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Opening extract from

Cuckoo Rock

Written by

Phil Bowen

Published by

Salt Publishing

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PHIL BOWEN
Cuckoo Rock

Phil Bowen was born in Liverpool in 1949 where he taught drama until 1979. He has worked as a full-time writer, performer and teacher since 1994, visiting over five hundred schools as a writer-in-education in more than thirty counties. Work from his first full collection *Variety's Hammer* was selected for *The Forward Anthology* of 1998. His biography of the Mersey Poets *A Gallery to Play to* has recently been updated and republished by Liverpool University Press, and in April 2009, Salt published *Nowhere's Far: New & Selected poems 1990–2008*. This is his first book for children.

Also by Phil Bowen

POETRY

The Professor's Boots (1994)
That was Peter Glaze (1994)
Variety's Hammer (1997)
Starfly (2004)
Nowhere's Far: New and Selected Poems (2009)

AS EDITOR

Jewels and Binoculars (1993): poetry about Bob Dylan
Things We Said Today (1995): poetry about The Beatles

PROSE

A Gallery to Play to (1999, 2008): the story of the Mersey Poets

DRAMA

A Handful of Rain
A Case of the Poet
Parlez Vous Jig Jig
Anything but Love

PHIL BOWEN

Cuckoo Rock

Illustrated by Fred James

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CUCKOO ROCK

Crossing over the Clapper Bridge,
Heading for Cuckoo Rock
Peering inside potato caves,
Woodpeckers taking stock

Of what's been left in the Blowing House
Left of Tinner's Mill
Where singing nettles and bracken
Sing to the magpie still:

Sometimes you may see them
Sometimes you may not
Keep your eyes wide open
They're difficult to spot

Then call to the crow and the jayfly
Yaffle at the Yaffling Tree,
Follow the swallow tomorrow
Bring back tomorrow to me

As today and the rest of the week
Lie there in granite and heather
Lie and remain in the bluebell gorse
Lie there in all kinds of weather:

And sometimes you may see it
Sometimes you may not
Keep your eyes wide open
It's difficult to spot

As hard to find as the finger sign
On the hand of the talking clock,
Crossing over the Clapper Bridge
Heading for Cuckoo Rock.

MAGICAL VALLEY

The pipeline lies in the pathway,
The pathway lies in the place
Of Mother-Rock and Water-Rock:
Wipe that mess off your face!

The raven crows to the blackbird,
The blackbird starts to shiver
In naval-weed and buttonwort:
Keep your eye on the river!

Where Water-Rock and Mother-Rock
Rock the water to sleep
Now the ivy's gone and the ferns have gone:
If it wasn't deer it was sheep!

And after that, the darkness,
Darkness inside the clay
And whatever it was the crystal saw:
Put all of that away!

Says Mother-Rock to Water-Rock
From rock to rock to rock:
Then throw away the crystal,
Put eyes in the weathercock!

Where the pipeline lying in the pathway
Is the pathway's side of the alley —
And a nesting box is a nesting box
Here in Magical Valley.

HEAVEN KNOWS

Is it a crow or a jayfly?
A snake on the Yaffling Tree?
Is it Sting of the Singing Nettles
Or Fern who can sting like a bee?

Is it Ivy over from Ivybridge
With her dancing songs of Spring?
Is it the most raving of raving ravens
Raving about everything?

Is it something found in the Blowing House,
An emerald on a magic dish?
Is it naval-weed or buttonwort —
The flash of an electric fish?

Is it the reason for bits of truth?
Or only the reason that lies?
No — it is simply the reason
For the whole of the earth and the skies.

PHIL BOWEN

THIS IS THE WAY

This is the way
And here is the gate
You can come all the way
But you'll have to wait

For excitement
Wait for the thrill
Of crossing that bridge
To Tinner's Mill

Wait for what ticks
Then for the tock
These amazing tricks
Around Cuckoo Rock

Wait for the fun
All the wild romance—
When the Cuckoo Man comes
When he starts to dance

When he does whatever
And whatever that seems
Then wait for the girl
Who gathers dreams

Cuckoo Rock



So stay in the moonlight
Stay for a wish
Wait by the pond
For electric fish

Then stand on the hill
High on the ridge
Call out to Ivy
From Ivybridge

And listen to the mermaid —
The song she sings
Listen to jingling
Jangling things

Listen in a place
Where you hear the most
Then listen in the darkness
Listen for a ghost

Listen to the 'toot-toot!'
Listen to the drum —
As magical music
Is bound to come

Cuckoo Rock

From sounds in the valley
Sounds on the wing
And those singing nettles —
Fern and Sting

PHIL BOWEN

FERN AND STING

Fern and Sting

Fern and Sting

We're the Singing Nettles

Fern and Sting

We burn and sing

Burn and sing

We're the Singing Nettles

Fern and Sting

Sting and Fern

Sting and Fern

So much to learn

With Sting and Fern

Sting and Fern

Cuckoo Rock

We sing and burn

We're the Singing Nettles

Sting and Fern

PHIL BOWEN

WAYS AND WAYS

After George Mackay Brown

The way to Cuckoo Rock
is earth, wishes, bluebell gorse.

The way to the Potato Caves
is salt and loam.

We call the way to Ivybridge,
the Pipeline Way.

Every way to Moonlight
is nineteen kinds of a way.

Mister Cuckoo Man's feet
have beaten a wayside track to Cuckootown.

And the way from the Blowing House
is bracken, moss, bridges, another wish.

Crows and jayflies
have the whole huge sky as a way.

NINE BIRDS

The swallow followed
The rook rooked
The magpie saw through it all

The crow crowed
The raven raved
The magpie saw through it all

The woodpecker pecked
The blackbird wrecked
The magpie saw through it all

The jayfly flew
Through the bluebird's blue
As the magpie saw through it all

The clouds spread
As the sky turned red
And the magpie saw through it all

PHIL BOWEN

MAGPIE FINDS

Monday, the magpie found a wish
from an electric fish.
He gave it back to the river as a thought.

Tuesday, a piece of rock from a boulder.
Next Spring
it could become a door — a way in.

Wednesday, a nesting box.
He put his beak in it,
the rim, warm with moss and flowers.

Thursday, he got nothing —
an old boot
left by a shaking tree.

Friday he happened
on a raven's skull,
earth spilling out of it.

Saturday, petals for a dream.
Tinner's Mill
was wrecked around here, someone said.

Sunday, he ended up
on the hollow face of the hill.
What are clouds? Floating fog. Cotton wool.



THE YAFFLING TREE

There's birds and birds

In the Yaffling Tree

All kinds of words

In the Yaffling Tree

There's crows and crows

In the Yaffling Tree

It kind of grows —

The Yaffling Tree

Its branches spread —

The Yaffling Tree

From the hands to the head

Of the Yaffling Tree

Last year is dead

Says The Yaffling Tree

It's in its bed

Says the Yaffling Tree

So think again

Says the Yaffling Tree

I said again

Says the Yaffling Tree

So count to ten

Says the Yaffling Tree

Amen amen

Says the Yaffling Tree