

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Selected Poems

Robert Bringhurst

SELECTED POEMS

Robert Bringhurst



JONATHAN CAPE
LONDON

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Version 1.0

Epub ISBN 9781409015109

www.randomhouse.co.uk

Published by Jonathan Cape

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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This edition is based on the longer *Selected Poems*
published in Canada by Gasperau Press in 2009

First published in Great Britain in 2010 by
Jonathan Cape
Random House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London SW1v 2SA

www.rbooks.co.uk

Addresses for companies within The Random House Group
Limited can be found at:
www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library

ISBN 9780224090858

The Random House Group Limited supports The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the leading international forest certification organisation. All our titles that are printed on Greenpeace approved FSC certified paper carry the FSC logo. Our paper procurement policy can be found at:
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Typeset in Bembo by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,
Falkirk, Stirlingshire
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
MPG Books, Bodmin, Cornwall

CONTENTS

[Cover Page](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[By the same author](#)

from [The Beauty of the Weapons](#)

[The Beauty of the Weapons](#)

[Song of the Summit](#)

[Ararat](#)

[A Quadratic Equation](#)

[One Glyph](#)

[The Sun and Moon](#)

[The Greenland Stone](#)

[Poem About Crystal](#)

[A Lesson in Botany](#)

[Anecdote of the Squid](#)

[Deuteronomy](#)

[Jacob Singing](#)

[An Augury](#)

[Essay on Adam](#)

[Deuteronomy](#)

from [The Old in their Knowing](#)

[Herakleitos](#)

[Parmenides](#)

[Pythagoras](#)

Demokritos
Xenophanes
Of the Snaring of Birds

Hachadura
The Stonecutter's Horses

from Bone Flute Breathing

These Poems, She Said
The Heart is Oil
Ptahhotep's River
Death by Water
Leda and the Swan
Six Epitaphs
Poem Without Voices
Bone Flute Breathing

Tzuhalem's Mountain

from The Book of Silences

Short Upanishad
Sengzhao
Yong.jia Xuanjue
Saraha
Saraha's Exercise for Beginners
Han Shan
Dongshan Liang.jie
Xuedou Zhongxian
Dogen
Bankei Yotaku

Lyell Island Variations

Larix lyallii

Thin Man Washing

Absence of the Heart

The Reader

The Starlight is Getting Steadily Dimmer

The Long and the Short of It

A River, a Runner

Riddle

Day In, Day Out

from *The Physics of Light*

Sutra of the Heart

Kol Nidre

Gloria, Credo, Sanctus et Oreamnos Deorum

Rubus ursinus: A Prayer for the Blackberry Harvest

For the Bones of Josef Mengele

Fathers and Sons

Hick and Nillie

Demons and Men

Sunday Morning

The Physics of Light

Conversations with a Toad

The Living

Finch

Birds on the Water

The Flowers of the Body

Giotto's Bones

The Focal Length of Fuel

So Do We

The Living Must Never Outnumber the Dead

At Last

For the Geologist's Daughter
All Night Wood

Acknowledgements

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

POETRY

The Shipwright's Log

Cadastre

Bergschrund

Tzuhalem's Mountain

The Beauty of the Weapons: Selected Poems 1972-82

The Blue Roofs of Japan

Pieces of Map, Pieces of Music

Conversations with a Toad

The Calling: Selected Poems 1970-1995

Elements

The Book of Silences

Ursa Major

The Old in Their Knowing

New World Suite no 3

PROSE

Ocean/Paper/Stone

The Raven Steals the Light (with Bill Reid)

The Black Canoe (with Ulli Steltzer)

The Elements of Typographic Style

A Short History of the Printed Word (with Warren Chappell)

A Story as Sharp as a Knife

Prosodies of Meaning

The Solid Form of Language

Wild Language

The Tree of Meaning

Everywhere Being Is Dancing

The Surface of Meaning

TRANSLATION

Ghandl, Nine Journeys to the Mythworld

Skaay, *Being in Being*
Parmenides, *The Fragments*
Skaay, *Siixha: Floating Overhead*

THE BEAUTY OF THE WEAPONS

El-Arish, 1967

A long-armed man can
carry the nine-millimetre
automatic gun slung
backward over the right shoulder.

With the truncated butt
caught in the cocked
elbow, the trigger
falls exactly to hand.

These things I remember,
and a fuel-pump gasket cut
from one of the innumerable
gas masks in the roadside dump.

I bring back manuscript picked
up around incinerated trucks
and notes tacked next
to automatic track controls.

Fruits of the excavation.
This is our archaeology.
A dig in the debris
of a civilisation six weeks old.

The paper is crisp and brittle
with the dry rock and the weather.
The Arabic is brittle
with the students' first exposure
to air-war technology and speed.
Ridiculous to say so, but
the thought occurs,
that Descartes would be pleased:

the calculus is the language
of the latest Palestinian
disputations
in the field of theology.

The satisfying feel
of the fast traverse
on the anti-aircraft guns
is not in the notes.

It lies latent and cool
in the steel, like the intricate
mathematics
incarnate in the radar:

the antennae folded and rolled
like a soldier's tent,
sweeping the empty
sky and the barren horizon,
the azimuth and the elevation,
sweeping the empty air
into naked abstraction,

leading the guns.

The signal is swirled until it
flies over the lip like
white, weightless
wine from a canteen cup.

Invisibly, the mechanism sings.
It sings. It sings like a six-ton flute:
east, west, always the same
note stuck in the rivetless throat.

A silent song as intricate
as any composition by Varèse,
and seeming, for the moment, far
more beautiful, because,

to us, more deadly.
Therefore purer, more
private, more familiar,
more readily feared, or desired:
a dark beauty with a steel sheen,
caught in the cocked
mind's eye and brought
down with an extension of the hand.

SONG OF THE SUMMIT

The difference is nothing you can see - only
the dressed edge of the air
over those stones, and the air goes

deeper into the lung, like a long fang,
clean as magnesium. Breathing
always hollows out a basin,

leaving nothing in the blood
except an empty
cup, usable for drinking

anything the mind finds - bitter
light or bright darkness or the cold
corner of immeasurable distance.

This is what remains: the pitted blood
out looking for the vein,
tasting of the tempered tooth and the vanished flame.

ARARAT

The deepening scour of the keel across this
granular water. Nothing more. The fissure
through the estuary five

thousand feet over the headwater. These
are the real mouths of rivers: the teeth,
not the slough and the rattles.

We have been here
before, eating raw air, but have always
forgotten,

all day eating the air the light
impales,
stalking the singular animal –

I no longer remember whether a fish
or a bird. Nor whether its song or its silence
is what we were listening for. I remember

a bow in a black tree, and a snowbound
ploughshare. I find here
no spoor and no flotsam

timber. Simply the blue sliding into
the furrow on the tilting light, and the violet
sky always casting the same white shadow.

A QUADRATIC EQUATION

Voice: the breath's tooth.

Thought: the brain's bone.

Birdsong: an extension
of the beak. Speech:
the antler of the mind.

ONE GLYPH

The hummingbird's tongue
under the sun's black anther,
fire taking the sky's measure.
Light's core soaring over
blue air, wave, rock, and water,
over eagle-cactus, pine,
and the spiked dust of the summer highlands:
bright blade of blue sunlight
over the stone,
spalled off the solid block
of the sky's light like a smoke-thin
razor of obsidian
or an unseen wing.