

Joost van den Vondel

‘De getemde Mars’

*Mars tamed*

1647

English translation by Frans-Willem Korsten

To our fathers of peace,  
fathers of the fatherland,  
the lords burgomasters of Amsterdam

Now a source of happiness bursts from our veins  
By the sound of the silver peace trumpet  
On which you tune the world’s peace  
Oh, true fathers of the peace of Amsterdam.  
Your wisdom helped braid the orange ribbons  
And cords, that now have tamed the violence,  
The bitter war, for so long lacking in rest,  
On whose heart no wish of peace could be attached.  
Europe, yes the entire globe, the four parts  
Of the earth’s ball, come rolling towards you, rejoicing,  
Because you have stopped the well of civil blood  
As you were the first to smother this Hydra of conflict.  
Now the citizens in your borough crown you,  
Because you willingly forfeit your own interests  
And spend your care, your labor and your sweat  
To the fatherland and the common wealth.  
Ay, stick to the aim of wars  
Which is FREEDOM, your heritage gained by fights,  
So that all can take shelter under this custody.  
Thus, your city will prosper in harmony and potency.

The world drunk with luxury and abundance  
Had tempted Jupiter, as his majesty  
Had been denied its rule and justice for years.  
That is why in the end his wrath was sparkled.  
‘Time,’ he said, in the meeting of the Gods,  
‘That Mars safeguards our law with his sword.  
Humans have gone astray too much from virtue  
And follow neither rules nor commands.’  
By his father’s order, Mars climbed in his wagon

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Pulled by two wolves, with cruel muzzles.  
The earth took fright, it knew them by their howls  
As a prediction of atrocious plagues.  
Analogously, the sailor hears the thunderstorm at sea,  
Which approaches and threatens him with his life,  
And he'd better be prepared and see it in advance,  
Before the waters seethe and loudly start to swirl.  
In this attack, this storm, from Mars's place  
And on the rolling and tumbling of its axle  
Everything that exists came to boom:  
The Scheldt, the Rhine, the Danube and their borders.  
All the vermin of people, hidden deep  
In mountains and woods, forests and wilderness  
Everything disnatured, distorted, and haggard  
Upon this smell comes storming from its caves  
All the rabble marched together in armies  
All the Plunder, Murder, Curse, Fomenter,  
The violence, Treachery, and Megara covered the lands  
With a flood of heinous misfortunes.  
The dust began to rise up in the air  
Like a sea of sand and smoke and fume.  
The sun, appearing from the east, took cover  
For the lightning of guns and armory.  
Then the night fell of disasters, for so many years,  
Upon the people's heart, that not a day since then,  
witnessed the dawn of joy or prosperity,  
But, depressed, began to roam in darknesses.  
One could see, alas, no longer by the stars  
Or sun or moon but by the lights of fires,  
From town to town, of lands overtaken,  
And states, in their stupefaction and confusion.  
The peckish fire grabbed the corners of Spain,  
From both sides, the revolting Lisbon,  
And Catalunya, and the raving Roussillon.  
The flames struck on in Ireland and Britany.  
Italy, also burning in the while,  
Came with water, as protection against the fire  
That from the mountains of the Adriatic shore  
Overtook her and was hard to quench.  
Yes the flames of fire jumped over to the rooftops  
Of Crete, where from the bare seas  
It raises its crown. This pained Europe.  
'Ouch, it is high time, high time, to wake up,'  
She claimed, when she saw, her back turned towards Sicily

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The island in a glow of uproar,  
Saw the flame, from there, jump to the court of Naples,  
To the utter fright of the empire of Castiglia.  
She went to complain her distress and sorrow with Jupiter.  
‘Oh father, oh, what good now brings my fame,  
That a part of the world would carry my name,  
So dearly bought, and for eternity?  
Was I the servant of your love to end up here?  
Did I offer you the blossom of my age,  
To witness now how Mars rips apart my dowry,  
Rupturing, raping, and plunging me in misery.  
Do you neglect the country of your birth,  
Your nurturing place, that gave you life?  
Do you forget your crib and worshipped grave?  
Is Mars now receiving my enemies at that gate  
The eternal enemies that looked at my luck with spite.  
The whole of Asia wants to board me with force,  
The Libians send forth their monsters.  
How can Europe escape this, or wriggle its way out?’  
The messenger of gods descends on these complaints  
In order to call back Mars from the field,  
Where he stands in glory, in the midst of his troops,  
Lusting for blood, murder, and the slaughter of humans.  
Mars though, alas, instead of calming down,  
Gets angry with supreme Jupiter  
And leaves the earth to now become king of all,  
And gathers all the forces of his war machines.  
He shouts: ‘Now stop this brutal fight, ye Giants,  
Make mountains of wall mortar, create from debris  
Of furious cities a storm sconce, steep and oblique,  
To shatter Jupiter’s cranium,  
Who for long has had his share of blood and tears  
And the flesh of human beings; we have to reach higher:  
We have to vie for the highest scepter  
And force our way to eternal honor.  
He has fought himself free from Giants once,  
And covered them with the weight of rocks.  
Now it is time he finally succumbs to the force  
Of heroes brought forward by the earth.’  
This was his speech, and all the debris rose up by heaps  
Up until the sky. There saw the Majesty  
Of Gods, Mars prepared with all his armies,  
Ready and hot to storm forward at once.  
A storm raged, from below and from above.

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The heavens were nothing but glows and fires.  
Gunpowder did not give in a bit to lightning.  
The mountain kartaw wasn't stunned by thunder.  
The heaven cracked and all the stars were shaking  
    Like the leaves in showers on a tree.  
The heaven was a wagon without reins;  
All the heavenly armies a flock without shepherd.  
    Neptune lost the trident, which shakes the beaches  
And the rocks. The god of war wrenched Vulcan's  
    Hammer, while beating, from his wrists,  
    And clang the staff of steel from Pluto's hand.  
He broke the spear of Pallas, ripped the weapon,  
    Medusa's head, from her left arm  
    And was afraid of no snakes, which still warm  
And moist with poison, gaped for blood and veins.  
    Alcides had to lay down his hand bludgeon.  
    The wine god was looking for his panthers:  
And Triton's shell, up against trumpet and drum, was  
    Too hoarse and raucous to act against the enemy.  
    The entire fortress of heaven was stunned.  
    Saturn mowed down all that came upward,  
    Up until Mars took the bowed scythe  
    And came to use it instead of his sword.  
    Then Jupiter saw his rule in the balance  
And the chances of heaven turn, blow after blow.  
    His enemy would not listen to treaty,  
    Nor would he accept laws from the authority.  
What consult, Jupiter? Your court starts to burn.  
    Your lightning used to strike Phaeton  
    That bold son and chariot driver of the sun  
Who burned everything and scorched your highest roofs.  
    The father saw for the sake of comfort in all directions  
    And from the skies of the Netherlands a goddess  
    Appear in a cloud, more or less  
    As Venus comes to rise in her wagon:  
    Like Pallas comes flying through the skies.  
It had to be Pallas, or Venus herself, or none  
    Of both, or sculpted from their faces  
    As if to appear out of two mixed into one.  
    Confidence shines forward from her face  
The wreath of olives, freshly wrought, covers the head  
    Her countenance promises everyone a happy day  
And comforts all those who cannot catch their breath.  
    The white garment littered with green olives

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She enriches with a glower of majesty  
That reaches higher than human mortality  
Could achieve. Thus she comes floating closer,  
The wagon is pulled by Dutch lions,  
Ever so fluty, forward through the sky.  
They listen meekly to her rod and discipline  
And know of neither roaring or yelling.  
One wonders whether this could be Cibele,  
Yet she is young and not wearing a tower crown.  
Neither is she Juno, on her lion's throne,  
Nor Ceres, for whose scythe snakes tremble in fear.  
Unobtrusiveness and Love are spinning in front  
Breathing the fresh smell of dew.  
The air is softened, and gets a happier color;  
All around one hears birds warble.  
Like this, in May, the morning star does climb  
Before the trail of roses of the whitening dawn,  
And draws the attention of everyone's eyes  
Before the sun raises its hairs above the horizon.  
Then Jupiter called: 'Move on, move, you beauty  
Now tame with an ogle of your face  
This brutal God, who doesn't budge for lightnings:  
No pearl more beautiful in the foliage of your wreath.'

So, she approaches the god of wars  
Who stops his storm, as soon as he sees her face.  
He is struck blind, he doesn't know this divinity  
And sucks, meanwhile, the sparkles from her eyes.  
A little breeze plays, and blows the golden locks  
Around throat and neck. The loveable mouth,  
The red rose, on the snow of cheeks, wounds  
The god's heart, now disgusted by his grudges.  
The weapon falls from his rough hands,  
She rises up and down and quickly ties  
And binds both his arms on his back,  
Not with metal but with soft, orange cords.  
Thus, she drives Mars before her wheels  
And leads him in triumph through the Netherlands.  
She is followed in this glorious path  
By a thick mass and cloud of grateful souls  
That sing: 'May the goddess of peace rule for long,  
We longed for her so long: she made Mars meek  
And placed his sword, that bloody sword, back in its sheath.  
May neither jealousy or time overtake her scepter.'