my first dream of home
from Loughborough U
involves two poets arguing
over a lunch-time stew
remember those post-binge
mid-seventies Glebe mornings—
lantana & sandstone, bits
of Harbour out the window
& the light, intense & blue?
I crawl downstairs & there's
Martin chopping garlic to
vague, patrician interjections—
"mate, isn’t garlic something
one can over do?"

Martin pauses, mock pedantic—
"Aristotle, Galen, Hippocrates
& all the authorities agree,
garlic, de natura
is not subject to degree!"
then, as if it’s worried him
for years, David Campbell DSO, DFC,
takes another swig of whisky
looks up & says "I see. I see."

**LASSŪ IN CIELO** is reproduced, with
permission, from John Forbes’s last
collection of poems, Damaged Glamour.
IN MEMORIAM JOHN FORBES

John Forbes died on 23rd January 1998 at the age of forty seven

As a keen but disinterested student of literary reputation, John, I think, would have been amused by some of the tributes that have flowed since his passing which hint that death makes his oeuvre neater and more easily assessed. I can hear him laughing now and I am sure he would have enjoyed being mentioned in the Senate by his school friend Senator Mick Forshaw. With his death Australian poetry lost its most brilliant exponent, a man of immense intelligence, a hard critic—chiefly of his own work. But his wide circle of friends lost much more than that.

I first met John while working at a tinsel factory. Neither of us were very conscientious workers and we spent most of our time reading poems to one another. I remember that John was enthusiastic about my poems and gave me an inordinate amount of encouragement but this was typical of him. When he met writers whose work interested him or in which he saw the glimmer of possibilities, he would become their champion and later in his career, particularly when he read manuscripts for Angus and Robertson, many young writers benefitted from his breadth of vision.

Apart from the beauties of his writing John's greatest talent was for friendship. He was a brilliant talker with a capacity for discussing a vast range of topics and he was almost devoid of condescension, a great conversation stopper. I saw this in action when he and I hitch-hiked to Mildura on our way to the 1982 Adelaide Festival. John had the capacity to subtly refocus himself (quite legitimately) to suit whoever was giving us a lift at the time, he could be furniture mover, souvenir salesman, postgraduate student, sometimes even poet—depending on what the occasion demanded and drivers who perhaps had picked us up for someone to talk to so they didn't fall asleep amid the boredom of the Hay plains at night, were well rewarded.

In 1982, John's great friend Ken Searle, painted a picture of John, Ken and myself rowing down the Murray River. John is sitting in the back of the boat wearing a terry towelling hat and looking a little sunburnt. This image of him captures his guileless charm. He looks a bit like a schoolboy and memory tells me he is reading a book, though this is probably erroneous. This is how I remember him, sitting in El Bahsas Coffee Shop in Newtown, dressed in a blue T-shirt and black jeans (a style of dress he adopted years ago to save himself the petty decision of what to wear each morning—'and besides', I hear him add 'they look great') reading anything from Shelby Foote to an account by Elvis Presley's hairdresser ('the Flaubert of trash') of the King's desert vision of Stalin and (always) smoking a Camel.