

The Keeper and the Grove

The keeper of the grove is old but not so old.
The bamboo grove is old but not so old having been planted
in his lifetime
brought from the warm south
it binds the sluice of stones and boulders
of this northern valley into garden.
Cool green where he leads us out of cicada heat
moving like water between clumps of roots
seeking and vigorous
you behind like a spate.

No he waves when we want to cross a clear carpet of leaves.
He squats to brush them aside and another carpet appears
a moment before we realise it's underwater
a pool with no surface no blue lid
the interface between liquid and air indiscernible
till we touch.

He beckons us on through the next and the next barred vista
but we stand craning our necks to see
into the ceiling of the grove
and argue about the direction of the sun.
Dappled shadows shift and glide
all over our faces all over our skin
one animal.

At his tiny hut we are ushered in as he lifts the lid of a large kettle
it's a pond of bamboo leaves
and the tea when he pours it is green
and tastes of grass.
In the warm room he offers a fan he's made himself
split bamboo rim and handle
bamboo leaves sewn flat
strong but delicate could only last a season
we both want it.

(from Caroline Caddy — *Esperance: New and Selected Poems*, p 149)