

The Beach

Bruce Dawe (1990s)

Life's a beach. And then you die.

Popular Saying

At daybreak, a jogger, indenting the wet shingle
with the cuneiform marks of his passage.

Clambering over the sullen rocks of the headland,
a boy and a long-haired dog which splashes through
the shallows, dutifully fetching
thrown driftwood.

Then a Spartan swimmer, leathery from salt and sun,
braving the chill waves.

Low tide, and fisher-folk are already
burleying for worms.

Then the early lovers, honeymoon-driven, hand-in-hand,
savouring the boom of ocean, compulsive as a dance-band,
then the families: parents strolling like Egyptian priests, toddlers
staggering with seismic joy, small children
racing ahead to gather suddenly around
funny things

to be touched with a tentative toe
or mumbled over, wide-eyed ("Mmnh... Errh..."), the parents
glancing sideways at each other ("Worth it? Every bit of it...").

Far out, the indistinct, appearing and disappearing
dots of surfers.

After breakfast

the crowds arrive, seeking the best spots on the sand,
loaded with Eskies, blankets, rugs, towels, umbrellas, trannies,
sun-screen creams, sun-glasses, books,
the impedimenta of culture.

Life-savers man the towers now, below
the parade of fashion begins, the skin game; from the beach-house
young bloods study form...

Under the boisterous surface of the day, the sparkle and laughter,
larger darknesses, like kelp, move in.