

Mark O'Connor

FIRST EVENING

On a cay whose sides
are the diverse seasons:
blust'ry South, burning North,
becalmed East, temperate West,

where the late tern battles home, beating
the tops of ocean's gray pasture to snatch
sprats for its mate, and the stingray slides in,
bluespotted, shy, on the heightening tide,
swift as sea-birds' shadows on cooling sands —

here where sough of casuarinas underscores
the broad Pacific banter, the mile-long rasp
and gasp of waves re-raking coral sands,
the moon welcomes a black cloud
— dissolves it to a dusky lining
where the swift pock-marked creature swims and shines
like fish pursued from midnight boats.

Casuarina, sand-seizer, whose vertical leaves
shed the sunstrike below; Tournefortia, treelet
of dunes, turtle-blasted salt-sufferer; Pisonia,
bird-trapping oak; and Pandanus, gaunt clinger of rocks.
Be the friends of my stay.

Many of Mark O'Connor's poems, including this one, have been substantially reworked for his forthcoming Selected Poems. The original version can be found in his The Eating Tree (Angus and Robertson, 1980).