

The ancient eucalypts

The ancient eucalypts stand,
and wait

They have seen this before,
felt it. They know.

In the breathless stillness
heat gathers its heavy veil,
hovers, presses, suffocates.

Bark dries and drops.

Leaves, longer than a violinist's fingers,
droop. Loosened by thirst
they circle slowly to the ground,
layer upon layer.

In the distance
clouds collect each other,
layer upon layer -
a broiling army,
built of raindrops.

The ancient trees stand
and wait. They know
deep in the boiling clouds
a serpent also waits,

its hot-tongued breeze
teases, promises only a lick
of precious rain.

Angered by the rolling clouds
the serpent grumbles
its forked tongue flickers,
strikes with dreadful might,
and all around, the echo
thunders, and the waiting ends.

A choking odour wafts, delicate as a veil
from the smouldering earth
from its dryness.

The trees know it
welcome it.

They have smelt it before
have heard the roar
felt its hot-tongued flames
sapping their tired limbs.

But battle-scarred and blackened,
they will survive, blossom,
ancient witnesses of an
ancient rite.

But we, the strangers,
the uninvited guests,
the builders of fragile temples
on sacred ground
do not escape
We have angered the serpent most,
fuelled its fury,
and this is really what
fires
its terrible revenge.