

POETRY

Ares: A Poem

Books II and III

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BOOK II. Ares Nascent

Come, Atë, bring your ruinous machines.
Come, Eris, daughter of the night, come now,
With Ares, you may fill your cup of pain.
Great Zeus, Olympus king, will sire a child
Whose mother, Hera, will disclaim at birth.

Ares, least beloved of all the gods,
But Why? In form, he was most beautiful.
No, it was not his shape they all condemned,
Nor parentage, the son of two great gods,
They saw in him detested from the womb.

“No more!” the goddess partner screamed to Zeus.
“We have enough. I wish to bear no more.
The birthing pain is more than I can stand.
Go then to cloistered sister Hestia
That she may bear the babes you so desire.”

Great king, the monarch of the gods—denied!
“You know, mad Queen, our sister’s purity;
Virginity is her perpetual state.
No god or man will desecrate her oath.
You will conceive and bear my son in pain.”

Then she, the Queen of all the gods, conceived.
The seed of Zeus was set in poisoned soil,
Corrupted by the odium she felt,
That in her womb a monstrous baby grew,
Infected with the blood of cruelty.

Abomination! Hera felt the pain.
Olympus shook from that god’s dreadful screams.
While Zeus flew off to mate with nubile nymphs,
Elder Demeter came to comfort her,
But there was nothing she could do to help.

Excruciating pain, the baby born.
Old Rhea took the infant in her arms.
“So beautiful,” she said in her delight,
“But there is something I can feel in him,
A chill—I shiver when I take his hand.

Then Atë snatched the baby, and she smiled.
“Eternal god of war,” she said, “we’ll call the child
Ares, and he will rule in place of Zeus,
Bringing perpetual war to all mankind,
No more small skirmishes, eternal war.”

So born in bitterness, the god began,
In concert with a pair of wicked gods
To practice starting wars across the land,
Delighting in the battle sounds and smells,
The horrid sights of bodies torn apart.

But let us hear his voice in his own words
So we may know what is the argument
He makes in his defense of what he does
That makes the other gods despise him so
And let us listen carefully and hear.

Be not so quick to judge the warrior,
The one we send to almost certain harm
To fight for you against an enemy
He does not know and who he’s never seen
But simply trusts in your authority.

He’ll tell you what he’s seen on battlefields
And on the foamy sea and in the air
When those you’ve sent to war to do your work
Contend against your chosen enemy
Enduring hardships you can never know.

My name is Ares. Call me God of War!
I’ll find the strong. I’ll find the driven ones.
It won’t be hard to find those filled with greed,
So driven that for more, for what you have,
Who will attack and take what loot they can.

Down in the place where man began, I saw
Two clans and heard their shouts, "It's mine! It's mine!"
I made myself invisible and walked
Among the groups and whispered in their ears,
"They are your enemy. Make war! Make war!"

I took a rock and crushed the skull of one
And did the same to yet another one.
It was a joy, my first attempt to start
A war! I killed a dozen on both sides.
The war went on for twenty-seven years. 431-404 BCE

It's a mistake to think that I enjoy
The killing of an untrained callow youth
Who lacks the skill and vital energy
Required to fight a seasoned veteran
Without a hope that he'd survive the war.

How can a birth bring such calamity,
One child among the children of the gods,
Whose claim to glory and to memory
Lies only in the turmoil he will cause,
The bloody path that he will carve in stone?

In me the seeds of pandemonium
Were sown in shallow soil, unwelcoming,
The rocky ground that was my mother's womb,
Perverted by the jealousy and hate
She felt toward Olympus' god of gods.

What did I do to have her hate me so,
Cause her to cast me out right from the start,
Reject her blameless son from infancy,
Inflict upon the boy the vilest name,
As if directing him to vilest deeds?

A jealous wife is unpredictable,
Unable to rein in her need to harm
The errant husband for his foul misdeeds,
So she may wound the child, as Hera did,
From the time that I was born to her.

I own my life. I'm born the God of War
Who fights on battlefields of my own choice
And place no blame on those who at my birth
Declaimed the incest of my parentage,
Great Zeus and Hera filled with odium.

I am no bastard child, as many are,
Who sired by Zeus live out their lives in shame,
As was Athena, spawn of ocean nymph,
A clever sister of the Potamoi,
And product of the rapist King of Gods.

I have a greater title to the throne
Than those whose birth is illegitimate,
The lesser gods and low-born demigods
Like Sparta's famous all-too-beauteous queen
And Herakles born in deceit of Zeus.

My anguished birth is not a shame to me;
Conceived in hate in cow-eyed Hera's womb,
A chamber dark absent of mother's love,
With no entitlement of decency,
No cherishment or tenderness or joy.

What is a life, what start and what the end
That makes a difference, means anything
To anyone beyond the self, that gives
Importance to the universe, and where
Is it heading, where the path, and why?

Why am I here, on high Olympus peak?
What purpose must I chase, and who decides?
Will Zeus lay out a clever plan ahead
For me to take, fulfill my destiny,
Or will my hateful mother make the choice?

Perhaps it's true that life is just a game
With those who win and those who fall aside,
A game of chance we dare not fail to play,
Compete until the end, however soon,
When final judgment is announced at last.

I know my milieu is the battlefield,
My mission is to foment wars and fight,
I go to find some instability
And find it in abundance everywhere.
My sword and axe are presently engaged.

Above the starry skies, where ancient gods
Conspired to manage the affairs of those
Who once created them, Olympus stood
In honored dignity and highly praised,
So near and yet so far from certain truth.

I know that I exist. I see the proof,
Abundant evidence around the world,
Persistent war in every time and place,
Attesting to my life as God of War,
Enduring to the end of mortal days.

Unfailing is the quest for lasting peace,
Pretended fantasy that never was,
For tranquil gods of peace have not survived
The competition for the mortal mind
While I will live for all eternity.

Shall I invent some reason for my birth,
Appealing explanation for the crowd?
There is no need to justify my life,
So long as wars continue on the earth.
I thrive within the minds and hearts of men.

Who does not know that birthing comes with pain?
So when the universe was born, it came
With pain so great it could not be contained,
And as it aged, it only grew in strength,
Assuming staggering and potent might.

In anguish does humanity exist,
The ache of chronic pain, the sting that bites
Into the flesh, into the mind that shapes
Behavior that's intended to decrease
The throbbing that distorts reality.

For what is pain? In truth, I do not know.
In some great fight, discovery awaits,
A battle wound from sharpened javelin
Inflicted by a worthy warrior.
What will the feeling be? I shall find out.

Give honor to the dam who gives us birth?
In Hera's pain was more than muscles' cramp,
More than the aching of maternity.
Of Titans sired, she bore the vestiges,
The still remains of a defeated race.

Before my time, before the time of man,
There was a war, I'm told by Father Zeus,
Between the Titans and Olympians,
Confirming my belief that even gods
Were born to fight, to seek supremacy.

In all the universe, the galaxies,
The lands, the air, and in the oceans' deep,
All creatures must compete, to push aside
Whatever interferes with that grand quest
To dominate, to subjugate all else.

The father fears his progeny will rise
To wrest the crown from their own sire and king,
And then the sons look back and fear the same,
A vicious cycle that might never end
Until an epic hero breaks the chain.

If I am born to be a warrior,
Then it is I will be that champion,
To break the chain of entrenched dynasty,
Campaigner for the mothers and their babes
Against the venal mercenary force.

I ask, What kind of universe is this?
What will I find when I leave this behind?
Will I find universal love and care
Among the human race? Respect? Esteem?
I'm eager to find answers to my thoughts.

My home, Olympus, is no paradise,
No pleasure palace for the other gods
To take their leisure with no care or fear
For loss of life or immortality,
But still I wonder what my life will be.

I am a son of Zeus, my sire and king,
So Zeus is in my body, mind, and soul,
But Hera is my dam and she's in me,
Imbuing me with hate for all mankind,
And giving shape to what I will become.

I'm curious. I want to know so much.
In what direction will I go to find
The purpose of my life, why I exist?
Will I have any friends—or enemies?
Where do the answers to my questions lie?

Are you a warrior? I need to know.
Are you a veteran come home from war?
Or maybe you have seen a war at home
When some invading army came to raid
Your cities, towns, and tiny villages.

I need to know before I tell my tale
If what I say will sound familiar
Because you've seen the horrors I have known
Or whether this is just a diary
You're reading with a cool indifference.

If you've been there, you know the consequence,
And not just from a distant point of view,
Of war, of battles fought for someone's cause,
A cause that may be moral when it's judged
By those who write the histories of war.

If you have not been there, I ask of you
To talk to someone who can tell a tale
Or two of what it's like, if they agree,
On pain of their remembering the scenes
That will remain forever in their minds.



I can accept if you are not like me,
That is, if you are not a warrior
Who fights the battles shedding blood of men,
And you prefer to live in quiet peace,
Pursuing more productive enterprise.

Not all of us are meant to go to war,
With flashing swords and shouts at enemies.
We few select are chosen to defend
Our families, our friends—and even you—
Against marauders, pillagers, and thieves.

My brother Hermes is a quiet sort
Who carries neither sword nor javelin
But travels with heroic warriors
From fields of battle to Elysium,
Companion in the flight to afterlife.

If peace is what you seek, I understand
And never will denounce the stand you take,
But some of us are differently disposed,
Although we also seek a common goal,
A world of peace with justice for all men.



BOOK III. Ares Rising

Of Gilgamesh, I heard when I was young,
A stately king and mighty warrior
Who would not bow to any of the gods,
Resisting Ishtar's passionate appeal,
Unleashing Heaven's Bull for her revenge.

Gods cannot deal with mortals' insolence.
Rejection is an insult to the gods,
And they will find a horrid punishment
When they perceive contempt or disrespect,
And Ishtar the Sumerian struck back.

But valiant battle-hardened Gilgamesh,
With Enkidu, his ally and his friend,
Took on the raging Bull and slew the beast,
Defying Ishtar with his weaponry,
Condemning both the friends to mortal death.

So many stories of the gods I heard,
As humankind in awe began to ask
About the sun and moon and stars above
And why some groups of men began to fight,
To kill and break the bones of other men.

I grew impatient with the rocks and sticks,
Long bones of beasts as instruments of war.
I taught mankind to dig for stronger stuff.
They did not disappoint with weapons new
To butcher more, to prosecute their wars.

Bronze spears, axes, I gave abundantly.
It mattered not to me which side triumphed.
Sharp points to penetrate the skin, sharp edge
To slice an arm, a leg, a head. What thrill!
A dagger hidden by the side. Surprise!

Into the deep I then advised my pawns'
To find the iron in the rocky ore,
Then put it in the fire and you create
A stronger weapon from the forge of flame
To keep the point and even sharper edge.

Across the world I flew, from east to west,
From north to south and to another war.
My steel I shared with friend and foe alike.
I measured my success in human blood
And corpses on the gore-soaked battlefield.

I spent my youth preparing for the day
When peace is just a faded memory, a tale
That's told to children who will never know
A world devoid of war, no constant fears,
Unlikely myth of ancient origin.

Eris my constant guide I so admired
And followed in her train of discontent,
Depending on the strife to humans caused
To start a war wherever she would go,
Then I would hasten to the bloody fray.

My mother breathed disgust into my lungs,
But it was Atë taught me how to hate.
In exile from Olympus, Atë roamed
The earth, now called the Meadow of Atë
And I have come to call the loathing lea.

With Atë at my side, I learned the tricks
To bait you to the slippery slide to war,
The lust for dominance and sovereignty,
For power over those across the land,
Irresistible to would-be kings.

I have no worthy rival for my realm.
A stolen name is not reality
But just facade to share my eminence,
Celebrity, and notoriety,
To bask in glory that is mine alone.

Ascending to the greatest heights, I rise,
Surpassing all the other ancient gods
Who ridicule and derogate my name
Despising me and that to which I'm called,
Bent on disparaging my work abroad.

I've demonstrated to the gods and men
My power and resolve to win where they
Have failed, to prove my immortality,
Revealing to the universe my might
And will to dominate the minds of men,
To bend their purpose to my very own.

I rise despite contempt and disrespect
Of many people, gods, and demigods
Who pine for lasting peace and harmony
In ignorance of the propensity
Of humankind to fight, control, and kill.

From birth I was despised, reviled, and scorned
By other gods in Zeus's pantheon,
Spurned and dumping shame upon my head.
I then determined I would rise above
Them all, and that became my only aim.

If you will look around, then you will see
Attested evidence of my ascent,
All products of the wars that I inspired,
Unhappy ruins of the humans' works,
Depression of what once was happiness.

My rise is an affront to worshippers
Of other gods, of those who pray for peace,
Whose hopes are vested in the impotent.
Those gods are falling; one by one they fall,
While I am rising sans the accolades.

It is an irony that those who pray
So fervently for peace are first to shout,
"Go rally round the country's flag, my boys!
And if you die, we'll build a monument."
[But if you live, you will be on your own!]

My fated star keeps rising all the time
As untrue men continue on their quest
For land to spread their sovereignty and rule
And seek revenge for slightly injured pride
With prejudice against another hue.

While other gods with little potency
Solicit adoration from the mass
I rise surpassing all the rest and shine,
Oblivious to feckless energies,
To raise pretended rank and prominence.

I will with no uncertainty ascend,
Exceeding all the fame that ever was,
To rise above Olympus' lofty height
And claim the final tournament is mine
Despite the scorn that I endured so long.

I rise! I am alone of all the gods
Surviving five millennia intact,
Outlasting ineffective deities
Continuing to prosecute my charge,
Eliminating weak and prideful men.

How did Muhammad grow to be so strong,
Revered by billions all around the world,
A merchant born in Mecca near the sea,
Who earned a decent living trading goods,
The son of Abdullah, a tribal chief?

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At forty years of age, he saw *Jibril*,
The angel Gabriel, who came to him,
In *Hira*, as the sacred story's told,
To bring to him a message from Yahweh,
That "God is one," and there Islam was born.

Rejected by the worshippers of gods
Like Hubal, al-'Uzzā, Manāt, and Christ,
Muhammad and his Muslim followers
Were forced to flee and to Medina went,
And there the seeds of coming war were sown.

The answer to the question that we posed
Is in the final Battle of Badr: 624
Muhammad's Muslim warriors prevailed
Against a Quraysh Meccan caravan,
And won Arabia for his One God.

Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi his god
Commanded to invade the realm of Gaul
To spread the latest doctrine of Islam
By force of daggers and of scimitars
Against the infidels in Europe's fields.

Rahman had conquered the Iberians
And then his army crossed the *Pyrénées* 732
To meet the King who beat the Viking horde,
Odo, the reigning Duke of Aquitaine,
Who asked for help from Pepin's valiant son.

Charles Martel met Rahman face-to-face
In Tours, where rival armies came to blows.
"The Hammer" won the fight and Rahman died,
His life surrendered in a hopeless cause,
That ended Muslim quest for dominance.

Now think about the gross absurdity
Of Yahweh's army fighting Yahweh's men!
Such zealotry that fuels the energy,
The drive to slaughter those who deviate
From some small point of their theology.

I owe no loyalty to any god,
But many naïve trusting mortals do,
And dedicate their lives to venerate
Some deity demanding deference
And strict obedience to that god's laws.

Tariq Ibn Zeyad, a follower
Of such a god, came out of Africa,
Obedient to that god's messenger,
To wage a war against the Christian Goths,
Armed with a scimitar and sacred book.

At Guadalete, Tariq led a force 711
Of Berber warriors against the King
Of Visigoths, usurper Roderic,
Whose larger army had no loyalty
And fell to better Muslim leadership.

I watched and shook my head to see the shame
That Roderic displayed that summer day,
When ill-equipped and untrained Christian men
Were led to slaughter by the warriors
Led by the Prophet's better generals.

In Yangtze valley, thirty million dead
When Han Xiuquan, deluded crazy man
Of Hakka origin, declared a war 1850
Against the ruling Manchu dynasty
Unleashing fourteen years of death and pain.

With "Heaven's Kingdom" as the promised land,
This mesmerizing lunatic convinced
The masses to rise up on his behalf,
Throw off one set of Chinese leadership
And put himself in charge of everything.

His Taiping armies loosed upon the land
Went pillaging the towns and villages,
Atrocities committed by the troops,
A mindless rampage giving lie to claims
Of better lives for people everywhere.

In eighteen sixty-four, the war was done, 1864
And hope in memory may stay repeat,
But vestiges of ruin still remain,
With dreadful civil wars continuing
And I the God of War am still on call.

When William was the Duke of Normandy,
He made a claim for England's crown and throne,
To be secured by him and his allies
Across the Channel that divides the land
That he possessed from land that he desired.

From all of France they came to Valery, 1066
And knights from Brittany and Flanders came
To swell the gallant force that war required,
Aware that some would likely not survive,
But swearing their allegiance to the cause.

I chose no side in that dispute but thought
That William and his friends might just succeed
When then I saw ten thousand men debark
At Pevensey prepared to take the field
Against the Anglo Saxon Godwinson.

At Hastings, it was William's strategy
Along with soldiers that October day
That won the battle and the crown and throne.
While Harold died, an arrow in his eye,
Ten sixty-six stands out in English lore.

The English rose is red—or is it white?
That simple question raged for thirty years, 1455-1487
And I could only stand and watch as York
Fought Lancaster from Albans in the north
To Richard's fatal Bosworth in the east. 1485

Henry the Fifth, the star of Agincourt, 1415
Died leaving baby Henry as his heir,
And crowned the King of England and of France.
I could not fight for this, a timid king,
Who hated war and truly went insane.

I fought beside the French nobility
Against a weakened army poorly led,
And watched across the water with disdain,
As Lancaster and York began to fight
For now—the insane Henry's English crown.

The Roses' war would end at Bosworth Field,
When Richard Third of York would lose his horse,
And Henry Seventh's army cleared the field.
I watched as Roses' wars were at an end,
Beginning Tudors' century of rule.

To find an opportunity to fight
Is nothing but a children's simple game,
For there's a flaw to see in all mankind
Defective from the start when they were apes
Contesting for the food and mates and space.

My rising's aided by that human flaw
That offers openings for me to breach,
To pluck that string, discordant jarring wire
Creating sounds that grate upon the ear,
Inviting me to join the coming war.

Like smoke from fiercely raging fires, I rise.
Shall I deny my clear identity,
In all my individuality
To say that I am not the god I am?
The God of War will rise because he must.

I have been censured, criticized, but why?
It was not I who manufactured war.
Before my birth, the armaments were used
To conquer, dominate, and overthrow
The ancient authors of the universe.

What does it take to make a warrior?
It's not the gaudy tailored uniform
Or gifted with a handsome salary,
Not promises of glory or of fame,
Adventure in exotic foreign sites.

Artistic posters lure those ignorant
Of what may lurk behind the secret door,
While the authorities release their threats
To jail the boys who will not join the crowd,
Those skeptical of posters' promises.

It takes a willingness to turn a man
Or woman who may volunteer to serve
From common ordinary citizen
To savvy understanding warrior
With all the skills to fight the gallant fight.

Bemedaed they may be when war is done
And giving honor to the warriors
Who gave their lives in noble cause,
But do not ask them to recount the tales
Of what they saw and heard—and what they did.

Do not mistake me for a common cur,
I am a kind of knight; I have my code.
I will not do as Edward First had done
To William of the Scottish Wallace Clan. 1305
My sharpened sword and axe will speak for me.

My code is clear, though some may disagree.
Ferocity in battle is no vice,
But when the battle's done, I need no more.
It is enough to win the dreadful war
Without a boastful champion's parade.

What point is there in celebrating war?
Just be content the battle's done—for now.
I've had my fill and so should all of you.
Collect your dead and bind the wounds of those
Who managed to outlive it all somehow.

You're happy that your sons are home again,
But they are not the same as when they left.
“Post-trauma” is the state that they are in,
With memories they never shall forget:
“Where are they?” is the question they all ask.

From what I say—and how—you might conclude
That I do not respect the feminine,
The woman warrior who's by my side,
Or strengthening my dreaded enemy,
As brave as any man I've ever known.

I fought beside the Amazons in Troy
And watched with pain as many gave their lives
Defending Hecuba, Andromache,
Cassandra, and the elder men, as well,
Unflinching in fearless bravery.

I've seen it happen from the early times.
In Troy, Achilles found Briseis there
And fell into a rage when she was seized
In recompense when Agamemnon lost
The virgin daughter of Apollo's priest.

To England and to Scotland and to Wales,
To Northern Ireland, as well, they came:
"Overpaid and oversexed and they are
Over here!" the British men complained,
But British women welcomed GI Joe. 1942

The GI Bride sailed to America
And had a better life after the war.
Not all the matches ended quite so well,
As when the Germans left *Le Paris gay*, 1944
Collaborators paid an awful price.

Some nations rise, some nations fall in time,
For reasons we can only start to know,
From inattentiveness or from neglect
Of matters worthy of significance
Appearing minor to the untrained eye.

Atlantis, once a military force
Unequaled in the ancient art of war,
Allowed the prowess of its warriors
To cloud its vision of the perfect state,
Then disappeared beneath the rolling sea.

Aeneas, Aphrodites' valiant son,
Escaped the reign of terror that was Troy
To found the Roman state, and Romulus
Began a line of kings till Tarquin fell
And the Republic reigned five hundred years.

Once mighty Rome began ambitiously,
Its legions conquered nearly all the world,
But much too thinly spread it would fall prey
To Huns and Vandals and to Visigoths,
Collapsing into fading memory.

To be continued in the next issue.