

Cookhouse Station

for Jackie Shipster

If you ever pass through Cookhouse Station
make certain you see what is there.

Not just the long neat platform beneath the escarpment,
and the red buckets,
and the red and white booms
but the Christmas beetle as well
which zings like a tireless lover
high in the gum-tree all the hot day.

And whether your stay is short
and whether your companions
urge you to turn from the compartment window
does not matter,
only make certain you see
the rags of the beggar-man's coat
before you choose to sit again.

And though there might be no passengers
waiting in little heaps of luggage when you look
make certain you see
the migrant workers with their blankets
as well as the smiling policeman,
the veiled widow as well as the girl
the trainee soldiers whistle at, otherwise
you have not passed that way at all.

And if it is a midday in December
with a light so fierce
all the shapes of things quiver
and mingle, make certain you see
the shades of those who once lived there,
squatting in the cool of the blue-gum tree
at ease in the fellowship of the after-death.

And if you ever pass through Cookhouse Station
make certain you greet those shades well
otherwise you have not passed that way at all.