

L7 Arme, arme, in heaven there is a faction

Notes. This poem depicts the moral and political disorder that plagues the court of Jove, king of the gods, as a result of the King's sexual infatuation with the Trojan boy Ganymede. According to the Greco-Roman myth, Jove, obsessed with the boy's beauty, had assumed the form of an eagle and stolen Ganymede up to Olympus where he made the boy his cupbearer. The poem's reimagining of the myth is in fact a coded depiction of the consequences of James I's rumoured homosexual relationship with his youthful favourite Buckingham, who had held his first court office as royal cupbearer. Neither internal evidence nor copyists' annotations allow us to date the poem with absolute precision, but c.1619-1622 is probably about right. The sexual and court politics of the poem have been discussed by a number of critics and historians: B. Smith (202-03), Perry (1075-77), Knowles ("To 'scourge the arse'" 85-86), P. Hammond (143-46), and Bellany (Politics 255-57). One copy of the poem (Rosenbach MS 239/27) describes it as a "song", but there is no evidence either of an assigned tune or of actual musical performance.

"The Warres of the Gods"

Arme, arme, in heaven there is a faction

And the Demy-Gods

Now are bent for Action;

They are at Odds

With him that rules the Thunder¹

And will destroy

His white fac't Boy²

Or rend the heavens asunder.

Great Jove that swaies the emperiall Scepter

With's upstart³ Love

That makes him drunke with Nectar⁴

They will remove;

Harke how the Cyclops⁵ labour,

See Vulcan⁶ sweates

That gives the heates

5

10

15

And forges Mars⁷ his Armour.

Marke how the glorious starry Border

That the heavens hath worne,

Till of late in Order

See how they turne

20

Each Planets course doth alter,

The sun and moone

Are out of Tune

The spheares begin to faulter.

See how each petty starre stands gazinge

25

And would fayne provoke

By theyr often blazinge

Flame to this smoke:

The dogge starre burnes with ire,

And Charles his Wayne⁸

30

Would wondrous fayne

Bringe fuell to this fire.

Loves Queene⁹ stood disaffected

To what shee had seene

Or to what suspected

35

As shee in spleene¹⁰

To Juno¹¹ hath protested

Her servant Mars

Should scourge the Arse,¹²

Jove's marrow¹³ so had wasted.

40

The chast Diana¹⁴ by her Quiver

And ten thousand maydes

Have sworne, that they will never

Sporte in the shades,
Untill the heavens Creator 45
Be quite displac't
Or else disgrac't
For lovinge so 'gainst nature.

The fayre Proserpine¹⁵ next whurries
In fiery Coach 50
Drawne by twelve blacke furies;
As they approach
They threaten without mercy
To have him burn'd
That thus hath turn'd 55
Love's pleasures Arse Verse.¹⁶

Slow pac'd Diana¹⁷ he doth follow
Hermes¹⁸ will make one
So will bright Apollo,¹⁹
Thetis²⁰ hath wonne 60
Rough Neptune²¹ to this action
Æolus²² huffes,
And Boreas²³ puffes
To see the Fates²⁴ protraction.

Still Jove with Ganymed lyes playinge, 65
Here's no Tritans²⁵ sound
Nor yet horses neighinge
His Eares are bound,
The fidlinge God²⁶ doth lull him
Bacchus²⁷ quaffes 70
And Momus²⁸ laughs
To see how they can gull him

Source. BL Add. MS 22603, fols. 33r-34r

Other known sources. “Poems from a Seventeenth-Century Manuscript” 128; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. c.50, fol. 41v; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 160, fol. 174r; Bodleian MS Tanner 306, fol. 261r; Brotherton MS Lt. q.44, fol. 43v; Beinecke MS Osborn b.197, p. 111; Rosenbach MS 239/27, p. 82

L7

- ¹ *him that rules the Thunder*: i.e. Jove, king of the gods; and, by implication, James I.
- ² *white fac't Boy*: Ganymede; and, by implication, Buckingham. The adjective “white-fac't” may imply the use of cosmetics.
- ³ *upstart*: alluding to Buckingham's relatively low social status.
- ⁴ *Nectar*: P. Hammond (144) glosses nectar as semen.
- ⁵ *Cyclops*: assistants in Vulcan's workshop.
- ⁶ *Vulcan*: god of fire whose workshop forges metal.
- ⁷ *Mars*: god of war.
- ⁸ *Charles his Wayne*: a cart-shaped group of seven stars in the Great Bear constellation. “Charles”, the name of James I's son, might have provoked certain political readings for contemporaries.
- ⁹ *Loves Queene*: Venus, goddess of love.
- ¹⁰ *in spleene*: in anger.
- ¹¹ *Juno*: queen of the gods.
- ¹² *scourge the Arse*: the poem here makes explicit its allegation of sodomy between King and favourite.
- ¹³ *marrow*: P. Hammond (145) glosses “marrow” as either semen or general sexual capacity. Marrow can also have the sense of vitality and bodily strength.
- ¹⁴ *Diana*: chaste goddess of the hunt, armed with bow and arrows.
- ¹⁵ *Proserpine*: Proserpina, queen of Hades.

- 16 *Arse Verse*: upside down.
- 17 *Diana*: a variant, “Saturne”, is perhaps a better reading (“Poems from a Seventeenth-Century Manuscript”).
- 18 *Hermes*: Roman Mercury, messenger of the gods.
- 19 *Apollo*: god of the sun.
- 20 *Thetis*: a sea goddess.
- 21 *Neptune*: god of the sea.
- 22 *Aeolus*: ruler of the winds.
- 23 *Boreas*: the North Wind.
- 24 *Fates*: the three Fates, who were believed to enforce the fate of both men and gods.
- 25 *Tritans*: mythic sea creatures whose trumpets calmed the waves. It might be possible to read this and the following line in the context of early 1620s’ anxieties that James I was neglecting naval and military readiness.
- 26 *The fiddling God*: unclear; both Hermes and Apollo were associated with the lyre, but seem unlikely candidates given their roles earlier in the poem.
- 27 *Bacchus*: god of wine.
- 28 *Momus*: god of mockery.
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