

**PAWNS, FOUR  
POETIC PLAYS**

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Pawns, four poetic plays by John Drinkwater

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**JOHN DRINKWATER**

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# PAWNS

FOUR POETIC PLAYS

BY

JOHN DRINKWATER

*Author of "Abraham Lincoln: A Play"*  
*"Poems: 1908-1919," etc.*

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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## INTRODUCTION

THESE four plays are characteristic of John Drinkwater's point of view. The sum of the world's beauty is a great majority of the total. If we choose deliberately to live with the minority of ugliness, we alone are to blame. Beauty, peace, and quiet may belong to our lives if we desire them as much as we seem to desire more ugly things. The so-called practical man may object that Drinkwater's vision is a poet's vision. Life leaves us little time for beauty. We need poets to puncture the fallacy of so absurd an argument. All beauty asks of any one, poet or business man alike, is that it be not ignored. You will not see it if you turn your back; it is, however, always there to see whenever you desire to make the effort. Nothing can hide it from our eyes but our own neglect.

As for peace and quiet, they are the natural concomitants of a mind loving beauty. If you carry the true vision about with you there is little danger that you will mar it with strife or unrest. Thus it follows that Drinkwater's

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point of view, like that of all real poets, is both sane and practical. It is sane because he is of those who urge us to live on decent, friendly terms with our neighbors; it is practical because only by so living may we have any hope of happiness. The upholders of the theory that life is a competitive struggle are the unpractical men. It is they who are the bringers of war to the nations and the occasions of strife at home. They have turned their backs upon beauty and set up altars to the false gods of practical affairs.

*X = 0* is the most deeply moving of these four plays, for it deals dramatically with the greatest of all evils — war. We need only to remember war as death stealing out of the darkness to strike down youth, to whom the vision of beauty is a natural dream, to realize war's horror. We then know war as the negation of truth. This play, furthermore, touches our emotions deeply because it is itself wrought out of deep emotion. Through the drama we see the ugly fact as it is and we come to hate it for its ugliness.

In like manner *The God of Quiet* reminds us that we often forego one essential of living. If men are to think and to do things — and they can do things only if they think — they must have the leisure that quiet brings. And,

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like beauty, quiet may be found within. The world's uproar need not disturb the contemplative mind.

It is straining too far, perhaps, to interpret *King Cophetua* as a treatise upon democracy. John Drinkwater is, after all, a poet showing us his image of life in terms of beauty. We must beware of criticism which seeks to turn poetry into propaganda. It is a typical Anglo-Saxon failing to look upon our artists as preachers in disguise. But like all writers who are sincere, Drinkwater's attitude toward life shows through his work. We are therefore justified in making note of King Cophetua's dislike of advice which has expediency for its motive. It is enough to observe that the king chooses the beggar maid because she embodies an ideal with which her position in the world's opinion has nothing to do.

Neither readers nor audience need, however, to go searching beneath the surface of these plays. They are dramas expressed in poetry — the utterance of simple truths which we know beforehand, for of such are the materials of poetry and drama. We may read or see — and take pleasure thereby. That is what the author would wish to have us do.

JACK R. CRAWFORD





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