BILL BEARD

SAM DIED.

I never knew you Sam.  
Or your mother.  
Only your great, round  
blue eyes . . . amid flute-filled  
fires of joy of nights  
in your presence  
— the grin and gurgle  
as Jane, your aunt,  
held you, and bounced your six months  
on her knee.

Now, as I stand in the sun  
this Sunday morning, beside  
my camp fire in a dry creek bed,  
I hear the west wind gently touch  
a weeping willow tree; see an eagle  
fly high in blue sky: and remember  
yesterday’s letter from Jane  
“Sam died. Sam died two days ago.  
Oh Bill, it’s unbelievable.  
I feel so helpless . . .”

two tears trickle off my cheek,  
and I sing your eyes  
into a far cathedral  
of the sun.

So long Sam: until  
under other skies,  
we may meet, full throatedly.

I sit, naked to the sun,  
and sharpen my tomahawk.
I squat, or stand, in savannah
tablelands, altering
with the wind. A mantis

smiles: there is slow movement
in the leaves

... summer is heavy lidded, and
the powerful owl empties his eyes —

pray silently for those who laugh
with the trees;

night is gliding near;
shadows of the pale sky
    echo their fear . . .

    south coast, the sapphire coast
    lies quiescent,
    chanting only to the lonely
    cloud's neap tide song:
    but the eagle still rides
    the west wind; and
    a man there is seldom alone.

My feet lie dormant,
'tneath off-coast hills.

Leaves fall, the half moon
wanes; dark hawks

go to ground, the season of fire
is dwindling

: the cold is hard by . . .