

## **The Scourge of War**

Something growled

Something boomed

Invading the calm

It echoed.

... Stuck

Where two brothers pass each other by

Where two brothers meet

Where two brothers join

In the piazza of life and death

In the gulf between calamity and culture

In the valley of anxiety and peace

Something boomed.

While the *chia* and *seraw* acacias spat at each other

Sorghum and millet cut each other down

With no one to collect them they feed on one another,

Until a single seed remains ...

Brimming with tears

Being chopped—hacked

Sowed unto itself.

... planted

In earth yet to gush In that indiscernible thing

Stream of blood and water,

The seed ...

Assailed by:

The freezing sun

Tempestuous nimbus cloud

Grayish lightning

Scalding rain ...

Slipping through littered iron

Climbing onto the spirit of death  
Shouldering its sterile life  
Here, it has grasped at spring.  
The seed ...  
Arrived on its own  
From the blood and water yet to gush  
Whose and to whom unascertained  
Its tributaries unidentifiable  
When it parted that spring  
But in that spring ...  
When the seed looked to the right  
He was a man, it was a beard  
When it looked to the left  
He was the earth, it was a seed  
Bewildered... it fed on amazement  
Tempted ... but joining forces is not like it  
Who should it stick with, where should it lurk  
Who should it win over or be thrown at  
But that spring's dirtiness is its ugliness  
It plowed with the beak of bullet  
Spilled infinite lives Swept breath

Reaped death with death  
Threshing it on the shoulders of our offspring  
Finally bruised the fruit in distrust.  
For the fruit ...  
When day and night became one  
Anxiety and calm mingled  
A world within a world  
War within peace  
Trust in betrayal's backdoor

It sunk in bewilderment.

Is it not bewildering?

The scourge of this spring of war  
After a mother's tear for her children  
The clan's tear for its time  
The earth's tear for the earth  
Flowed and flowed like a stream  
Soon the earth became wet and muddy  
The property, mired  
Entrapping all ... robbing them  
Then the shovel and the pick were produced  
And the shroud and the stretcher sprang up  
But ...  
How fast everything is used up and everyone scrambles for it  
All of us crave and own it

The ugliness of this thing, war  
When its spring arrives unwished-for  
When its ravaging echoes knock at your door  
It is then that war's curse brews doom  
But ... You serve it willy-nilly  
Unwillingly you keep it company  
Still, you pray so hard for it to be silenced!

**Amanuel Asrat**

**The winner of special prize of the National Holidays Coordinating Committee (1999)**

Translated from Tigrinya by Tedros Abraham in collaboration with David Shook (2015)