

Brian Edwards

## NIGHTFISHING

He crouches under the river bank,  
a dark figure in a small circle of light  
from a kero lantern. Above him, red gums  
block the sky, and off on the flat land,  
across stubble paddocks and fence lines,  
there's noise of a distant tractor  
and markers of a township.

Where are you now dead man? What  
brings you back to the river,  
what subtlety of season or weather shift,  
or fleeting dissatisfaction?

Why do I see you?

I see you in the old ute on gravel roads,  
a trail of dust in a blue sky,  
and when there's mist in the paddocks  
I see you walking on a golf course,  
blowing on your hands in the cold  
as early morning sunlight struggles  
through the trees. Listen. There's  
a goods' train on the line, the engine  
wheezing and steaming as it passes.

Do you remember the day  
you shot the big eagle that took lambs,  
the day we caught sixty-three redfin  
at Flat Rock, cricket matches at the Park,  
Saturday nights at the pictures  
and the drunk lying on the road  
as we drove home, all of the westerns  
you read at night, those times we listened  
to BBC cricket broadcasts  
with John Arlott calling the game  
and our team battling the Poms in England  
as we huddled down by the fire,  
the night bristling with phantoms?

What do you remember  
of the last night  
as we waited for you to die?  
What do you remember  
of the count-down,  
your breath rising and falling,  
words incoherent,  
memories fighting  
one another for expression  
as night wore on and the ways  
were confused utterly  
and forever?

Down beneath the river banks,  
a man hunches in the light of a kero lantern,  
a small glow  
in the immensity of an encompassing darkness.

