

LINES TO A SON

The sea is calm tonight,
Empty. The mountains black and vast.
Out there a light
Signals and is gone. Few ships bother with
These parts. Restless after a storm
Which banged about this month
I walk a holocaust
Of broken gannets, dead crabs, palm,
Stopping where the headland collapses
Beneath some trees.

Years ago
On another beach others heard it:
The sound below the shallows
Suck and draw, the movement of armies
Across a plain . . . the lot
That I sense in this southern sea.

Once white flesh
Appeared along our mile of sand
In season. At night there were drums,
Marimba; and marijuana on the air.
But now all I hear
Is the wash
Among rocks;
The distant break of wind.

I miss you in a world
Turned winter where down thick roads
Come carts, cattle, dogs, people
Who do not stop. It is no time for a child.
Somewhere warm you sleep tonight,
Miles off, but under these same stars
Knowing nothing of all this, the struggle,
The fighting in the outer provinces.
Your days are young and bright.
I fear for you. There is lightning on the dark edge
Or maybe a flare, or the spark of sabotage.

by
Mike Nicol

TWO POEMS

UNDER GRASS

Here again a thought occurs and hardens
Of a farmhouse, gutted and abandoned
Among tall trees
In the low country.
The careful gardens gone to weed,
Toys, broken and rusted, on the porch. Children
Lived here until the last campaign.
All departed now; into the ground
Or down the track disappearing under grass.
The debris of small
Creatures covers the turmoil
Of how they left, at night, futureless,
Carrying what they could:
Clothes, blankets, water, food.
If they made it through lurking fields
Down exploding roads, some survivors,
Some refugees
In scattered cities
Must still hold the distant manor
In their dreams, as a child
Might half remember a father's kind hand.
The war is over: grass has won.
We have gone to our separate lives
In the confusion
Of evacuation.
In which city, under planes or olives,
Near mountains or the slow run
Of old rivers are you? The sun
Is setting on the western heights.
It is time for bats and the calls
Of guinea fowl
And owls.
The house is little more than walls,
Doors kicked or blown in, all rights
Reserved for white ants, borers, termites.