

## Boat

The new boat. I bought it mostly  
for my boy, who at fifteen has become  
black and thunderous. An aluminium  
dinghy with ten horses behind it –  
something to interest him, something  
to give us something in common.  
And yesterday it did. I swear  
he was almost happy as we launched  
the boat in the bay for the first time.  
Our small craft. At full throttle  
it sat up and planed! A sensation  
of speed, as in a go-kart! Today  
he wants to try it by himself.  
Sure, I say, stepping to the shore.  
Why not? I push the prow out to sea.  
He pulls the cord and powers away,  
heads out without looking back.  
The dinghy skips over the light chop,  
going out and out. I watch him,  
the boy I've not loved nearly enough.  
My son, who grows bigger in my heart  
even as he grows smaller in my eyes.  
He is on the sea, going directly  
away from me. And I notice now  
what I should have noticed before –  
the cloudbank on the horizon.  
Black clouds coming in. And the boy  
still going out! I watch and watch,  
willing him to turn. The boat

no longer glints, having gone  
into the shadow of the clouds.  
Then suddenly a tear, a bright tear  
in the fast encroaching blackness.  
And another. No thunder. No rain.  
Just lightning, synapsing the dark sky  
to the dark sea! The level sea,  
on which my son is the highest point.  
The empty sea, on which our boat  
is the only boat. Lightning! Oh son,  
turn back, turn back to the shore!  
I beckon and call. But he has gone  
too far to see or hear me any more.

## Con's, 1968

on Saturday mornings, whose recurrence had an especially  
unscripted and lost-kite feeling,  
days linked to early or mid-autumn,  
the boy went out with his father,  
headed for the shops.  
every time he was first taken to Ampol –  
'fuel, tyres, oil, water' –  
bowser man, man of nod, not word  
in pressed blue short sleeves, his father,  
more chatty, in white singlet, stooped over  
undoing tyre air-nozzle caps

then further, to a working-class suburb where  
green-grocer and hardware sat side by side.  
on every occasion he had to pass houses with  
hedge fences, dense green but trimmed,  
resembling the work of both nature's frenzy, wilful secateurs

everything happened in such a mannered atmosphere.  
in the first place, it was the leaving and  
returning home on a day fat with chance,  
a day that promised ever, delivered rituals –  
midday closures, backyard burns.  
for morning it was moving through the older 'burb,  
asbestos and rendered brick homes,  
buffalo or couch grass verged, spindly box trees  
scratching sky. finally, it was to hear up close  
the barter and banter of customer and worker  
at Con's, the greengrocer's

smells and colours in that atmosphere had  
 so much depth, sharpened somehow and made pungent,  
 vivid, their tangs and hues heightened.  
 here were the fruit stands – peaches, plums, muscat grapes,  
 over which reigned the dark green roundness  
 of watermelon, sometimes cut open  
 to reveal inside its cool red and white freshness.  
 here were crates of vegetables – celery, brussel sprouts,  
 capsicum, slurred surfaces of pumpkin,  
 polished burnt earth of eggplant. and the shop workers  
 themselves, aproned, pencils behind ears, adding  
 prices down and around edges of newspaper,  
 Con, with his harelip, yelling ‘cookin’ grannies,  
 chip price!’ across the display

and always, above the boy and his father, above  
 all the glazed fruit brilliance, ripened waft,  
 above scrawled crayon prices, cut-away boxes  
 and wheeled trolleys of shoppers, above floated  
 this found kinship, shoulder to shoulder, breaths  
 of many, uncladding of souls from the few  
 who, between exchange of coins and purchase,  
 turned, talked, let themselves of a softer blood