GREEN PRAWN MAP

in memory of my grandfather H. T. Adamson

Morning before sunrise, sheets of dark air
hang from nowhere in the sky.
No stars there, only here is river.

His line threads through a berley trail,
a thread his life. There's no wind
in the world and darkness is a smell alive

with itself. He flicks
a torch, a paper map Hawkesbury River
& District damp, opened out. No sound
but a black chuckle

as fingers turn the limp page.
Memory tracks its fragments, its thousand winds,
shoals and creeks, collapsed shacks

a white gap, mudflats—web over web
lace-ball in brain's meridian.
This paper's no map, what are its lines
as flashlight conjures a code  
from a page of light, a spider’s a total blank?  
So he steers upstream now

away from map-reason, no direction to take  
but hands and boat to the place  
where he will kill prawns, mesh and scoop

in creek and bay and take  
his bait kicking green out from this translucent  
 morning.

_Flint & Steel_ shines  
behind him, light comes in from everywhere,  
prawns are peeled alive.

Set rods, tips curve along tide, the prawns howl  
into the breeze, marking the page.  
He’s alone as he does this kind of work—

his face hardened in sun, hands  
moving in and out of water and his life.
FULL TIDE

My whole being’s the bay,
cradled in the warm palm
the steady open hand of today’s
flood tide. Anyway
let’s tell the fishermen
something they already know—
it’s the fabled calm
before the flow: I love
a gypsy with a lithe
soul who’s difficult to please.
So may the resonance
of this new psalm begin life
here, then moon-change
phase to phase—it’s fishermen
who recognize my strength,
who say to keep an eye
on me, then look long
at her art, sense vision’s
power—the dance,
intellect and body, her total
elegance. Ah river
with ageless dreams, sorceress
with sea hawks and gliders,
updrafts in phosphor-fire, eyes
quick for your lips, thighs—
speak, tell me fables
as you flow. Ah tide that stops
dead, for my wild Magyar—
genuflecting from your ancient bed.
THE JESUS BIRD

The lotus bird’s signature
is slenderness, moving
without ring-marking water’s
skin-tight surface.

A colourist, strokes tone
with a wing, fans out pinions:
The show’s to escape
death in shape of harrier
or swamp’s light-slashing pike.
The night watch is a dance
where bird antenna
probes mind-stepping illusions
to parry with a stray
plug-throwing fisherman,
alert in thin air
whirred by a dragonfly’s
cellophane propeller,
or puttering swamp bugs.

When the creek's back is dark
glass, a conjurer, stripper,

lotus-dancing with river-pimps.
Creek alley's sideshow.
Musk ducks and the plump Wonga pigeon were knocked from the sky in blood sport, left to rot, then afterwards in firelight were the games, all various forms of gambling. In the mist you’d hear knucklebones rattle in their cotton pockets or, darned in conversation, obscene words, slurred by badly brewed alcohol; never song but garbled recitations, coughed half-chants. Whatever fed the imagination was like a yellowness: it showed in various activities, from plucking ducks to the way they slept in postures of loose decadence. The river was a flood of their refuse, a smear of thick waste through the countryside. After storms and at low tide you’d see the details of their hate: the score, a tally, and what they called their stake—the sacred remnants of an ancient tribe’s estate.