

You want ghosts

and the daily news and prophecy

Robert Adams

It's been an ordinary life, so much like
so many others, not too many glories, not too many shames,
a mite's illumination. Perhaps a B+ life,

though that is dangerously close to boasting.
Each morning now I clamber to the beach
through a cliff-top cemetery and sometimes

this coincides with sunrise and it's impossible
not to revel in the everyday banality. On Wednesday
a huge black cloud, jutting from the horizon

like a ragged mountain peak, blotted out the sun
but its rim, signifying the particularities of atmosphere,
was fringed by a silver, branching light. By Thursday

the coastline of a dark unknown continent hovered
in the mountain's place, the sky was ultramarine and bright,
and clouds were pink and orange vapour trails

or fairy floss. *Rosy fingered dawn*, I suppose,
though that's almost too figured to comprehend.
Dawn is in the body without need of epithets.



Here I am re-jigging things in Wonderland.
I imagine other presents, tidy up the past,
sketch out glittering futures, if not glittering

at least brighter, a little striking. I like it here.
In Wonderland there are mysteries and there are puzzlements
which I have no need to solve, 'known unknowns
and unknown unknowns' to quote a swine
who knew a thing or too. In Wonderland or the cemetery
I've never seen a ghost. I never expect to

though I've been startled by a sudden scrabbling
when it's dark or felt thought slide when clouds unexpectedly
deny the light. Ghosts are the stuff of stories, a disposition

to look outside the self for answers or consolation.
All things glow and fade though the gravestones all
are fixed, the angels mute, the cemetery ...

is real estate. Shadows are the nearest thing
to ghosts. You can't call shadows substance
but you can sense their arrival and departure, their creeping,

that their imprint is proof of substance, the disclosed
and undisclosed in abeyance. Shadows are an intercession
between me and not me, a suspension

between 'I feel' and 'it must mean.' Words
shadow other words, shadow other worlds. They are ghosts,
they are clouds. I know them by their fuzzy edges.



The old verities – Christianity, Communism, rhyme and metre –
are dimmed and dogma masquerades
as something else – economics maybe. Theory.

All poetry's didactic, at least to some extent,
and it's all descriptive, narrative and confessional,
to some extent. Words line up, drop down a line,

line up again, and *you* stand behind each word you write
no matter how you try to hide, no matter
the stratagems you employ. You choose to choose

to roll a die, pluck marbles from a sack, mash together
the daily paper and an obscure evangelical tract
but even if meaning is meaningless to you,

your reader will bring meaning to the work
or try to. Words are clues, hints. I am groping
to say a thing which vanishes in the utterance.



This morning the rain-splashed, glass-grey dimpling
of the sea is unvaried, seems unvaried,
though gutters, sandbanks and channels, the ebbing tide

all leave hints of movement, change, unmeasured depth.
I see little more than surface, marvel
when schools of salmon leap or cormorants dive,

give only passing thought to the Continental Shelf, to ground swell,
the East Australian Current, all the other forces
at play below my gaze. These too are layerings of time,

the long time of cooling and warming seas, the seasonal shifts
of winds and currents, the uncertain arrivals
of la Niña and el Niño, the daily tracked and timed

alterations of the tide. There is a patience in this predictability
and unpredictability, a waiting and a willingness
to speculate. From this angle or that perspective, day after day,

in painting after painting, an artist friend tries to capture light,
not capture, not even render, tries to apprehend light's temptations
on cloud and sea. It's a search for the invisible in what is visible,

something that depends on sense but is beyond the senses,
what cannot be expressed without distortion: the reflective
and absorbent qualities of water, the way it is sometimes grey,

sometimes blue or green, sometimes so reflective it is invisible
and simultaneously opaque: the texture of this world in time and place.
It strikes me this is ground on which to stand ...