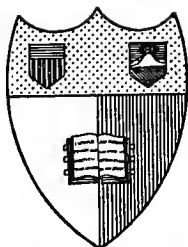


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**Pawns: three poetic plays.**



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# Pawns



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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*POETRY—*

- COPHETUA. A PLAY. 1911  
REBELLION. A PLAY. 1914  
POEMS. 1908-1914  
SWORDS AND PLOUGHSHARES. 1915  
OLTON POOLS. 1916  
TIDES. 1917  
LOYALTIES. 1919

*PROSE—*

- WILLIAM MORRIS. 1912  
SWINBURNE. 1913  
THE LYRIC. 1915  
PROSE PAPERS. 1917  
ABRAHAM LINCOLN. A PLAY. 1918.

**P**A W N S : Three  
Poetic Plays by  
John Drinkwater

London : Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd.  
3 Adam Street, Adelphi. MCMXX

THE STORM . . . . First published 1915  
THE GOD OF QUIET . . . . " " 1916  
X = O . . . . " " 1917  
The three Plays in one volume first published  
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## NOTE

THESE plays were not only intended for the stage, they were written under the actual discipline of stage production, and their craftsmanship was learnt in a theatre. That poetic drama has fallen into neglect in a country which, having produced several of the world's greatest dramatic poets, never 'plays any but the first of them in its theatres, and hardly ever plays him without the most shameless and foolish distortion of his work, is the fault not of poetry but of the theatre. For nearly two hundred years in England the poets very rightly have refused to work for a theatre that has sacrificed the drama to the actor, instead of so training its actors that they could honourably give the poet the supreme joy of seeing his work nobly and tenderly interpreted. The poets, in their chosen exile, have suffered; for dramatic imagination, deprived of its gathering to the theatre, cannot, even with a *Cenci* or an *Atalanta* for harvest, be wholly prosperous. But the loss to the theatre has been immeasurably greater; since the breach, English poetry has lost no splendour, but, with the exception of half a dozen plays at most, the drama of the theatre, until the last few years, has kept none. A theatre audience can be the most exhilarating crowd-intelligence in the world, once it has been given the chance of caring for good drama on the stage, but the appetite of a theatre audience will inevitably grow to what it is given. And only in a theatre where the audience has been nourished upon fine fare can poetry live, or the poet decently exercise his dramatic instinct. The rarity of such theatres is the measure of the rarity of poetic drama.

These plays had the great good fortune of being shaped in a theatre in which, of a hundred plays produced in four years, not five would fail to satisfy a jury composed, let us say, of Shakespeare and Congreve and Synge, not, of course, as to their greatness, but at least as to their artistic integrity. Barry Jackson's Repertory Theatre has created an audience in Birmingham which in the decision as to the worth of a play has not, I believe, its peer in England. To be associated with such a theatre is in itself a delight; to have helped to bring poetry to its stage is a privilege which I cannot measure.

I should like to say a word of the performances. The part of Alice in *The Storm* makes heavy demands upon the staying power of the actress. While Mona Limerick's great emotional grip, perhaps, most finely caught my imaginative intention, Cecily Byrne has always seemed to me to find a rare spring of nervous energy in playing the part. Mary Merrall I saw in rehearsal but not afterwards. Her technical clarity must have had its decided value. The play has always been lucky in performance, and I have not known it to fail in its impression, even before strange audiences. *The God of Quiet*, with its rather experimental idiom of construction, gave, apparently, both pleasure and puzzlement. It was beautifully and most devotedly acted, and Arthur Gaskin's exquisitely personal design for the stage was worthy of a theatre where Barry Jackson, in quality and measure of actual work achieved, has quietly proved himself the first stage designer in England to-day.\* That

\* This is to speak with nothing but grateful admiration for such genius in stage design as that, say, of Mr. Charles Ricketts. But Mr. Jackson can point to perhaps thirty productions, his designs for which, carried out in the ordinary routine of repertory work and quick from his daily contact with his materials, combine a fine gift with unique opportunity, and make a body of achievement that is by itself in the English theatre to-day.

the play held an audience there was never any doubt, nor, I am glad to think, that its lyric plan gave many people deep pleasure. But the ending seemed to some quite friendly critics to be elusive in its significance. This, I think, was because irony is the most difficult of all things on the stage. *X = 0* has, I hope, profited in directness by experience learnt from the earlier plays. It had very impressive settings devised by Frank Clewlow, which enabled the play to move with intervals of but half a minute each, and of the players I cannot speak with enough gratitude. I could have asked for no finer performance.

It is but as a simple earnest of my feeling that I record in an appendix the names of the actors with whose help these plays first found their truest life.

JOHN DRINKWATER.

BIRMINGHAM,  
*May, 1917.*

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## THE STORM



To  
BARRY V. JACKSON

The characters are—

*ALICE*

*JOAN, her young Sister*

*SARAH*

*AN OLD MAN*

*A YOUNG STRANGER*

## THE STORM

*A mountain cottage. It is a midwinter night. Outside a snowstorm rages.*

*ALICE is looking out through the window. JOAN, her young sister, and SARAH, an old neighbour woman, are sitting over the fire.*

*Alice :* It isn't fair of God. Eyes are no good,  
Nor lanterns, in a blackness like to that.

How can they find him out? It isn't fair.

*Sarah :* God is for prayers. You'll anger Him speaking  
so.

*Alice :* I have prayed these hours, and now I'm tired  
of it.

He is caught in some grip of the rocks, and crying out,  
And crying and crying, and none can hear him cry,  
Because of this great beastliness of noise.

*Sarah :* Past crying now, I think.

*Joan :* There, take no heed  
Of what she says—it's a rusty mind she has,  
Being old, and wizened with bad luck on the hills.

*Sarah :* Rusty or no, I've a thought the man is dead.  
No news has been growing apace from nightfall on  
Into bad news, and now it's as though one stood  
At the door and said—we found him lying cold.

*Alice* : Whist ! you old bitter woman. Will it never  
stay

In its wicked fury? . . . and the snow's like a  
black rain

Whipping the crying wind. If it would rest awhile

I could think and mind me what were best to do

To help my man. But a savagery like this

Beats at the wits till they have no tidiness.

*Sarah* : We'll sit and wait till they come.

*Alice* : And I a woman

Would never let him ask for anything,

Because of the daily thought I took for him,—

And against this spite now I've no strength at all.

*Sarah* : For all you would bake his bread to a proper  
turn

And remember always the day for his clean shift,

There was many a scolding word for him to bear.

*Joan* : Hush—

*Alice* : Let her talk. What does she know at all,—

Thinking crossed words between a man and a woman

Have anything to do with the heart? We have,

My man and I, more than a fretful mood

Can thieve or touch. My man—I must go myself.

*Joan* : There is nothing you could do.

*Sarah* : 'Tis men

Should carry the dead man in.

*Alice* : My man

Is alive, I say—surely my man's not dead—

Surely, I say—old woman, your croaking talk

Teases my brain like the pestilence out there

Till I doubt the thing I know. There's not a crag

Or cleft in the hills but is natural to him

As the stairs beyond the door there—surely, surely—  
Yet nothing is sure.

*Sarah :*                   Death has a way with him,  
A confident way.

*Alice :*                   You know that he's not dead—  
I know that too—if only that dark rage  
Howling out there would leave tormenting me,  
And let me reason it out in peace a little,  
I could be quite, quite sure that he's not dead.

*Sarah :* Age is a quiet place where you can watch  
The world bent with its pain and still be patient,  
And warm your hands by the fire because you know  
That the newest sorrow and the oldest sorrow are one.  
They will bring and put him down upon the floor :  
Be ready for that, girl. There are times when hope is  
cruel

As a fancy-man that goes without good-bye.

*Alice :* I have a brain that is known in three shire-towns  
For a level bargain. It is strange that I should be  
Listening now to a cracked old woman's clatter  
When my own thoughts for him should be so clear  
That I shouldn't heed the words of another body.  
I want no hope—only an easy space  
To remember the skill of my man among the hills  
And how he would surely match their cunning with  
his,

Or else to count the hours that he's been gone  
And see that his chance is whittled quite away.  
To have a living thought against this fear  
I all I want—but those screaming devils there  
Beat in my mind like the drums in Carnarvon streets  
That they use when they want to cheat folk into thinking



*Joan* : That an hour would bring him back, and  
hungry too.

*Alice* : An hour would bring him back—but that is  
nothing.

I know it now : he went to the broken wire  
And mended it—three-quarters of an hour—  
And then he would think that after all the slates  
Were best bespoken now—six miles to go ;  
He would be about a mile when this began—  
This wrath that will surely last till the Judgment Day—  
And that would make two hours till he reached the  
quarry—

But he went on, and the neighbours up and down  
Were scared and went out searching with their  
lanterns,

Like lighted gnats searching the mines of hell.  
Isn't it queer to see them out there dancing  
When all the time he has gone a twelve-mile journey—  
And then this old woman came with her neighbour duty—  
It's odd folk are,—

*Sarah* :                   It's a poor thing, spinning tales  
When there's no faith in them.

*Alice* :                   Hush, I have it all  
Quite clearly now, in spite of that monster baying,—  
Two hours to the quarry, hindered by the night,  
Then half an hour to bargain, then two hours  
For beating back, his boots heavy with snow,  
Or a little longer—five hours and more all told—  
It is nine o'clock—he went five hours ago,  
Or a little more, so that's just how it works—  
He should be coming now along the road,  
Tired—we must warm the cakes again.

*Sarah :* Ay, warm them,  
A dead man's heavy bearing.

*The clock strikes nine.*

*Alice :* That's the time  
To bring him back, and we'll call the lanterns in—  
He must be near by now—

*A man is heard outside, kicking the snow off his boots. ALICE opens the door, and AN OLD MAN comes in, carrying an unlit lantern.*

*The Old Man :* My candle is spent.

*JOAN takes the lantern and fits a new candle while they speak.*

*Alice :* And you are going out again ?  
They have not found him ?

*The Old Man :* No. It's not easy there.

*Alice :* Then he didn't go to the quarry after all.

*Joan :* Because they hav'n't found him ? That's no sign.

They couldn't if he went.

*Alice :* Ah yes—how is it ?—  
He went, and they've been looking on the hills—  
But have not found him. Yes—he must have gone.  
He should be back. You should have found him for me.

*Sarah :* She is strange because of the trouble in the house.

I am old, and that is something.

*Alice :* It is not that—  
I am caught away from myself by the screaming thing  
That scourges the hills. And yet in spite of that  
I had reckoned all his doings since he went

Until his time for coming—but you came—  
You came instead. That is not right.

*The Old Man (taking the lantern and lighting it):*  
We'll send

Across to the quarry now—

*Alice:* It is no use—

He'll not have gone.

*The Old Man:* The night is full of tricks,  
But another hour will have ferreted all the hill.

*He goes out.*

*Sarah:* Simon who took his money down to market,  
And wouldn't change for a good sound fact of cattle,  
Fingered his earnings till a hole was worn  
And came to the house again with an empty bag.  
Leave making tales, my girl, poor tales—they bring no  
profit,

Keeping the truth outside, and breaking away  
To a thimbleful of ash themselves. He is dead.  
Think hard on that. When the old king of the world  
With the scourge and flail turns his strokes from the  
wheat

On the goodman's floor and scars the goodman's back,  
It is no time to wince. Your man is dead.  
And a day and a day make Adam's fall a story.

*Alice:* Not down to the quarry—then—my little  
Joan,

Do you know at all what a man becomes to a woman?  
How should you though? If a man should take  
A patch of the barren hill and dig with his hands  
And down and down till he came to marble and gold,  
And labouring then for a dozen years or twenty  
Should build a place finer than Solomon's hall



*Alice* : There is treachery against us—my man—  
my dear—

My brave love—they are trying to part us now !

But we must be too strong when . . . . when he is  
dead . . . .

*There is a knock at the door. She makes  
a half movement towards it.*

He would not knock. See who it is.

*JOAN opens the door and a YOUNG  
TRAVELLER, buffeted and breathless, comes  
in.*

*The Stranger* :

By Thor !

There's beauty trampling men like crumpled leaves.

May I come in till it's gone ?

*Joan* :

Surely.

*The Stranger* :

I set

Every sinew taut against this power,

This supple torrent of might that suddenly rose

Out of the fallen dusk and sang and leapt

Like an athlete of the gods frenzied with wine.

It seemed to rear challenging against me,

As though the master from Valhalla's tables,

Grown heady in his revels, had cried out—

Behold me now crashing across the earth

To shake the colonies of antic men

Into a fear shall be a jest, my fellows !

And I measured myself against this bragging pride,

Climbing step by step through the blinding riot

Of frozen flakes swung on the cataract wind,

My veins praising the tyranny that was matched

Against this poor ambitious body of mine.

*Alice* : The storm is drenched with treachery and  
sin—

It is not good to praise it.

*The Stranger* :                    You on the hills  
Grow dulled, maybe, to the royalty that finds  
In your crooked world a thousand splendid hours,  
And a storm to you is but a hindered task  
Or a wall for mending or a gap in the flock.  
But I was strange among this gaiety  
Plying black looms in a black firmament,  
This joy that was split out of the iron heavens  
Where pity is not bidden to the hearts  
Of the immaculate gods. I was a dream,  
A cold monotony suddenly thrust  
Into a waking world of lusty change,  
A wizened death elected from the waste  
To strive and mate with eager lords of tumult.  
Beauty was winged about me, darkling speed  
Took pressure of earth and smote against my face ;  
I rode upon the front of heroic hours,  
And once was on the crest of the world's tide,  
Unseared as the elements.—But he mastered me,  
That god striking a star for holiday,  
And filled himself with great barbaric laughter  
To see me slink away.

*Alice* :                                It is no god,  
But a brainless anger, a gaunt and evil thing  
That blame can't reach.

*The Stranger* :                    Not all have eyes to see.—  
I'm harsh with my words, but I come from a harsh  
quarrel  
With larger thews than man's.

*Alice :* Stranger, I'd give  
Comely words to any who knocks at the door.  
You are welcome—but leave your praising of this blight.  
You safely gabbing of sly and cruel furies,  
Like a child laughing before a cage of tigers.  
You with your fancy talk of lords and gods  
And your hero-veins—young man, do you know this  
night

Is eating through my bones into the marrow,  
And creeping round my brain till thought is dead,  
And making my heart the oldest thing of any ?  
Do you see those lights ?

*The Stranger :* They seemed odd moving there,  
In a storm like this.

*Alice :* A man is lost on the hills.

*The Stranger :* That's bad. But who ?

*Alice :* My man is lost on the hills.

*Sarah :* She has it now ; her man is dead on the hills.

*The Stranger :* I talked amiss, not knowing of trouble  
here.

But why should he be dead ?

*Alice :* The woman is worn,  
Her mind is worn, and she lives out of the world.  
You ask at once as any wise man would.  
I have told her and told and told that he's not dead,  
And my young sister, too, though but a girl,  
Says it, and she has a head beyond her years.  
He is lost for an hour, or maybe for a night,  
But never dead. That is the way you think ?  
It is waiting that steals your proper sense away ;  
And then, although you know, you let in fear  
Blaspheming the thing you know—it is waiting to-night



*Alice* : It is spent at last. He will come from his shelter now.

My dear—come soon. Set the kettle again.

*JOAN does so. There is another pause.*

I have my thought again. It is an end.

I am broken. There is no pity anywhere.

*The Stranger* : The lights are coming.

*Sarah* :

The anger never bates,

But scourges us till time betrays the limbs,

And strikes the tongue, and puts pence on the eyes,

And leaves the latch for stranger hands to lift.

*The blackness beyond the window has given place to clear starlight on the hills.*

*A NUMBER OF MEN with lanterns pass by. There is a knock : ALICE opens the door, and THE OLD MAN stands there with his lighted lantern. She looks at him, and neither speaks. She turns away to the table.*

*Alice* : Why have we waited . . . all this time  
 . . . to know . . .

*Her sorrow breaks over her.*



THE GOD OF QUIET



To  
MY FATHER

The characters are—

*A YOUNG BEGGAR*

*AN OLD BEGGAR*

*A CITIZEN*

*A SOLDIER*

*FIRST KING*

*A HERALD*

*SECOND KING*

*THE GOD*

## THE GOD OF QUIET

*A road at the summit of a hill outside a beleaguered city. It is the evening of a hot summer day.*

*On the far side of the road is a bank, from the top of which the city could be seen. On a great stone cube, halfway up the bank, is the life-sized figure of a god. Not unlike the Buddha in presence, it is the GOD OF QUIET.*

*TWO BEGGARS, a young man and an old, come in, moving towards the city. They stop.*

*Young Beggar* : Nor coin nor crust,  
Three leagues of dust  
We've trodden. Blast  
Them—let them fast  
And try the flavour—

*Old Beggar* : Hold, man, hold—  
'Twas like enough that our tale were told  
For ever before the sun went down,  
With the devils of war let loose to frown  
On a poor man's cry for alms. We live,  
And that is something—

*Young Beggar* : The lord forgive  
Your weakling heart—

*Old Beggar* : Nay, ask him, you,  
To pardon the stubborn thing you do  
In cursing when—

*Young Beggar :* Stop your babbling tongue,  
Your belly's old but mine is young—

*Old Beggar :* Nay, nay, my son ; not angry now—  
Not angry—there. I've seen the plough  
Break stouter stones—the times will mend.

*Young Beggar :* Old man, I spoke in haste—

*Old Beggar :* Come, lend  
Your arm—there—so ; now, let us sit  
And rest us here.

THE OLD MAN *sits down on the  
bank ;* THE YOUNG MAN *goes to the  
top and looks out. While he speaks  
THE OLD MAN watches the god.*

*Young Beggar ;* The slings have hit  
That city hard. Well, let them fight  
And finish. Broken walls are gates  
Not warded well, and men in flight  
Pay toll to beggars.

*Old Beggar :* God creates  
Good holy times of peace for us—

*Young Beggar ;* Peace—holy times—old chatter-pie—

*Old Beggar :* Rich seasons after ruinous—

*Young Beggar :* Dream-daft old man, put fancies by.  
Wits, wits, old man, are what we need.  
There's a city learning its last of good  
And the time is come to drink and feed,  
And there's pence for wits—

*Old Beggar :* One day I stood  
At dusk in the golden harvest lands,  
And watched the sickles rise and fall,  
And the following women with patient hands  
Gleaning all, gleaning all.

And the pigeons slept in the pines, and the sound  
Of leaves and waters grew strange and clear,  
And trouble had died, and I had found  
Peace, O Lord, as here.

*He has risen, bows to the god, and  
sits below the figure, untroubled.*

*Young Beggar* : It is dying, dying, that city.

*He turns to the other.*

How

Can a man keep sharp in the mind, and spring  
On chance when it comes, with a patchy cow  
For mate, a soft and humble thing?  
Nimble fingers, a hand to strike,  
Then—money, money . . . . blast you, speak,  
You, mild as a bee old butcher shriek  
Has pegged on a thorn . . . . what do you seek  
In the eyes of a copper image, made  
By some juggling fellow with fancy brains?

*He stares at the god.*

All right, old image, I'm not afraid . . . .  
I'm not for your flock . . . . the belly's pains  
Are masters may not be served by sleep . . . .  
Old drowsy god . . . . I must fight, and plan,  
And lie, and be cunning, and peer, and creep—  
For starving's a dirty death for a man.

*Old Beggar* : There's many a man with a buzzing hive  
Of thoughts in his brain that are nothing at all.

*Young Beggar* : Damn you, be still! . . . . You  
dead-alive

Old grinning god, I'm what you'd call  
A fellow with a gift of argument,  
And I tell you he should be hurrying now,

Ransacking the world, not a mere consent,  
 A space unpeopled, a rusty plough . . . .  
 Life is a matter of shouting and haste,  
 You quiet, old seducing thing . . . .  
 Why won't you shout? . . . You muddy-faced  
 Old silence . . . . silence . . . . beggar-man, king . . .  
 Victuals and void . . . sharp stones and boots . . .  
 A coat and nakedness . . . rain and sun . . .  
 A thistle that's blown and a thistle with roots . . .  
 All right, old god . . . . all's one, all's one.

*He sits beside his fellow, composed.  
 An exhausted SOLDIER, who has been  
 out from the city, reconnoitring, comes  
 in, watching the distances.*

*Soldier* : Have you seen a king in golden gear  
 And a great host moving to bring us aid?

*A pause.*

Are you drunk, or daft, or won't you hear?

*He moves up the bank, and looks  
 down to the city; then, fixedly, at the  
 god; a pause.*

Old god of quiet, you've lost your trade.

*AN OLD MAN from the city comes in  
 hurriedly. THE SOLDIER comes down.*

*Soldier* : News—what news from the city walls?

*Citizen* : An arm-thrust more and the city falls.

Is there sound or sign of the swords of the king?

*Soldier* : No sound, nor sign.

*Citizen* : That life should bring

Her comely days to so bad a close;

Have you sought them far?

*Soldier* : There are watchful foes

About us—I dare not set my feet  
Beyond this place.

*Citizen :* And life was sweet,  
A good adventure—and now an end  
Of pleasant ways between friend and friend.

*He moves up the bank.*

O city whose red roofs look to the sea,  
Never again your stones shall be  
Glad of your children who smite the waves  
With oars well swung,

*coming down*

and bonded slaves

Shall live to grudge their dead of death.

*Soldier :* I have fought, and hoped, and spoken well  
In the midst of fears, and I'll spend no breath  
Nor courage more to dispute with hell.  
We're a broken city, and ill's the day ;  
My dear was hungry, my dear is dead—  
And old god Quiet may whistle away  
Till the furies are quiet that throng my head.

*He sits below the god.*

*Citizen :* Nay, let your sword be busy down below.

*Soldier :* My limbs are all bemused. I cannot go.

*Citizen :* One sword may strike the balance in this doubt.

*Soldier :* The scales are turned ; the city's term is out.

*Citizen :* And will you choose in this extremity  
To creep aside from fate ?

*Soldier :* I only see,  
Beyond disaster that I understand  
Darkly as men the process of a hand  
Obscure in heaven and hell, a little space  
For rest, and the remembrance of a face,



But boasting in my pale infirmity  
 Of such immortal courage as shall lose  
 No virtue being secret. My blood and thews  
 I have not spared ; my mind is easy so ;  
 And, though my friend is death, I will not go  
 Courting a vain death for my renown.  
 For every hero compassing his crown,  
 Darkly in indistinguishable sleep  
 A hundred lie, and the quick world shall keep  
 No word of how their hearts were bright, how spent  
 At last. I am of these, and am content.

*Citizen* : Aye—it is just a weariness of brain.

*Soldier* : O lord of quiet, I am yours again,  
 After confusion, after vanity.

*He turns away to the god.*

*Citizen (looking down to the city)* : All now is done . . .

How long shall succour be . . .

He will come too late, this king who was our friend.

*There is a pause ; then in the distance  
 victorious cries from the besiegers :*

*Voices* : It is ours. The wall is breaking. Stricken : send  
 One thunder more. It falls . . . It falls . . . It falls !

*Citizen* : The time is come. And bloody burials  
 Shall take their lamentable toll of days,  
 And men shall know the sorrow that betrays  
 Beauty and resolution and the high  
 Conduct of heart proposing patiently  
 Desirable shapes wrought out of shapeless dust,  
 Not scattering of created things. And lust  
 Of vengeance shall make black the people's mind  
 So heavy is their trial, and so blind  
 Has queer omnipotence set us from his hand.

So death shall have his season in the land,  
 Distracted death, till life shall come again  
 As water to the maddened tongues of men  
 Burnt on the sand of sterile leagues of waste ;  
 And all the words, the tumult, and the haste  
 That prosper now to feed some curious pride  
 Shall pass. O quiet god, be satisfied :  
 The battles fail : your healing eyes endure ;  
 Kingdoms are ghosts : your kingdom is secure.

THE KING, *a great captain, moving  
 to the city's relief, enters.*

King : What on the walls ?

Citizen : An end is made.

King (*as to his lieutenants*) : Stay you.

*looking down to the city.*

Aye, twenty thousand spear,  
 Which is my measure, might be laid  
 Threefold in vain against their gear.  
 (*To his men*) Let all be still. What men are these ?

Citizen : Though strange, devout ; they worship.

King : Whom ?

Citizen : The god of quiet.

King (*he looks at the god ; a pause*) : A god who sees.  
 World-weary city at your doom,  
 Strong king in your victorious hour,  
 You have endured, and slain, and died,  
 Poor clay that would excel in power,  
 Made frantic by some silly pride.  
 Could you not learn that while we grow  
 As men, maybe from less to more  
 While æons over æons flow,  
 Yet holiest man may move before

His fellows but a single pace,  
 One flight of thought, and from his tongue  
 Hardly shall fall a word of grace  
 More than from any clod among  
 Sad naturals or runagates ?  
 No. You must still with narrow eyes  
 Consider how to top your mates  
 And write your name across the skies ;  
 Nor great for honour your desire,  
 Nor vision, nor creating song,  
 But merely for consuming fire,  
 Sorry possessions, and a strong  
 Sword that shall rule you know not how,  
 Judgment, you know not whom to bind . . . .  
 The fruit was full upon the bough,  
 O spendthrift wind, O spendthrift wind,  
 Mad hearts, mad world, mad blood of men,  
 Mad counsels and mad reckoning . . . .  
 You quiet god, I leave again  
 Their tumult, and to you I bring  
 Humility, and thought that burns  
 To shape itself and fetter none . . . .  
 We wake, a generation turns,  
 We learn to love, and we have done . . . .  
 And shall we spend these little days  
 Disputing till our veins are cold ?

*He sits before the god.*

*Citizen* : The victor comes.

*King* :

Or comes or stays

It is no matter.

*Citizen* : I am old.—

A spent arm, a mere messenger

Whose errands now are done. At last  
I too may rest.

*He sits by the others.*

*King :* I wasted where  
Shrill madness was ; those moods are cast.

*A moment's pause.*

*Old Beggar :* It is the quiet mind that keeps  
The tumults of the world in poise.

*Soldier :* It is the angry soul that sleeps  
Where the world's folly is and noise ;

*King :* For anger blunts us and destroys.

*Citizen :* We are little men to be so proud.

*Young Beggar :* We are fools : what was so long to  
build  
We break.

*King :* Our praise is for the loud  
Tongue and the glib.

*Old Beggar :* The gentle-willed  
We starve, and the prophet's lips are stilled.

*King :* It is the quiet mind that wakes.

*Citizen :* The angry soul ever is blind.

*Young Beggar :* Love is the bowl that folly breaks.

*Soldier :* Who rules the world the world shall find.

*Old Beggar :* All wisdom is the quiet mind.

*A pause again. A HERALD comes in.*

*Herald :* Are you the king who with his arms was sworn  
In succour to this city now forlorn ?

*King :* I am that king.

*Herald :* And will you yet oppose  
My lord of so sure aim ?

*King :* Which of us knows  
What is our aim, much less if it be true ?



One strong to bear the intolerable sight  
 Of all my spears a moment ere he fell,  
 And should no other story be to tell  
 Save that he too was broken at my heel.  
 Now, though you slink aside, you yet shall feel  
 My majesty, the anger of my name . . . .  
 Captive and stripped, you shall be a jest, a shame,  
 A laughter to my kingdoms and your own,  
 You faint and thin deserter of a throne,  
 You spiritless who feared the naked blades . . . .  
 Why did you fear, and cheat me ?

*First King :* Falsehood fades,  
 And consciousness is full and the world swings  
 true,

And happy vision rides unclouded through  
 The ordered ranks of circumstance alone  
 When man of man is patient, and the sown  
 Harvests of one are gathered to his gate  
 Uncoveted of any. And the hate  
 Of blood for blood and bone for bone can find  
 No habitation in the quiet mind . . . .  
 Why should the lust of man be ever set  
 To bring his neighbours to the cunning net,  
 Or drive him headlong howling through his days,  
 Mad with much labour in disastrous ways,  
 Till kind oblivion folds him, and he can  
 Never again be folly's mark ?

*Second King :* Not man,  
 But life it is that frets us till we die,  
 Great life that urges, bidding us defy  
 All who would stand against us, and to spare  
 Nothing of pain and sacrifice, but dare



*First King :*                    Your word brings back to me  
Swords, and blood . . . . and forgotten things,  
As sometimes, out of a scent maybe  
Of moss on a wall in April, springs  
To a moment of life, that is born and sped  
In a curious flavour of the mind,  
Some buried hour from the years long dead—  
So much is your word, but this.

*Second King :*                    They find  
Who speak me so that they speak not well.

*First King :* O quiet god, I will speak no more.

*Second King (to the god) :* O quiet god! And the day  
shall tell

Of a god no less than a man who bore  
His will against mine and repented it—  
You have thought to subdue with your quiet eyes  
The prey of my sword, you have thought to sit  
And govern by peace, while I must rise  
And stride through the world and sweat and bleed  
To gather my gains, and the man shall take,  
Who should measure his might against mine, a creed  
That tricks my glory, my will for the sake  
Of a sleepy vision! A god may rule  
As he will in some heaven with gods to hear;  
But a god who comes between men is a fool,  
And a fool is little enough to fear.

*He drives his dagger to the god's heart.*

*THE GOD rises, and speaks swaying.*

*The God (crying out) :* Not one of you in all the world  
to know me.

*THE GOD falls headlong. All rise.  
There is silence for a moment.*

*First King (fiercely)* : Why did you do it ?

*Second King* : He was a bad god—  
A sly god and slothful—an evil liver—

*First King* : Why did you do it ? He was a friendly  
god,  
Smiling upon our faults, a great forgiver . . . .  
He give us quietness—

*Second King* : I say that he's well dead—

*First King* : And I curse you for the killing,

*He draws his sword.*

and here I swear

To requite the honour of this god ill bestead

By a braggart king.

*Second King (drawing his sword)* : So ho ! at last you  
dare

To stand again as a man—my coney, come—

You shall die well, being slain by me.

*Young Beggar (to old beggar)* : Can he do

As he said and avenge the god ?

*They talk together.*

*Second King (to Herald)* : Trumpet and drum

Bid all to arms !

THE HERALD gives the signal, and  
they sound to arms.

*First King (to soldier)* : And bid my armies, you—

THE SOLDIER does so. THE OLD  
BEGGAR raises the head of the fallen  
GOD in his arm, the KINGS facing each  
other with drawn swords—trumpets and  
drums sounding from both armies. ALL  
go off—the KINGS fighting, and for a

*moment nothing is heard save the clashing of their swords.*

*Old Beggar (looking into the face of the fallen god) : Not one of us in all the world to know you.*

*Cries and the noise of arms break out again as the Curtain falls.*

$X = 0$

A NIGHT OF THE TROJAN WAR



To  
GILBERT CANNAN

The Characters are—

*PRONAX* } *Greeks*  
*SALVIUS* }

*ILUS* } *Trojans*  
*CAPYS* }

*A GREEK SENTINEL*

*A GREEK SERVANT*

The action passes between a Greek tent and the Trojan walls, and is continuous.

X = 0

## A NIGHT OF THE TROJAN WAR

### SCENE I.

*A Grecian tent on the Plain before Troy, towards the end of the ten years' war. It is a starry summer night. PRONAX and SALVIUS, two young Greek soldiers, are in the tent, SALVIUS reading by a lighted torch, PRONAX watching the night. During the scene a SENTINEL passes at intervals to and fro behind the tent.*

*Pronax* : So is the night often at home. I have seen  
White orchards brighten under a summer moon,  
As now these tents under the stars. This hour  
My father's coppices are full of song,  
While sleep is on the comfortable house—  
Unless one dear one wakes to think of me  
And count my chances when the Trojan death  
Goes on its nightly errand.

*The SENTINEL passes.*

It's a dear home,  
And fragrant, and there's blessed fruit and corn,  
And thoughts that make me older than my youth  
Come even from the nettles at the gate.  
To-day, perhaps, the harvesters are out,  
And on the night is the ripe pollen blown . . . .

And this is the third harvest that has gone  
 While we have wasted on a barren plain  
 To avenge some wrong done in our babyhood  
 On beauty that we have not seen. Three years . . . .  
 But so it is, and so it must be done,  
 Till the Greek oath is proven. Salvius,  
 Why is all lovely thought a pain ?

*Salvius* : We know

Even upon the flood of adoration,  
 That beauty passes. That's the tragic tale  
 That is our world.

*Pronax* : Is it not very strange  
 That, prisoned in this quarrel so long and long,  
 Until to remember a little Argive street  
 Is torture to the bone, yet there is now  
 Nothing of hatred in the blood for them  
 Whose death is all our daily use, but merely  
 Consent in death, knowing that death may strike  
 Across our tongues as lightly as those that lie  
 For ever dumb because we might not spare.

*Salvius* : Not strange ; who goes in company with  
 death,  
 Watching his daily desolation, thinking,  
 On every stroke, of all the agony  
 That from that stroke goes throbbing, throbbing,  
 throbbing,  
 Forgets all hate. How should we hate the dead ?  
 And, where death ranges as among us now,  
 You, Pronax, I, and our antagonists  
 And friends alike are all but as dead men

*The SENTINEL passes.*

Moving together in a ghostly world,

With life a luckless beggar at the door.  
 It is not ours to hate, who have all put by  
 That safety where men think eternity  
 Immeasurably far, and leisured passions have  
 Their sorry breeding place. Great kings may hate,  
 And priests may thunder hate, and grey-beard prophets  
 May cry again to those who cry their hate  
 In pride of their new-found authority,  
 Fearing lest love should mark them as they are,  
 And send them barren from their brutal thrift.  
 But not for us this envy. It is ours  
 Merely to die, or give the death that these  
 Out of their hatred or indifference will.

*Pronax* : It's not that a man grows tardy in his duty . . .  
 It's still a glad thing to do as the motherland bids,  
 Though the blind soul forgets how sprang the cause.  
 I shall die in my hour, though it should come to-day,  
 Not grudging. Yet it is bitterness for youth,  
 When nothing should be but scrutiny of life,  
 Mating, and building towards a durable fame,  
 And setting the hearthstone trim for a lover's cares,  
 To let all knowledge of these things go, and learn  
 Only of death, that should be hidden from youth,  
 A great thing biding upon the fulness of age,  
 And not made common gossip among these tides  
 Of daily beastliness. And still I must remember,  
 For all I have renounced my thronging life,  
 My orchards, and my rivers, and the bells  
 Of twilight cattle moving in the mist.

*Salvius* : I know ; the mind grows faint with thinking  
 of them—  
 Those little, lovely things of home. My bed

Looks to the west on the Ionian sea—  
 A sweet, fresh-smelling room it is. I wrote  
 My rightest poems there. I cannot see  
 A sail now coming Troyward but my brain  
 Is sick for that small room, above the quay  
 Where sailors laugh at dawn and all day long,  
 Until the silent sunset ships go out  
 Into Sicilian waters.

*Pronax :*                    There your poems  
 Were made, in Pylos ; and in Athens I  
 Too dreamed, although I caught no lyric song—  
 I envy you your song ;—I was to build  
 A cleaner state ; I dreamed a policy  
 Purer than states have known ; I was to bring  
 Princedom to every hearth, to every man  
 Knowledge that he was master of his fate.  
 The dream is dulled. Three years of Trojan dust  
 Have taught me but to pray at night for sleep,  
 And an arm stronger in cunning than my foe's,  
 A quicker eye to parry death. And, Salvius,  
 What of your songs ?

*Salvius :*                    Asleep these many days,  
 Biding their happy time if that should be.

*Pronax :* And death is watching,  
*The SENTINEL passes.*

and your song, that grew

In the womb of generations for the use  
 And joy of men, may perish ere it takes  
 Its larger music, that the tale may go  
 That Greece drove bloodier war than Ilium ;  
 That's a poor bargain. . . . But these thoughts that stir  
 Like ghosts out of a life that should have been,

Neglect my duty. It is past the hour  
 I should be nosing along the Trojan wall  
 To catch what prey may be. I have scarred the wall  
 At the bend there where I told you, in the breaking stone,  
 These many nights, until at last I've made  
 A foothold to the top. It's a queer game,  
 This tripping of life suddenly in the dark,  
 This blasting of flesh that is wholesome yet in the blood,  
 And those who weep, I think, are as those would weep  
 If I should fall. I loathe it ; but, good-night ;  
 You should sleep : it is late, and it is your guard at dawn.

*He is arming himself, and wrapping  
 himself in his cloak.*

Good-night. What are you reading ?

*Salvius :* Songs that one  
 Made in my province. The sails are in his song,  
 And seabirds, and our level pasturelands,  
 And the bronzed fishers on the flowing tides.  
 His name was Creon. I will make such songs  
 If the years will.

*Pronax (who has poured himself out and drunk a cup of  
 wine) :* I know. Put out the torch  
 If you're abed before I come. Good-night.

*Salvius :* Good-night : good luck.

*Pronax :* And will you bid them fill  
 The trough ; this business may make bloody hands.

*He looks out into the night, and goes.*

*The SENTINEL passes.*

*Salvius (reading) :* Upon the dark Sicilian waves,  
 The casting fishers go . . . . .

*The Curtain falls.*

## SCENE II.

*On Troy wall.* CAPYS, a young Trojan soldier, is on guard, looking out over the plain where the Greeks are encamped. ILUS, another young soldier, his friend, wearing a bearskin, comes to him.

*Ilus* : When does your watch end ?

*Capys* : In two hours ; at midnight.

*Ilus* : They're beautiful, those tents, under the stars.

It is my night to go like a shadow among them,  
 And, snatching a Greek life, come like a shadow again.  
 It's an odd skill to have won in the rose of your youth—  
 Two years, and once in seven days—a hundred,  
 More than a hundred, and only once a fault.  
 A hundred Greek boys, Capys, like myself—  
 Loving, and quick in honour, and clean of fear—  
 Spoiled in their beauty by me whose desire is beauty  
 Since first I walked the April hedgerows. Would time  
 But work upon this Helen's face, maybe  
 This nine-year quarrel would be done, and Troy  
 Grow sane, and her confounding councillors  
 Be given carts to clean and drive to market.  
 What of your sea-girl ? Has she grown ?

*Capys* : You ask

Always the question, friend. The chisels rust,  
 The moths are in my linen coats, my mallets  
 Are broken. Ilus, in my brain were limbs  
 Supple and mighty ; the beauty of women moved  
 To miraculous birth in my imagining ;  
 I had conceived the body of man, to make  
 Divine articulation of the joy  
 That flows uncounted in every happy step



To strike again as Troy has bidden me,  
For an oath is a queer weevil in the brain.

*Capys* : Who's there ?

*A Voice* : Troy and the Trojan death.

*Capys* : Pass Troy.

It is still upon the plains to-night, and the stars  
Are a lantern light against you—you must go  
Warily, Ilus. The loss of many friends  
Has sharpened my love, not dulled me against loss.  
I am careful for you to-night in all this beauty  
Of glowing summer—disaster might choose this night  
So brutally, and so disaster likes.

Go warily.

*Ilus* : I know the tented squares  
And every lane among the Greeks, as I know  
The walls of Troy ; and I can pass at night  
Within an handshot of a watching eye,  
And be but a shadow of cloud or a windy bush.  
A hundred times, remember.

*Capys* : Yet would I could come  
To take your danger or share it.

*Ilus* : No ; there's a use  
That's more than courage in this. And, *Capys*, yet  
Those chisels must win your vision into form  
For the world's light and ease. It's an ill day  
Among ill days that smites the seer's lips.  
Your work's to do.

*Capys* : And yours—that dream of Troy  
Regenerate, with the heart of the people shown  
In the people's life, not lamentably hurt  
By men who, mazed with authority, put by  
Authority's proper use, and so are evil,

While still the folk under their tyranny keep  
 Their kindness, waiting upon deliverance.  
 So may we come together to our work,  
 In prophecy you of life, creation I.  
 How long to-night ?

*Ilus :* Before your watch is done  
 I shall be back. Here at this point, before  
 The night is full ; throw me the rope upon  
 The signal, thus—

*He whistles. He is climbing over the  
 parapet, to which he has hooked a rope.*

Peace with you till I come.

*Capys :* And luck with you. Go warily. Farewell.

*ILUS drops down to the plain below.*

*CAPYS draws the rope up. There is  
 silence for a moment.*

*Capys (moving to and fro along the wall) :*

Or Greek or Trojan, all is one  
 When snow falls on our summertime,  
 And when the happy noonday rhyme  
 Because of death is left undone.

The bud that breaks must surely pass,  
 Yet is the bud more sure of May  
 Than youth of age, when every day  
 Death is youth's shadow in the glass.

*A hand is seen groping on the parapet,  
 PRONAX, looking cautiously along the  
 wall, draws himself up silently, unseen  
 by CAPYS, who continues :*

Beside us ever moves a hand,

Unseen, of deadly stroke, and when  
It falls on youth--

*He hears the movement behind him,  
and turns swiftly.*

Who's there?

*Pronax (rushing upon him):* A Greek unlucky to Trojan  
arms—

A sworn Greek, terrible in obedience.

*His onslaught has overwhelmed CAPYS,  
who falls without a cry, the Greek's  
dagger in his breast. PRONAX draws  
it out, looks at his dead antagonist,  
shudders, peers out over the wall, and  
very carefully climbs down at the point  
where he came.*

*The Curtain falls.*

### SCENE III.

*The Greek tent again. SALVIUS is still reading, and the  
torch burning. A SERVANT brings a large jar of water  
which he pours into the trough outside the tent. He  
goes with the jar, and a moment later the SENTINEL  
passes behind the tent. There is silence for a few  
moments, SALVIUS turning the pages of his book. Then,  
from the shadow in front of the tent, ILUS in his bearskin  
is seen stealthily approaching. He reaches the tent  
opening without a sound, and in the same unbroken  
silence his dagger is in the Greek's heart. ILUS catches  
the dead man as he falls, and lets his body sink on to one  
of the couches inside the tent. The SENTINEL passes.  
ILUS, breathless, waits till the steps have gone, and then,  
stealthily as he came, disappears.*

•

*There is a pause. PRONAX comes out of the darkness, and, throwing his cloak on the ground, goes straight to the trough, and begins to wash his hands.*

*Pronax* : What, still awake, and reading? Those are rare songs,

To keep a soldier out of his bed at night.

Ugh—*Salvius*, sometimes it's horrible—

He had no time for a word—he walked those walls

Under the stars as a lover might walk a garden

Among the moonlit roses—this cleansing's good—

He was saying some verses, I think, till death broke in.

Cold water's good after this pitiful doing,

And freshens the mind for comfortable sleep.

Well, there, it's done, and sleep's a mighty curer

For all vexations.

*The SENTINEL passes.*

It's time that torch was out—

I do not need it, and you should be abed . . . . .

*Salvius* . . . . .

*He looks into the tent for the first time.*

What, sleeping, and still dressed?

That's careless, friend, and the torch alight still . . . .

*Salvius* . . . . .

*Salvius*, I say . . . . gods! . . . what, friend . .

*Salvius*, *Salvius* . . . .

Dead . . . it is done . . . it is done . . . there  
is judgment made . . . . .

Beauty is broken . . . and there on the Trojan wall

One too shall come . . . one too shall come . . .

*The SENTINEL passes.*

*The Curtain falls.*

## SCENE IV.

*The Trojan wall. The body of CAPYS lies in the startlight and silence. After a few moments the signal comes from ILUS below. There is a pause. The signal is repeated. There is a pause.*

*The Curtain falls.*

## THE STORM

was first produced at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, on Saturday, May 8th, 1915, under the direction of the author, with the following cast :—

<i>Alice</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Cecily Byrne
<i>Joan</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Betty Pinchard
<i>Sarah</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Margaret Chatwin
<i>An Old Man</i>	.	.	.	.	.	W. Ribton Haines
<i>A Young Stranger</i>	.	.	.	.	.	E. Ion Swinley

At the Stratford-upon-Avon Memorial Theatre, on August 26th, 1915, *Alice* was played by Mary Merrall, and on the play's revival at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, on March 18th, 1916, the cast was—

<i>Alice</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Mona Limerick
<i>Joan</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Betty Pinchard
<i>Sarah</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Margaret Chatwin
<i>An Old Man</i>	.	.	.	.	.	William J. Rea
<i>A Young Stranger</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Scott Sunderland









