

Bill Cotter

THE SMALL BOY AND THE 'ROO SHOOT

It was the sudden light that betrayed you,
That long white needle
Shot out between the back shed and the cow paddock
And pinning you there in the tussocks.

The filtered shadows of night you knew,
The whisper of fox breath,
The distant, cut short squeal of a rabbit
And the moon splaying out
Between the branches of the dead wattles.
Night was your friend.

But not this switched on fire,
This avalanche of frost
Coming dead straight towards you.
They were things you were not programmed for.
The centuries had not informed your body,
Given instructions here

And so you leaped,
Understandably,
Foolishly,
Straight up.
Frozen among the tussocks, you might have been safe,
Mistaken for a shadow,
Passed off as a ghost.
Moving like you did,
You were dead.

I remember
The gunshot,
The injection of flame that caught you at the height of your leap,
The red fading comet of your body
As you hurtled towards the scrub
And the shouts,
The shouts of the men.

Bill Cotter, "The Small Boy and the 'Roo Shoot"

Yes. I recall all of that.
But most, the crash,
The explosion as you cannoned into a tree,
The later sight of your skull,
Split like an egg

And the held-in abhorrence of a small child
Swaying in the back of a truck.

