

*Adrian Căesar*

## AT TARTHRA BEACH

A child of the mid-century  
I learnt my warfare early  
from a blue-bound book  
with pictures and insignia  
two generations of conflict  
my Dad gave to me  
because it was exciting:  
Britain's toy soldiers  
were my delight.

Thirty years and continents away  
we have this peculiar holiday  
Mum and Dad and me.  
In a caravan at Tarthra Beach  
where each morning I tune the radio  
to news from the latest war  
much as their parents did  
when in late adolescence they  
listened to a nearer conflict  
unfold in Churchill's rhetoric  
which could not stop the bombs  
fracturing homes and lives  
whilst survivors trembled  
in cellars of our nightmare.  
They hardly want to hear of more  
much less my brusque critique  
of venality and violence.

Later we walk the beach  
away from safe bathers  
between their flags  
and soon at ocean's edge I see  
someone has drawn  
peace symbols in the sand  
ironic gesture for the tide's contempt.  
I wonder who has drawn them there.  
Not far ahead, perhaps the answer:  
teenage lovers

arm in arm, head to head  
they stop and scribe  
absorbed with tidewood.  
Mum and Dad move up the beach  
and past, as I linger to intrude  
upon the ageless message  
intent to prove it's a young ideal  
that prints the beach with protest.

But no such certainty  
lies in that fragile text.  
I look down upon their hearts  
scrawled with "John loves Mary"  
look up to see two couples now  
arm in arm, hand in hand  
versions of each other  
stroll down the sands  
a symmetrical tableau  
though the older pair  
at seventeen  
scuttled through blackouts  
before courtship was scarred  
by more permanent marks:  
Dad scribing love from sand  
in the Middle-Eastern desert.

I shiver in the sun  
full of abstract rage  
screaming "peace" like a witless gull  
whilst lovers, love  
and soldiers fight, I stand  
a cold, pontificating voyeur  
making futile gestures  
to escape the tide  
while their voices  
make ghostly echoes on the breeze  
like a memory  
of my careless childish arm  
scattering toy figurines.  
Gut-shot with scribbled shards  
I learn to laugh  
at history books.