

LAGOON

*Why exactly this lagoon of oblivion had spread in him,
and how far it extended, had remained a mystery to him
however hard he thought about it.*

- W.G. Sebald

This is where I come from if it's true
to say I come from somewhere not just
anywhere south
of the imagination like warty
hills of the Monaro
or an Irish quag.
It's Lagoon with wind-tussocked, wrinkled
hills worn down to a murmur
that claims me.
Flat skied, convict-shaped
earth, the barren sweep
of Tanner's Mount knuckled
with Bathurst quartz, small and obedient
noon shadows: this is where justice
jammed them, impatient and impenitent
forebears transported for a brace
of crimes: possession
of a stolen lamb,
highway robbery
and other, nameless filchings cancelled
by oblivion.
It's hard to tell exactly where
it was: the lagoon has forgotten
itself, drowned
under Chifley Dam's
green skin brailed by metallic rain,
or a mired bend in Campbell's River
where dragonflies whirr in a spectral frenzy
like solid drops of petrol darting in the sun.

I have inherited their future
born of silent massacres,
patient weathering
of the cold fastness of hills,
and endurance of each summer's baked mirages.
They mastered the art of sticking
to the narrow furrows of their lives
whereas I have learnt
only the art of streets,
sailing between their guttered shores
on that new ocean, traffic.
Every trace of them has vanished.
There is a school there now,
where children, yet to learn
that dreams are what make death real,
play in the stark sun.
Horse studs
gather along the creek
and they stand there, fluid
flanks shiny in wintered light
chewing and staring
down impostors in their midst.
Time has stolen it,
evaporated family mysteries
like the slow death of a photograph
of the old farm,
like neap days
pinched of history.

David Musgrave