THE HOUSE ON STILTS

Through weaved air, that wedge of darkness
choked beneath our weatherboard
was no man’s land – a fretwork of lattice
checkerboarded the sun, and a fernery
of maidenhairs and birdsnests drifted
round the edges, tinting the light green.

An underground exile, I cupped my ear
upwards for the thud of clipped heels
knocking like ghosts through the floorboards.
Now I am the ghost, back down where
the heron-house, the crane-house dips
its white sticks into mud, where the black rats
scuffle at night in old fuel cans, where lengths
of fishing line fray on copper nails
and film-eyed possums drag their claws.
Born between the wars, between the grey fringe
of scrub and the glass scrawl of reef, this
white ghost-crab tiptoed a century, metal-backed,
and now is history. The gulf yawns – a lifetime
since cyclone rain rattled the venetians
like a handful of thumbtacks, discord
of a continent, but I am there still,
midden-deep, and the light flickers
in and out around me like radio static.

A salt breeze has withered the passionflower;
it hangs dead on the vine. The moon flattens to a crisp.

Hang, we will all hang. Night comes early here;
midges jag in the sky like anxious stars.