

Nathanael O'Reilly

Yambuk

For Greg Conlan (1974-2004)

My grandmother sent me an article  
From *The Warrnambool Standard*  
Describing the circumstances  
Of your death. There was a picture  
Of the fireball caused by your collision  
With the petrol tanker. The report stated  
That you appeared to have lost control  
Of your ute while rounding a sweeping  
Curve on the Portland road near Yambuk.  
I hadn't seen you since our childhood,  
When I climbed the fence between your house  
And my grandparents' to play Space Invaders,  
Asteroids and Frogger on your Atari,  
When we surfed at the East Beach and climbed  
The cannons at Battery Hill. Reading  
The word "Yambuk" reminded me of the day  
Your dad paid us to work on his farm  
There, riding around on a motorbike  
Turning new hay bales on their sides.  
How could I forget you turning away  
For a moment and riding head-on  
Into a bale of hay, throwing us both  
Over the handlebars? How was I to know  
You would never leave your hometown,  
Never make it to the age of thirty?  
How was I to know that you would die  
Where my ticket-of-leave  
Ancestors owned their first farm,  
That your blood and theirs  
Would stain the same soil?