

## Tea at Hlambeza Pool

The pool is as you'd suppose it to be,  
green and narrow, mirroring cycads,  
the clouds and crags of a deep ravine.  
Spined succulents thicket the banks,  
the pleated rocks and slithery shale.

And we are as you would imagine us,  
sprawled on rugs with thermos flasks,  
discussing new hardware and software,  
exchanging stories of burn-out, stress,  
armed robberies and patients with aids.

'A green cathedral!' someone exclaims,  
smacking at horseflies and mosquitoes.  
The children pick through the rushes,  
then clambering onto adult shoulders  
leap out, shrieking, and splash the pool.

'What's this?' Bobbing along an edge,  
roofed in by a nave of bent-over ferns,  
three fist-sized crumplings-up of paper,  
pumpkin seeds in the boat of the one,  
white beads, tobacco inside the others.

'Offerings,' says a friend, 'you know,  
like Greeks and Romans used to make.  
Not to gods, to the people of the river,  
the ancestors whom local Xhosa claim  
are intercessors, their links with GΩd.'

'Perhaps we shouldn't have swum here.'  
The words reverberate across a silence.  
I feel the cycad fronding of the unknown  
breaking out around and inside me again,  
then glimpse deep in a pool of memory  
the faces of the living dead, the shades.