

Walyunga

We came here in the summertime:
 empty riverbed
 of dry, silk-washed stones
 silent
 rippling in the heat,
 a furnace rising in our faces,
 beating at the eyes.
 Roos thudding through the reeds
 and up a slope into the trees
 curved our gaze,
 following their smudgy, dipping line
 across an old freight track.
 You walked the trail a little way
 where the ancient people left their tiny signs,
 black flints fitting snug
 into the hot palms of our hands.

Again, but now the rains have come
 and clothed the valley green,
 white-creams of winter wattle
 splash the riverbanks.
 The waters roll swollen and replete
 thickly dark, unyielding to the eye.
 I watch you move down the bank
 with the grace of all young things,
 standing still and mesmerised
 by the water-shadows.
 Your dark hair rimmed in silver
 quivering over the river's skin,
 you stare unbroken
 and finally turning, smile,
 answer the question in my look,
 voice low and cool with wonder.
 "I saw a hundred spirits in the water."

Home at night, cosy in the heat
you draw a picture silently,
pencils scrape on ageing cartridge,
hold it up for me to see...
a blue-scaled serpent rising from the water,
reddish-brown medusa strands
coiling round its face.
"Waugal," I whisper, "river spirit."
You nod, brown eyes solemn, wide,
your smaller hand creeps warmly into mine.
We softly smile and contemplate
Walyunga.