

Commended

- 'Salmon Trout, Moruyah Heads'  
Paul Cliff

### **Salmon Trout, Moruyah Heads**

A man like a big bull seal, in Adidas and a red tracksuit,  
has slid excitedly down the seawall,  
like a spider tip-tripping across its web —  
to juggle his long-handled net and rod — and strain awkwardly  
to land the lithe, bowed, silver weight of a fish.  
Swung in a great dripping arc, it's transferred to his aching net.  
Then, laying both these devices down (like an outsize pool-cue and cue-rest),  
he dips in a paw to seize the fish by its jowls.  
Screws, and removes the orthodontory of hook —  
holds the fish prone on a rock, pulls his knife quickly from behind,  
and pushes the silver tip deep into its neck.

At this the fish flails hard, once: swims in a sudden film of red,  
haemorrhaged from gill to tail: kicks,  
as if another new fish might swim wholly out of it,  
or it might still flutter behind the rock, to find sanctuary yet ...

But it can't: Instead, its flesh slackens, consolidates,  
and its life distils to its glassy round eye:  
as if photographing this final resting moment of itself.

The fish severed forever from Moruya;  
Moruya forever severed from it.

The fisherman relaxes then. Zippo-lights a cigarette,  
and answers my ignorant question: It's a salmon trout, he says.  
'*Arripis trutta*,' the *Macquarie* confirms: 'Australian or native salmon;  
strictly, marine perch — a popular Australian sport fish.'  
Which would explain the red tracksuit, the cigarette sucked lustily sideways —  
and the cocky, owzat gleam in his wicket-keeper's eye, I guess —  
as the fish was neatly toppled two-handed,  
like the ball-snicked bails, into the plastic bucket at his feet.