1968

After a War

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Our generals clear their throats: we’ll napalm
the monsoon itself, or the fields
will never dry; the paddies, though thick
with excrement, dead fish, will never yield
all the bodies we’ve claimed.
We’ll burn the land to a desert.

It is beginning April. Winds rise
in the southwest, swirl. Gusts of rain
scatter the husks of rice. In waters
where the dead lie camouflaged
and still, April begins in watery syllables. Eyes,
tongues of the dead dissolve in their skulls’ sockets.

Yes, let us gather the relics together:
from the west a wristbone to beat a drumskin with;
from the south a ribcage strummed by a plow;
from the east the tuned teeth of a jawbone struck,
as though in a music box, by circling oxen;
from the north the curved bow of a legbone.

After a war no one could win, come,
let us honor the Asian dead we exhumë.
Let us stand, heads bowed, solemn,
at a flag-draped monument of stone.
Let us listen to their harsh, disparate music,
until the dead be counted, or be damned.