

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)