

# Broken Down

*Jennifer Harrison*

gum trees thin and stippled  
with glare-light and red dust

they don't seem to grow  
from the baking earth

but have been bark-cast  
into form by a sparse ghost-god

with a sense of humour  
and a practical mindset—

their life-cycle's warped  
and the disfigured dead stand

in fields and by roadsides  
eroded stumps unapologetically

monumental yet diminished  
by the sky's freakish distance—

and the living: their spindly  
narrow-leaved branches

reach calmly into mirage  
hills pale blue in their shimmering

cattle lazily flicking tails  
not budging midday

from the scattered cool patches  
of variegated shade—

they don't seem to be so much cast by  
as cast aside from botany

unreal spiritual  
even young trees look elderly

born emaciated and dry  
as we contemplate pulling out

the bedding from a nearby sheep shed  
to sleep on while someone tinkers

in the truck's bowels  
with a spanner and 1930 pliers—