

POETRY

Ares: A Poem

Books VI and V

Edward Robert Raupp



With Illustrations by
Salome Bekauri and Mariam Bekauri





BOOK IV. Ares Ascendant

As I grew strong and gained in confidence,
I gave my thanks to those who guided me
And sought afar an opportunity
To watch a few ambitious men seek war,
And found someone in Canaanite Kadesh.

When old kings die, I see an opening,
With scramblers seeking to replace the king,
I take my place to see the fires of greed
First on one side and then another side,
Inciting each to lay his legal claim.

And so it was, when Egypt's Hatshepsut,
The Pharaoh Queen, who with Thutmose the Third,
Did rule the Empire of the Greater Nile,
And on her death, the vassal chiefs arose 1458 BCE
Asserting independence from the crown.

I saw delicious opportunity
And flew to rile up the Kadesh king.
"This is your chance," I whispered in his ear,
"To go to war against the Pharaoh boy.
"Collect your friends among the Canaanites."

"That unripe boy has never battle fought,
And you will easily claim you have won,
So gather allies, other vassal kings.
Expel Egyptian soldiers from your lands.
Autonomy's within your grasp today."

From all of Canaan allies came to fight
For sovereignty, for dominance and pride,
Relief from tribute to the Pharaoh boy.
The walls of Kadesh and of Megiddo
Would be the bastions, strongholds of revolt.

They would oppose the Kingdom of the Nile
With fifteen thousand sons prepared to die
For Syria and Aram, and for gods
Of Canaan foreign to Egyptian Ra.
And I would see that they would die for me!

To Megiddo the rebels came well-armed, 1275 BCE
Defying the untested Thutmose Third,
Expecting triumph easily and brief,
"No tribute to the Nile" was on their lips,
Assured that they would win the coming war.

Thutmose had never known the facts of war,
But I'd soon see that he would learn the truth.
"Show all that you are worthy of the crown.
To Megiddo take twenty thousand men
And murder all the rebel Canaanites."

With points of ivory, the arrows flew
Across the field and many found their marks,
Soft flesh of necks and chests and arms and legs,
And finished with bronze axes and with spears,
The crumpled bodies fell in three-deep piles.

In all, eight thousand Canaanites were killed.
A thousand men of Egypt lost their lives.
There is no counting of the wounded men,
As they would not live long beyond the day.
Tjaneni tells the tale but there is more.

I relish not the blood of those who fought,
Who had no stake in who would win or lose,
But died as fodder for the haughty kings.
I knew, of course, of the futility,
And how the war would end at Megiddo.

To know is to be sure, to have in hand
The certain truth that cannot be denied,
That time and circumstance can alter not.
I am the truth, for I, among the gods,
Remain unchanged throughout eternity.

What naïve humans say when they confess
Is often false and only wizardry
And cloaked behind a veil of make-believe,
A tangle of impossibilities,
That never can be proved by evidence.

Beliefs that gods of ancient myth still live
Corrupt the mind, but that's all right with me,
For it is in the clash of those old creeds
Where I find opportunities to fight
On one side then the very opposite.

The gods professing love for humankind
Command the carnage of the infidels,
And to the last to wipe them from the earth,
The men, the boys, the women, and the girls
Are sacrificed to some god old or new.

Returning warriors who won their fights
But lost their arms or legs or came back blind,
Received with loathing by the populace,
Hear hollow platitudes sans gratitude,
With precious little common dignity.

I've carried broken men and damaged boys
From bloodstained European battlefields,
Across the grassy plains of Africa,
And over highest mountains in the west,
To places where they should find rest and peace.

But I've been shocked when I have set them down
Among their "friends" and fellow countrymen
To find these best and brave disdained by those
Who did not fight and do not know the pain
Of those they sent to war to fight for them.

Ingratitude appears to be a trait
Inherent in the human heart and mind,
Unwillingness or inability
To recognize the service they receive
From those they send to do what they will not.

I soar above the rest, those impotents,
Who once had massive temples built for them,
And while the temples glorious remain,
They've been abandoned by their long-dead gods,
But simple worshippers assemble still.

Few temples have been built for me, except
In Pelops' Isle, where warriors are held
Above the rest in honored dignity
Apart from hollow men who shout but run
When calls to battle sound their reveille.

But Spartans' sacrifice I do reject,
When on the altar lay the prisoners,
For they at first are bravest warriors
Who in the battle fought for their own state,
And are unsuitable for sacrifice.

Give me the craven, spineless, greedy men
Who hiding in their homes send youth to war
So they could grow in comfort and in wealth
While still unproven boys would shed their blood,
Perhaps to die, on far-off battlefields.

“Get off my property!” the owner screamed.
“Get off my land or I will get my gun!”
So many wars have started with those words,
Encounters with the others, known or not,
The neighbors or the strangers from abroad.

This notion that “The land is mine” is false.
Who gave to you the right to dominate
The land and all that dwell in nature’s home?
Your thieving ancestors who stole the land,
Declaring it to be their own by force?

That *lebensraum* that Hitler in conceit
Asserted sovereignty that was not his
Shows how an autocrat can justify
Invading lands that someone else calls home,
Initiates a war of strong and weak.

Return, Thucydides, and prove your truth,
“The strong do what they can” is what you said,
And then, “The weak will suffer what they must.”
But strong is not alone in height and weight;
It’s in the mind, as well, and in the plan.

In Tegea, the women worshipped me,
Beseeching me that I might spare their men,
And once I did so for a girl alone,
Awash in tears for brother far away,
So young, the caring girl; I spared the boy.

So do not trust the mean and nasty tales
That other gods and their believers tell
Of my brutality and viciousness.
My fury’s left upon the battlefield
And never brought to families at home.

Look now on all of Athens’ highest hills,
And at the base of one, see there a house.
Areopagus is my hill of fame;
The house a temple built to honor me,
But temples are as nothing to my mind.

My temple’s in the hearts of greedy men.
Such pleonexia corrupts those hearts
With love of having and of getting more,
The lust of grasping for what others have
And never satisfied but craving more.

“A splendid little war” is what they said,
American expansion on the move,
Replacing Spain as the colonials
To dominate the helpless Philippines
Nine thousand miles away from Washington.

John Hay, the man who coined the “splendid” phrase,
Had never heard the gunfire of a war,
Had never seen the body of a man
A deadly cannonball had torn to shreds,
Or smelled the stinking guts of those brave men.

How dare this feckless lawyer in the rear
In ignorance and arrogance opine
On aspects of a war so far away!
I know the answer, as I know the man,
A man I’ve seen so many times before.

“Expand the empire! Take it to the seas!”
“The world is not enough. I must have more.”
The proper word is pleonexia:
His greed for more cannot be satisfied,
Voracious driven maw that must be fed.

When Hirohito was the Emperor,
Divinity he claimed from God of Sun,
A strident military took control, 1932
And I predicted there would be a war,
But even I could not foretell it all.

Expansion was the single strategy
Of those determined martial Japanese
To capture nature’s bounty that they lacked
From Chinese and Korean properties
And others in the Asian continent.

But in a blunder born of ignorance,
Miscalculation of the consequence,
They bombed Oahu and the U.S. Fleet, 1941
And opened up the door to suicide,
With millions dead and suffering defeat.

There’s nothing new to civil governors
Who claim descent from old divinities,
As Ptolemies and Alexander did,
As well as Caesar and the kings of Troy,
But mortals trying to be gods are doomed.



How could the brutal Hirohito know
That cruelty to prisoners of war
Would end as suddenly as it began
When Little Boy came to Hiroshima
With fifteen thousand tons of TNT? 1945

Then Fat Man came to Nagasaki next,
On August 9 of nineteen forty-five,
Dispelling any thought of self defense
Of what remained of Hirohito's realm,
Its cities now in ashes from the bombs.

An army's cruelty comes from the top,
And history records the Emperor
Applauded bestial behavior
Among his pack of callous conquerors,
Deserving the severest punishment.

The Nanjing massacre should let you know 1937
What kind of devil was the Emperor,
With poison gas and inhumanity
Why he was not hanged by the neck till death
Remains a mystery to all mankind.

Nippon, the Empire of the Rising Sun,
Fell with a thundrous roar into the sea
And well-deserved it was, its cruelty
Held to a just accounting for its crimes—
Shout, "Hang, disgraced Hideki, by the neck!" 1948

Your Sunday sneak attack was ill-conceived
With no regard for any consequence.
Did you reflect upon your tiny size
Compared to giants you woke up that day?
You are no David and your stone's too small.

Beware, you Tojo followers, take note
How haughty pride can lead you far astray,
To unsafe places wise men never go,
Where leaders fitted out with common sense
Avoid the darkness of the fiery lake.

I'll fight your shady battles, but beware,
For I may change my side opposing you
If it will add to my celebrity,
And you will feel the point of my steel sword
As those you send, those men and boys, to war.

Finlandia's a place where Russian troops
Were sent to die in nineteen thirty-nine. 1939
If frostbite did not kill the Soviets,
It was the Finnish soldiers did the job:
Three hundred thousand foreign casualties.

Suomi people have not much to say,
But when they choose to speak, it is with force,
So when their land and lives were under threat,
They fought like tigers to the bitter end,
Through bitter winter's freezing snow and ice.

The tiny Finnish army lost the war 1940
To massive Soviet invasion force,
But global admiration and respect
They won, while Stalin and the Soviets
Would be condemned as thugs by all the world.

What was the point in all of this, you ask.
Why were so many Russians sacrificed?
Did Stalin think that treasured Leningrad
Would ever be invaded by the Finns?
A paranoid dictatorship the cause.

Although my milieu is the solid ground,
My calling also takes me to the sea,
Where those at war contend against their foes
As well as turbulence of roaring waves,
Poseidon's challenge to enfeebled men.

Unjustified aggression must be stopped,
On land or on the oceans' wide expanse,
And I will join the force that's in defense
Against belligerents in sneak attacks
By peoples from across the stormy seas.

From Siraf Xerxes sailed near thousand ships 480 BCE
To Salamis in brazen confidence
That he would overwhelm the fragile Greeks,
But in his calculations, Persia's king
Would underestimate Themistocles.

I joined the Greek alliance in the fight,
Along with troops of Theseus and brave
Laconians, to humble and to send
Proud Xerxes back to Parsa in retreat,
His naval venture brought to shameful grief.



Themistocles was right when he declared
A stronger naval force was critical
Both to deter a would-be enemy
And to repel, if that should come about,
Invaders from the rolling tidal seas. c. 460 BCE

The view of Spartans may be understood,
That wars are won by hoplites on the ground,
For Sparta has no access to the sea,
No salted air to breathe as they grew up,
Preferring solid land to plant their feet.

But nearly all the rest of Greece consists
Of islands that invite a foreign force
To eye their open coasts as landing sites,
As gaping gateways to the villages
Where they will rape and ravage and destroy.

Deterrence is a robust strategy
To keep potential enemies away,
And with a well-armed naval fleet of ships
Projecting power for a stout defense
Against imprudent villainous assault.

Young Alexander, King of Macedon,
To Gaugamela took his well-trained troops
For one more battle facing Darius, 331 BCE
And in "The Camel's House," their two regimes
Contended once again for dominance.

I joined with Alexander in the fight
Against the Persian would-be conquerors
Who traveled from the east with banners high
Intending to exterminate the Greeks,
And expand the Achaemenid Reign.

My fury rises when I see the lust
For other peoples' lands and property,
The greed made manifest in violence,
And I am called to fight the avarice
With allies in defense of their own lands.

Beside the River Bumodus we fought,
Outnumbered but with better leadership
Defeating Darius a second time,
And ending the great Empire of the East,
I stood victorious with Macedon.

Three hundred thousand naval warriors
On seven hundred ships in Sicily
Contended for superiority.
I stood apart for I could not decide
Who had the greater claim, more just and fair.

Pecuniary squabbles I avoid.
Disputes between two peoples are not just
If all they want is what the others have,
And I will shed no blood on their account.
So Rome and Carthage, you are on your own.

From Ostia the Roman triremes sailed
Three hundred miles south on the western sea
Commanded by the Consuls for the year
Were Regulus and Longus in the lead,
Outnumbered in both fighting ships and men.

To Rome, the Carthaginians were trash,
Unfaithful, treacherous; and liars all,
Deserving of contempt and ridicule,
And after all the counting of the deaths,
The Roman merchants won Economus.

I fought the fierce Germanic warriors
When Caesar's four brave legions crossed the Rhine.
With twenty-thousand Roman legionnaires,
One hundred fifty thousand soldiers died
As red-draped Caesar won his victories.

I knew the Germans were not done with war,
And I was proven right in Italy
In Poland, Kievan Rus, and Hungary,
Against the French and the Americans
Allied with Britain twice in twenty years.

I would respect the German warrior,
His skill, his valor, and his discipline,
But I will see the concentration camps,
And I will be a witness to the crimes
That violate the code of chivalry.

The warrior will fight his enemy,
With every ounce of energy he's got,
But never will he torture anyone,
And neither will he kill his prisoner.
He treats his vanquished foe with dignity



He may be called “First Pirate of the Realm,”
But Francis Drake was knighted by the Queen 1581
Aboard his hardy ship, the Golden Hind,
For bravely sailing all around the globe,
And coming back to her with valued loot.

He sacked the coastal Spanish settlements
And on high seas, he captured merchant ships,
Enraging pillaged Latin monarchy,
And tearing Philip from Elizabeth,
His would-be fiancée some years before.

More than one hundred-thirty Spanish ships
Formed the Armada to destroy the Queen 1588
And to once more restore the Papacy
Her father tried to banish from the land,
But comes the Pirate to belay that aim.

The Spanish ships passed by the Plymouth fleet,
Allowing Drake to practice piracy,
To plunder the Rosario adrift
For needed ammunition, food, and gold,
And send the Spaniards from the battle site.

There were some moral battles on the sea,
Defending good from base imperial
Demands of pleonexia, that greed
Insatiable, unquenchable desire
For more and more of what the others have.

When Reinhard Scheer, a hundred German ships
Commanded to the North Sea battle site,
Met Britain’s Sir John Jellicoe’s Grand Fleet 1916
Of half again his size, he called to me,
“Oh God of War, be with me on my side.”

It was “The War to End All Wars,” they pledged, 1914-18
But I knew that old saw would never hold
So long as thirst for soil could not be quenched,
And armored ships are launched across the seas
To subjugate and dominate the land.

I gave my answer to the German fleet:
“Go home,” I said, “and spare your sailors’ lives.
Pray to some other god; to Mammon pray
To fatten up the merchant’s coinage purse,
For I will spill no blood for them or you.”

The Somme! The Somme! The Somme! A million dead.
It makes a seasoned warrior break down
In tears to see the gross incompetence
Of those in leadership who lack the skill
To plan and execute a strategy. 1916

The generals who know the prior war
Have not kept up with the technology
That obviates what they have known of war
Condemning soldiers to untimely death
From unexpected lethal weaponry.

The Maxim and the Lewis took their toll,
As untrained soldiers ran across the field,
With bayonets and eagerness to fight
An enemy remaining in a trench—
Six hundred rounds a minute did they fire.

In face of withering machine gun fire,
The soldiers fell on barbed wire barriers
Like flies on windscreens crushed against the glass
They never saw until they felt the blow
Of bullets in the chest and arms and head.

“The War to End All Wars” did not prevail
In ending any wars but introduced
Machine guns, tanks, and deadly poison gas,
Trench warfare and artillery to greet
Each day with death and corpses piled high.

I watched two battles on the River Marne 1914
And saw six hundred thousand casualties,
Cut down as in a bloody slaughterhouse,
On muddy fields where poppies used to grow,
In sacrifice to me, the God of War.

The final battle on the River Meuse 1918
Consumed the lives of fifty thousand men.
Two hundred thousand more would come away
With bodies broken and with shattered souls,
Forever haunted in their darkest dreams.

How fatuous the claim that wars would end!
Revenge against the victors would arise,
With black-shirt Nazis leading from the front 1919
Exploding wide across the continent
Inflaming hate-demented zealotry.



Long after I was born—"How long?" you ask—
Let's say three thousand years ago, or more,
The human species sprouted wings and flew,
Less to enjoy the view than go to war,
Reducing cities to a pile of stones.

In Guernica, the Condor Legionnaires
Committed acts of rampant genocide
Against a harmless native populace
Without a cause, to practice their technique
Of dealing widespread death from cloudless skies.

If ever I had any doubt about
The side with whom I'd choose to risk my life,
The massacre of innocents in Spain
Made up my mind, so I prepared for war
And climbed into the seats of fighter planes.

I learned to fly those instruments of war
When it was clear that they were here to stay,
As dragons breathing fire from the skies
On helpless people on the ground below
Who run for shelter from the searing flames.

Those instruments were all designed to kill
With streams of bullets and with heavy bombs
On factories and farmers' fields, as well,
To terrorize the cities and the towns,
The hospitals and kindergartens, too.

The vaunted Luftwaffe had its day of charm,
With Nazi Hermann Göring at its head,
Until the few of Britain's best repelled
The vile and loathsome dragons of the air
With their audacity and bravery.

1940

Survival of Britannia at stake,
Courageous people rose in her defense
Against invasion by barbarians,
As vile an enemy as I have seen
In any war, in any time or space.

I never dreamed the field would be above
The filmy clouds, where armies would engage,
Where warriors would fly as eagles fly,
Where courage would be shown by just a few
Who brought a nation from despair to light.



The cowards who attack the hospitals
Will suffer consequences of my wrath
When I have seen the carnage they have wrought
Upon the sick, the drained, the broken men,
Too weak, unable to defend themselves.

But I will take their side and wreak revenge
Against the merciless who stain the name
Of Warrior and have no right to claim
That what they do is just and fair in war,
And they must pay the price of arrogance.

When Putin bombed some eighteen hospitals 2022
In Mariupol and in Zhytomyr,
The coward manifested cruelty
In desperation when his strategy
Had failed to dominate Ukraine.

He is no warrior, this feckless man,
No matter his pretense and posturing.
He will go down in history as weak,
A vestige of the KGB, disgraced,
A schoolyard bully after all is done.



BOOK V. Ares Omniscient

I am the God of War; I know the feuds,
What men are in dispute with whom and why,
Where tempers blaze, where hunger's in control.
I fan the flames of discontent until
Men burst the reasoned bounds of sanity.

Tjaneni writes for you and for his king, 1457 BCE
But I was there in bloody Megiddo,
Witness to the horrid mayhem there,
And wielded my own brazen sword and spear
To butcher seven hundred Canaanites.

Attend to me! I am the God of War.
The other gods deplore my brutal ways
While mortal men refuse to worship me,
But my supremacy they can't deny,
My power is immense, unbeatable.

If all the hearts of men were filled with peace,
My constant calls for war would be ignored,
But peace falls victim to voraciousness
In stronger men of influence and sway,
So pave the path to war with flagrant lies.

I know the hearts of men. I know the blood
That flows in veins corrupted by conceit.
I know the pride of men, the arrogance
That makes them think they're equal to the gods,
Delusional, they act as if they were.

I know the weaknesses of men, the flaws
The defects, errors in their reasoning,
Mistakes they make in their designs of plans
To take away what nearby neighbors have,
To harm and terrorize the weaponless.

I know the strengths of men, the potencies
That win the brutal battles and the wars,
The caginess and trickery, deceit
To dupe the enemy, mislead and fool,
Delude the foe and snatch the victory.

I know the where and when the conflict will
Arise, and how that I can join the fray
With iron axe and sword in both my hands
Engaging one side or the next to shed
The blood of anyone who came to fight.

I know that in the end, the men will yield,
And though they say they do not worship at
My altar, still they do what I command.
They spill the blood of hated enemies
And innocents, as well, without remorse.

When Diomedes pierced my gut with aid
From spineless Pallas at his side, they thought
They killed the God of War—How arrogant!
I needed patching up and Paian's care,
But I knew I would live. I would not die.

I knew. I always know the war's result.
The God of War is not impervious
To pain. I bear the scars of swords that tore
My flesh, and though my royal blood was spilled
My body healed and gained the strength to fight.

To know, to understand, to see ahead
Is to decide the courses of one's life,
Resolve to act decisively, exploit
The moment, take in hand the rope of fate
And yank it from the Moirai's knotted grip.

Deceit in war I judge with certain doubt.
If it is done to fool the enemy,
And done with clever ingenuity,
Then I applaud the tactic's craftiness
As one more weapon in the arsenal.

But if the manner of the ruse lacks thought
Of possible adverse contingencies,
Then sadly I predict catastrophe
And whisper caution in the fighter's ear
Advising just a more direct attack.

When Patroclus put on Achilles' kit,
And posed in Troy as that famed warrior
He little thought of what that hoax could do
If he should die that day on Hector's sword,
Unleashing all the wrath of Thetis' son.

The strong Achilles' love had known no bounds,
Or limits on the anger that emerged
When Trojan Hector killed the one he loved.
Ferocity exploded from the depths
Of that Achilles' anguished, tortured soul.

Thrasymachus of Chalcedon was right, d. 1400 BCE
When asked by Socrates about the just,
Replied that justice is in might alone,
That it is in the nature of the man
The strong will always dominate the weak.

The weak will pray to their divinities,
But those are feeble prayers to the gods
Who are themselves too weak to intercede
Against the well-armed and the powerful,
The avaricious lust-filled men at war.

Voracious men, insatiable, will win
In competition with the satisfied,
Because within their breasts their hunger lies,
Compelling conquest over all the rest
Who have what they would claim by force of arms.

Whose side I take is immaterial,
Irrelevant when I decide to fight,
To bring my sword, my spear, my shield, my skill
Dispatching all who come to join the fray,
Condemning all of them to Tartarus.

I'm born in Greece, and Greeks I understand,
The stories and the history of wars,
All neatly packaged for the books and files,
Some truth and some imaginings inspired
By fervent longing for validity.

I think I understand the followers
Of Yahweh, that old warlord Canaanite
Who promised Paradise to worshippers,
Perdition to the rest who disagreed.
His jealous nature never did he hide.

Across the globe, a thousand other gods
Demand the loyalty of worshippers
In ways that I will never fully grasp,
But there is one assembly that defies
Good reason, thought, and even sanity.

They claim to follow Yahweh's only son,
The babe of Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace. c. 5 BCE
They build the greatest temples in his name
And shower opulence upon his priests
But persecute the people of his race.

Two billion worshippers of Yahweh's son
Playact to follow in his holy steps
And gather in his temples to confess
Their peccadilloes to his hallowed priests,
While harboring their hatred deep within.

Such irony! The *eirôn*'s there in full,
Exposing *alazôn*'s hypocrisy,
When Jacob's sons they hound and persecute.
The Son himself a Jew. His mother, too.
Disciples all were Jews. The Christian saints.

Campaigns against the heirs of Abraham
Are not my kinds of wars, but I will fight
Against the hypocrites, for they are vile
Companions of the lowest form of snake,
Though jealous Yahweh is no friend of mine.

I know those liars and those charlatans.
I've known them all my life, my work they mock,
Pretending that they occupy the space
Reserved for truth and rationality.
The deepest place in Tartarus is theirs.

Ex uno duo. Out of One is Two.
Chosun was one, one people and one land,
Until the blunder of the conquerors
Decided rashly to make two of one, 1948
Not giving any thought to what might come.

It came without delay when from the north
An army crashed into the southern state, 1950
The land of morning calm again at war,
With Arirang no longer sung in joy
From Namsan Mountain to the valley floor.

Three years the battles raged from north to south
Across the mountainous peninsula,
Resulting in five million people dead,
With half of these civilians in their homes,
And though the shooting stopped, the war has not.

A villainous dictatorship remains,
Developing such weapons as may bring
To earth a war that warriors can't win,
An Armageddon humans won't survive,
A planet poisoned for eternity.

Dictatorships abound in history,
From when the time of humankind began
Right up to now, and I believe I know
How they begin and how they grow so strong
And why they always end in infamy.

When Gaius Julius returned to Rome, 60 BCE
The people celebrated one great man
Who bravely conquered Gaul, Germania,
Britannia, and more, but then he erred,
Declaring absolute authority.

The Senate ended his dictatorship 44 BCE
With forty daggers plunged into his chest.
Assassination is a common way
To send the would-be god to his demise,
While suicide is yet another way.

Italians hanged Benito by his toes, 1945
And Hitler put a bullet in his brain.
Ceaucescu cried when up against the wall
He faced the firing squad near Bucharest. 1989
But not all tyrants died so horribly.

Then Kim Il Sung, a self-appointed god,
Would launch a useless deadly civil war 1950
While birthing a malignant dynasty,
Died peacefully from a malignant heart 1994
That claimed the life of one more evil man.

Some sixty million dead, the legacy
Of Mao Zedong who died at eighty-two 1976
While sleeping peacefully at home in bed.
Pol Pot three million killed in genocide
Before a heart attack would take his life. 1998

The Butcher of Uganda he was called,
Idi Amin and his dictatorship
Were indiscriminate in whom they killed
Before Mwalimu ended the affair, 1979
Allowing that pretender peaceful death. 2003

I've learned dictatorships can only last
So long as people tolerate the men
Who seize the seats of power by their force
And cow the populace with threats of death,
Until they're stopped by those who've had enough.

The man or god who boasts he has no fear
Lies to himself or does not recognize
The danger of disaster in the air,
But if he knows and does not speak a lie,
Then shun the man for he will get you killed.

Such hubris is notorious in wars
Among the would-be heroes called to fight,
Who hear the joyful chauvinistic tunes,
Who see the waving flags on steeples high,
Bedazzled by the colors bright and bold.

It is amazing, Bonaparte once said,
Just what a man will do for just a piece
Of brightly colored cloth upon his chest,
To which we add, upon his darkened grave,
A posthumous award for those who grieve.

c. 1805

My country, right or wrong, the zealots sing,
And I am there to gather in the souls,
The victims of the horrid battlefields,
Sent by their grasping masters to the front
To swell their boodle from the arms they make.

I know these men, these bloated racketeers,
Who lay upon the altar of deceit
The sacrifice of those who fought for them,
Whose greed propels the poor to give their lives
In fevered hopes for later Paradise.

The oligarchs and those who tend to them
Are wedded to tradition, high and low,
Immutable, the barriers between,
That can't be scaled in search of equity.
It is a bargain with inferno made.

What others do not know—or say they don't
Is that true cost of all the wars they love,
But it's a cost I know full well, in lives
And devastation of the property
Left by the builders of an early age.

The cost is in my nature and my call;
I know the consequence of what I do.
It is not up to me to start a war
For mortal men will do it on their own,
And I bring to the fray my axe and sword.

El Libertador became my friend,
His war was just, Simón de Bolívar,
To free the people from three centuries
Of slavish Spanish servitude
In New Grenada, sovereignty the goal.

At Boyacá, the battle was engaged 1819
Between the forces of the hope-filled free
And uninspired oppressors from Madrid,
Simón and Santander on freedom's side,
Colonel Barreiro on the other side.

High in the greater Andes mountain range,
Simón had won a fray at Vargas Swamp
And headed south and west to Bogotá
To claim the independence of the land,
Arriving at the *Casa de Teja*.

Three thousand warriors, on either side
The battle took two hours, then was done,
With more than half the Royalists removed
By death or injury or capture at the end
And Spanish domination in the wind.

I overstate the case when I conclude
All wars are caused by immorality,
When some, as we just saw, seek liberty
From an oppressive foreign government
Or from an evil tyranny at home.

Such was the case in Ethiopia,
When sons of Solomon were dispossessed
By selfish European politics
In the Scramble for All Africa,
And Italy would not be put aside.

The Horn of Africa was Rome's desire
Which they proposed to take by trickery
And by deceit assert their dominance
Without the need for military force,
But the Italians blundered grievously.

It was the Battle of Adwa I saw 1896
Determined Ethiopians defeat
Italian would-be foreign conquerors,
Destroy the Scramble's immorality
And keep the Land of Solomon intact.



I fought against the Second Leopold
Who tortured Congolese for private gain
And sent his Belgian army to suppress
Resistance from the tribal families
With weapons Congo men had never seen.

Pneumatic tires had come upon the scene,
So rubber suddenly was in demand,
And central Congo had the rubber trees
Along with labor to extract the juice
By those who worked as hard as bonded slaves.

My comrades were no match for *Force Publique*.
They bravely fought with stone-age weaponry
Against machine guns, cannons, and the like
For more than forty years but could not win,
Could not compete with ancient swords and spears.

Who put this man in charge, this greedy man?
He was the son of Leopold the First,
But why the Belgians had their tyrant kings
Has always been a mystery to me.
Rise up, you mortals, put away your kings!

I know war's harvest is a bitter crop,
As I have tasted it so many times,
Unpleasant to the sight and putrid smell,
Surviving hardened veterans confirm
As they recall the rancid battlefield.

Some who have never been at war may say
That warriors no tears should ever shed,
And brave Achilles never would have cried
When seeing Patroclus upon his shield,
But I did see the valiant hero weep.

If any soldier's never shed a tear,
Then he has difficulties with his eyes,
For when his comrade, his best friend, is lost,
He curses his condition, and he sobs,
And asks in pain, "Why him and why not me?"

And if you think that I, the God of War
Have never wept upon a field,
Then you must listen carefully to me:
When I survey the battleground and see
What I have done, I cannot stop the tears.

At times, the battle done, I climb the steps
That lead up to a tower well above
The gory battlefield, and looking down
On all the ruins, men and property,
I shake my head at all the waste I see.

Besides the daring dead, disfigurement
Pervades the field of broken warriors.
Disease, corrupted flesh, the battle's blight,
The vomit and the craze, the frightful shock,
All tally up the price that someone pays.

Consume the fuel that feeds the fires of rage,
The contracts for the instruments of war,
Impediments to reasoned dialogue,
And use the ash to cover countenance,
Disguise the sneer beneath the powdered mask.

The sights and sounds of war are known to me,
The rancid smells and tastes I know too well.
If I should die (I know I never shall),
I know full well the place that I would go—
It's not Elysium or Paradise!

Why do they hate? The mortals and the gods?
I ask because it's one thing I don't know.
Where is the origin, the fount of hate,
That bubbles up from somewhere deep within
The dark abyss that is the clouded mind?

I've asked the other gods, but they don't know,
Or if they do, they can't or won't explain
The reason for pervasive enmity
Compelling violence from age to age
That all too often culminates in war.

Of hostile confrontation I know well,
The weapons that I wield and my techniques,
But hate I do not know or understand,
Although I often taste its bitter fruit
And wonder as a pupil might who asks.

The answer is, as I have come to think,
That there is not an answer to be had,
For it assumes that hate is rational,
But it is not. The deadly tree of hate
Is rooted in the Chaos of the heart.



Stupidity or ignorance—which one
Leads to disaster on the battlefield?
From what I've seen, it is the ignorance,
Not knowing the terrain or enemy,
Untrained in tactics or in weaponry.

Not everyone can be a warrior.
Some lack sufficient strength or stamina
To meet the challenges and overcome
The barriers that block the way ahead,
But they can build their strength if they persist.

Some are unable to acquire the skills
They need in tactics or in weaponry,
For they were born without the means to learn
An easy or a complicated task,
And they will never be a warrior.

But there are some you simply will not trust
To be with you when you are under fire.
These are the cowards, liars, cheats, and thieves
Who only think to save themselves from harm
And may desert you when you need them most.

A thousand Austrians were killed one night,
Not by the hostile Turks but by themselves,
Between the hussars and the infantry
At lonely Karánsebes, they all died 1788
Defending hussar's hoard of fruity schnaps!

Napoleon in pride and arrogance
Thought he would win against the Russian Tsar, 1812
But he discounted Winter's deadly freeze
On soldiers ill-equipped to fight two foes,
The Russians and their ally, Winter's cold.

In ignorance of what he should have known,
The paperhanger made the same mistake.
He thought that he could catch the Soviets,
Who trusted him to keep his promises,
But sent the Fuehrer's army back to Hell. 1943

Two generations passed, but yet again,
Another autocrat went on the road 2022
To the mirage of a quick victory
In land too vast to conquer easily.
Go home Vladimir! Leave Ukraine alone.



I watch the blunders, and I shake my head
To see so many leaders make mistakes,
Who seem to be bereft of common sense,
Or lack the skills of probability,
When they attack a public they oppose.

The people of Taiwan look east and west,
Anticipating Mainland's hostile waves.
Beijing would make a terrible mistake
If they initiated an attack
Across the Strait to subjugate Taipei.

In my mind's eye, I see a bloody war
That Beijing cannot win without the loss
Of all they've gained by diligent hard work.
A classic Pyrrhic victory awaits
The side believing it has won the war.

What have they won, when at the end of day,
They find what Pyrrhus found at Asculum,
The price of victory may be too high,
That Death alone is left to claim the win.
So Beijing, listen! Leave Taiwan alone.

279 BCE

You humans seem to like to separate
Yourselves with unimportant boundaries
That neighbors must not ever violate
Lest war break out to punish—and for what?
To justify a lapse of common sense.

If you believe that war is just your fate,
You may be right, as it's the fate of all,
Both gods and mortals, the inheritors
Of that vile seed of ancient origin.

Don't waste your precious time or energy
In an attempt to understand the hate
That lies within the body and the soul,
Erupting in a passionate attack
With no apparent reasoning to see.

But I've seen violence, ferocity,
On battlefields that go beyond the pale,
When, for example, a companion's killed,
As when Achilles flew into a rage
On hearing of Patroclus' death in Troy.

One moonless night, I swam across the Rhine,
With engineers in rubber boats behind,
To clear the bank for Allied infantry,
And to secure the bridgehead to the east;
The European war would soon be done.

The bridge, the Ludendorff, was standing still, 1945
Remagen on the west, Erpel on the east,
Built when the “War to end all wars” was on,
Collapsed, but not before the Allies crossed
With six divisions and with all their gear.

More than a hundred thousand soldiers crossed,
With tanks, artillery, and all supplies,
Some on the Ludendorff, while others crossed
On pontoon bridges built by engineers,
All striking to Berlin to end the war.

It was the spring of nineteen forty-five
When Germany, at last, gave up the fight,
The second time in twenty-seven years,
Teutonic aspirations failed to win
A war that they began in arrogance.

My breath inspires when fear begins to float
Toward the hidden inner consciousness
To dredge up from recesses of the mind,
Foreboding fights to come and blood to spill
Then courage overcomes those enemies.

Some images of war lodge in my brain
And cannot be released to give relief
From pain of memory of what I’ve seen,
The awful things that stain the battlefield
From grassy green to what I won’t describe.

Down deep those entities survive in me
Determined to break out and overthrow
My reason with a passion uncontrolled
Distracting me from ordinary tasks
That my profession needs for me to do.

Those images at times cause tears to flow,
My comrades lying in the stinking mud,
The women and the children...No I won’t
Allow those images to take control.
Go back, you horrid memories, go back.



In Hue, at Tet in nineteen sixty-eight, 1968
The People's Liberation Army came
En masse to terrorize the government,
To bring an end to Vietnam's civil war
And drive away the brash Americans.

The men in black pajamas won the war 1975
Against the army that was thought to be
Invincible with all its modern gear
But could not even win so far from home,
So distant from a just and valid cause.

When those who start the wars go to their beds,
Do they have nightmares as the soldiers do,
The apparitions of the youths they sent
In numbers much too high to count,
Or do they fall asleep without a care?

If there must be a war, let it be short.
A hundred years is clear insanity,
And thirty years is still too long a war. 1618-1648
A day seems right to me, a week, no more.
The cost of longer wars is just too dear.

They say a leopard cannot change its spots,
Or that a dog that's old can't learn new tricks,
And so it may apply to humans, too,
As when a man is raised in KGB 1975-1991
Like Putin and his poisoned remedies.

Assassination is as far from me
As East is from the West, or North from South.
I meet my enemy on battlefields,
Not in a theater loge or city street
I will not sneak around in some dark place.

It's not the KGB; it's FSB.
Two letters differ, but the third's the same,
As are the tactics that they've always used.
They say it's not a war. They always lie.
They're just assassins lurking in the dark.

Pavel Antov, Ravil Maganov
Both critics of the Putin war, were pushed,
Or fell "by accident" from some high place.
Rapoport and Lesin, Nemtsov, too,
And more, said one bad word and now are dead.



While children in their gardens play their games,
The Russian would-be tsar would kill them all
Without a military rationale
But just to terrorize, as Hitler did,
Two monsters with their hearts as black as coal..

The parallels appear too obvious,
Both driven by a hate that has no depth,
Both blinded by ambition and deceit,
Pied pipers leading nations to their doom,
With lies and promises of wealth to come.

Deep in his bunker, Hitler killed himself, 1945
As Allied armies swept his goons aside.
He took the coward's path when he was told
Americans and Soviets were near
And soon he would be taken prisoner.

Will Putin cower in his Kremlin lair,
In fear the oligarchs will come for him,
Or will he run away to safer climes,
Where he has stashed the booty of his crimes,
Or will he be the coward Hitler was?

To be continued in the next issue.