

THE LAST DEAD MAN

a drama, with music,
-by-

David Jacklin

facilis est descensus Averni

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THE CHARACTERS

JOHN WILSON, a weaver's son
JOANNA LEES, a miller's daughter
ROBERT LYON, of the military class
CAROLINE THOM, of United Empire Loyalist stock
SIMON FRASER ROBERTSON, Scots descent, but of aristocratic background
ELIZABETH HUGHES, a clergy-man's daughter
HENRY LeLIEVRE, son of a French sea-captain, cousin to LYON

THE SETTING

John Wilson's mind. The space should be open and direction should make full use of available areas, including audience and aisles, any and all house entrances and whatever else. The action moves freely.

THE TIME

A June 13, sometime before the middle of the last century, recalling events from January to June, 1833.

THE BACKGROUND

On June 13, 1833, near the town of Perth, Upper Canada, John Wilson and Robert Lyon met in a farmer's field for the purpose of settling a dispute – with pistols. After two exchanges of fire, Robert Lyon lay mortally wounded. He died within hours. This event is recorded as the last fatal duel in Upper Canada, and probably, the last in Canada.

Duelling was officially outlawed by that time, but the practice continued and the law tended to be lenient. John Wilson, a law student, defended himself against a charge of murder so effectively that the presiding magistrate praised his calm, cool and powerful presentation.

Wilson, acquitted, went on to a successful career as a lawyer and magistrate, before entering politics, becoming one of the most influential, though lesser known, political figures in Canada's history. He was the founder of the True Grit party, today's Liberals, and, when that group proved to be too timid for his ideas, crossed the floor to become an Ultra Reformer, the most radical legal political movement of the day. His nickname was "Honest John", for his unshakeable resolve to fight for justice, equality and truth, as he saw it.

At the time leading up to the Confederation of Canada, Wilson was named by Grits and Reform alike as the only acceptable candidate for the leadership of the coalition which led the four original provinces into Confederation. The Tories, with more votes, favoured John A. MacDonald. History shows which way the vote went.

Wilson retired from politics and became a Superior Court judge. He died not long after Confederation. Elizabeth Hughes, whom he married some two years after the duel, survived him (along with 13 children) and died in 1910.

THE LAST DEAD MAN

a drama with music

Act One

(a lighted pool surrounded by blackness; some things to sit on; it might be a room, or it might be something else)

(WILSON enters and sits for a long moment)

(the COMPANY move quietly ON, from the black around WILSON; he smiles and looks to the audience)

WILSON: Before we are through here, someone will be dead! So, if at times, we seem a little long-winded, be patient. There will be a killing, at the end. And, this one has everything! Love, a great deal of that; treachery, of several sorts; and even, perhaps, a little honour. As to who it is that's dead; who might be the traitor; who the lover — we shall leave that to you to discuss amongst yourselves. But, please! Not until after the killing.

And, so — let us begin! The tragic history of THE LAST FATAL DUEL IN CANADA! — as seen through the glass of memory (for time is a sore decayer of truth) and as edited by conscience. First, the background: Perth, Upper Canada in the year 1833, the third year of the reign of His Majesty, William the Fourth (God bless him) . . .

OTHERS: Hear! Hear!

WILSON: The world in the middle of the Pax Britannica — decades of peaceful friendship, ensured by the force of British arms.

(music)

OTHERS: RULE BRITANNIA, BRITANNIA RULES THE WAVES!

WILSON: . . . and damned near everything else to boot. This is the empire on which the sun never sets, ruled by retired officers and their wives, fought for by brutalized, half-starved, illiterate scum from the bottom layers of society — the "thin, red line of heroes" and "our gallant boys in blue" . . .

OTHERS: Hear, hear! God bless 'em!

WILSON: And, so the world continues — a world where privilege rules, where slavery is a way to great wealth, where taxes on those who must work from sunrise to sunset go to support those who work not at all. But for all of that, there are two kinds of people in the world . . .

OTHERS: Those who are British!

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- WILSON: And, those who wish they were. Ahead of us, we have Queen Victoria and sixty years of British glory. Behind us, well, behind us is what makes Britain, Britain. Nelson and Trafalgar; Wellington and Waterloo. And, here in Perth, that was all just gravy, for what was Upper Canada, but a somewhat overgrown piece of Britain? Our customs, our thoughts, our entire life came to us from them. At the top, we have the United Empire Loyalists, as represented here by . . .
- CAROLINE: Caroline Thom. My sister is the wife of one of Perth's most prominent lawyers.
- JOANNA: Half-sister.
- CAROLINE: Half-sister.
- WILSON: If I may . . . Miss Thom's brother-in-law, one James Boulton, is the gentleman with whose firm I am apprenticed.
- JOANNA: Half-brother-in-law.
- WILSON: Just so. May we get on with this? After them, but only slightly, come the retired, half-pay officers and their families, such as . . .
- LYON: Robert Lyon. My brother is Captain George Lyon, formerly of the 99th Regiment of Foot. I am a law student, articling with the firm of Thomas Radenhurst. It is rumoured that I am a crack shot with pistol or musket. It is well known that I practice daily with small-sword and sabre.
- WILSON: These people came after the defeat of Napoleon, for which a grateful sovereign gave them grants of rocky, swampy, tree-covered land, several thousand miles from anywhere. In this class, too, is . . .
- LeLIEVRE: Henry LeLievre. Of French descent, my father having served with the French navy before Napoleon; cousin to Robert Lyon, also articling with Radenhurst.
- WILSON: Although he is French, at least his father had the good taste to be an officer. Sooner the enemy you know . . . After this group come the class of respected professional people: doctors, lawyers, clergy, educators. In this group is . . .
- ELIZABETH: Elizabeth Hughes. My father brought myself and my brother to Canada, last year, but died in the great cholera epidemic. I am assistant school-teacher for the Perth Common School.
- WILSON: Miss Hughes is here, not because she is a school-teacher, but because her father was a clergy-man. Her occupation is, at best, immaterial. Also in this class is . . .

- ROBERTSON: Simon Fraser Robertson. Scots descent, also articling with Thomas Radenhurst.
- WILSON: You will note the fact that all the gentlemen are law-students. Indeed, three are apprenticed to the same firm. If this were fiction, their occupations would be more varied, but it happens to be truth and truth, while sometimes stranger than fiction, is invariably less imaginative. Below these groups, well below them, are the rest of us, as represented here by . . .
- JOANNA: Joanna Lees.
- WILSON: . . . and myself.
- JOANNA: My father is a miller. I hope for something better.
- WILSON: Facts, only, please. Time for ambitions, later.
- CAROLINE: In fact, she is a miller's daughter.
- WILSON: It is possible that Miss Lees could raise herself from her position by marrying the right person and letting time go by, but I will always be, no matter what position I attain in life, John Wilson, weaver's son. Such is the tune to which Perth danced its way through one century and into another. But all around, a new rhythm is being stamped out, in the hiss of steam and the thud of engines; in the dying cries of trampled millions in the slums, in the factories, at the barricades, but, here in Perth, in 1833, killing was a retail thing, done with honour, to the tune of the Britannia Waltz . . .

(music; they dance and sing)

- ALL: SHALL WE JOIN THE DANCE; HEAR ITS MUSIC?
SHALL WE WALTZ AS THE DECADES GO BY?
NO REASON TO FEAR FOR TOMORROW; IN
EMPIRE, THE CENTURIES FLY.
- LYON: BY FORCE OF STOUT BRITISH ARMS,
WE'VE PAINTED THE MAP BRITISH RED.
ON OUR WELL-KEPT GENTLEMAN'S FARMS, WE
READ OF OUR BRAVE BRITISH DEAD.
- CAROLINE: THE MOTHERS, WHO TEARFULLY WATCH THEIR
SONS MARCHING OFF TO STRANGE LANDS,
CONTENT THEMSELVES WITH THE THOUGHT THAT
GOD IS AN ENGLISHMAN!
- ALL: SHALL WE JOIN THE DANCE? NOW, IT'S LOUDER!

SHALL WE WALTZ AS THE EMPIRE GROWS?
WHEN GOD'S ON OUR SIDE, AS HE MUST BE,
WHAT FOOL WOULD DARE TO OPPOSE?

LeLIEVRE: THESE BRITISH BELIEVE THEY ARE DESTINED,
THAT FATE WON'T ALLOW THEM TO LOSE.
AND GOD KNOWS, IT'S NOT LIGHTLY QUESTIONED.
HOW ELSE TO EXPLAIN WATERLOO?

JOANNA: AND, SOMEWHERE A LONG WAY AWAY,
IN A TOWN THAT'S BEEN IN BRITISH HANDS,
THERE'S A YOUNG MAN WHO'S PROUDER TODAY,
AND, FOREVER AN ENGLISHMAN!

ALL: SHALL WE JOIN THE DANCE, WHIRLING FASTER?
IT'S A TUNE THAT WE'LL NEVER FORGET!
WE PLAN TO KEEP DANCING FOREVER, FOR WE
KNOW THAT OUR SUN WILL NOT SET.

SHALL WE JOIN THE DANCE, GOING HIGHER?
SHALL WE WALTZ?
SHALL WE WALTZ?
SHALL WE WALTZ?
SHALL WE WALTZ?

(the music ends with a crash; WILSON nudges ROBERTSON)

WILSON: First polemic.

ROBERTSON: What?

WILSON: First polemic. On the nature of the individual.

ROBERTSON: Oh! Polemic on the nature of the individual.

(the others move away; spot on ROBERTSON)

Man is, by nature of being a reasoning animal, necessarily individualist, that is, his primary instincts and survival traits are predicated on the survival of the individual, rather than the species as a whole. At the same time, also by virtue of his reasoning ability, he is sometimes able to overcome these traits and act in a manner which upholds the good of the society of which he is a part. These persons are regarded as honourable, that is, reflecting those values which that society has come to regard as desirable, and are called heroes and are usually found in graveyards. The perverse fact of the matter is that these heroes, in choosing a path which most closely identifies their own personality with that of the society at large, are hailed as individualists of the highest order. In fine,

then, the individual is that unit which can most effectively subjugate its primal conditioning in the personality of the mass.

WILSON: Do you agree with all that?

ROBERTSON: They are your words, John, not mine.

WILSON: Do you agree?

ROBERTSON: No.

WILSON: No. So, here we are . . . caught between the death of one age, one idea and the birth of another. The waltz continues, yet, underneath, under the grace, the courtesy, the etiquette, is building a force which will shake the foundations of our civilization, but we do not see it, and if we did, we'd never believe our eyes. Surely, Monsieur Pangloss must be right, this must be . . .

(music)

ALL: THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS!

WILSON: And, so, with that, we move on to . . . the beginning!

(he crosses to JOANNA)

A certain young man, living with his parents, developed a friendship with a certain young lady.

(JOANNA comes forward)

WILSON: This friendship grows. The two spend much time together, under, of course, the chaperoning eye of her mother. When the girl is sixteen, the young man gives her . . .

JOANNA: Yes?

WILSON: . . . a book of religious quotations.

JOANNA: Thank you, so much.

WILSON: It is assumed by the families of both parties that this relationship will end in matrimony. However . . .

JOANNA: However?

WILSON: There's always "however". When the young man reaches employable age, his father secures for him a position as apprentice with the law firm of James

Boulton, in the very heart of the wicked town itself . . . Perth. Though pure in heart, the young man succumbs to the flesh-pots of the town, and, while yet protesting his affections for the first young lady, also allows his philandering eye to wander to two other young ladies.

(he and JOANNA sit side by side)

I shall write to you every day. And, I shall get home to see you sometimes.

JOANNA: You're only going to Perth, John, not the moon.

WILSON: But, it's more than fifteen miles, and I'll be quite busy, studying and such.

JOANNA: Perhaps, I could come and visit you.

WILSON: I'm afraid that wouldn't do. It wouldn't be proper.

JOANNA: Pish. I could stay with relatives.

WILSON: I'll just be very busy, so it's best if we wait until I get back. I won't forget you, I promise.

CAROLINE: He didn't, either. He never forgot about her, even when he started courting Elizabeth Hughes.

(WILSON leaves JOANNA and crosses to ELIZABETH, saucily taking her arm as she walks)

ELIZABETH: Here, again, Mr. Wilson? I'm beginning to think you loiter in this spot, waiting to meet me.

WILSON: You've found me out, Miss Hughes. I can see your approach from the window of the office and I slyly dash around the buildings to meet you, here. The highlight of my day.

ELIZABETH: You should give as much attention to your studies.

WILSON: Oh, I do, Miss, but even Sisyphus deserves some diversion.

ELIZABETH: How remarkably poetical of you, sir.

WILSON: One can be inspired by one's subject beyond one's limited talents.

ELIZABETH: You are too modest. I think you could be a poet.

WILSON: For you, I will be.

ELIZABETH: No, no, Mr. Wilson, for yourself. Do all things for yourself, and you'll not fail at any.

CAROLINE: And, he took her good advice to heart, doing things for himself. For instance, in order to supplement his meagre wages, he secured for himself a position as tutor to a certain young lady . . .

(WILSON crosses to CAROLINE; she recites)

Amo, amat, amas . . .

WILSON: Amo, amas, amat . . .

CAROLINE: Quite correct, sir.

WILSON: I thought I was testing you.

CAROLINE: Do you think I need a tutor in love, Mr. Wilson?

WILSON: There would be many volunteers.

CAROLINE: Stop there, sir! This lesson has proceeded far enough. What is scheduled for tomorrow?

WILSON: I thought we could start on Homer's Illiad, the tragic love of Paris for his Helen.

CAROLINE: I'm looking forward to it.

(WILSON moves away from her and takes out a letter)

WILSON: My very dear Joanna: I am working very hard, busy both day and night. I am learning much that is new and interesting . . .

(JOANNA reads)

JOANNA: . . . and my outlook on the world is changing greatly. There are opportunities of which I have never before dreamed, and I feel I could go a long way, if I took advantage of just one of them. Yours ever, John.

(ROBERTSON steps forward)

ROBERTSON: Monsieur LeLievre talks with Miss Hughes.

ELIZABETH: Monsieur, I don't know what to say. You can hardly expect me to know how to react to your . . . impetuous demonstrations.

LeLIEVRE: Elizabeth, it is true that I have known you a short time, only, but believe me

when I say I love you; a thousand times, I'll say I love you.

ELIZABETH: Another poet.

LeLIEVRE: You say "another". Who is the first?

ELIZABETH: I think that's rather impertinent of you, Monsieur.

LeLIEVRE: But, you don't deny there is another?

ELIZABETH: I don't think it's any of your business. Good day.

LeLIEVRE: Stop! Wait. I apologize, Miss Hughes. Of course, I have no right to question you on this, or on any matter. It's just that I love you, so much, and I don't know what I'd do, if I thought that you didn't care, at all, even a little.

ELIZABETH: Henry, you have, at least, no rival for my affections. There is a poet, but not a rival. Not yet.

LeLIEVRE: Then, you do care, a little?

ELIZABETH: Don't jump at conclusions, lawyer.

LeLIEVRE: No.

ELIZABETH: No one holds my affections, as yet. Not you, and, not my poet, either.

LeLIEVRE: Then, may I hope?

ELIZABETH: While there is life, there is hope, Monsieur.

(ELIZABETH leaves LeLIEVRE staring after her; CAROLINE comes forward)

CAROLINE: Mr. Wilson relates a fairy tale!

WILSON: Once upon a time, long, long ago, before they invented kings and empires, men lived in peace and with equality before the law, for the law was that of Nature, which said, "Work or die; struggle or perish." And, men were happy with this and lived or died as their fortunes dictated.

That has changed, now. Now, there is no choice; now, a man's future is determined the day he is born. A man creates a product, the product is worth this much, but, out of that, the king gets twenty percent; the parliament get fifteen percent; his landlord gets twenty percent; the doctors, bankers . . . lawyers . . . get fifteen percent, each, and suddenly, there is nothing! The one who has done the work gets nothing but more work! And, don't be fooled! The

only ones who get rich, nowadays, are the ones who contribute nothing themselves, and they do it by tearing wealth from the grasp of those who've created it! And, we all try to justify ourselves, but, in the end, every time you gain a little something for yourself, it's because you've ripped it from the mouth of a starving child!

(LeLIEVRE has shifted his focus to WILSON)

LeLIEVRE: My, so impassioned, so soon? At this rate, you'll have exhausted yourself long before the end. Why shout over matters you cannot influence? This is simply the nature of the world. Those who can survive, do; those who cannot, die. The criteria for survival simply change, that's all. Where once it was essential to be able to throw a spear or bend a bow, now the requirements are a head for finance and the luck of being born into the right family.

WILSON: It is unjust.

LeLIEVRE: Perhaps, but then, how does one measure justice?

WILSON: It is not measured; it is part of what man is. It is his birthright!

LeLIEVRE: Birthright! What birthright? The only thing man brings with him into the world is blood, the blood of his mother. Man is born in pain and in blood and will die the same . . . and so, too, will he live. What do you envision to replace this condition? Uplifted masses, working for the good of their brothers and themselves? Laughable. As soon as the bourgeois and aristocrats go down under the muskets and the guillotines of revolution, those same instruments are turned upon the masses, by the masses! My father lived it in France; what they bled for, and died for, all for nothing! And when that fat little Corsican proclaimed himself, my father chose rather to serve the tyrant he had fought, than the worse tyrant who had risen. Man needs both an oppressor and an oppressed; it is in the nature of man to wish to harm his fellows, just as it is in the nature of a lion to stalk his prey. Man is, willy-nilly, a predatory animal. Examine your teeth. Note the placement of meat-ripping canines and incisors. And, man is also an intelligent predator; the most successful of all predators, and he realizes that his most dangerous competition comes from his own kind. Man is both his own blessing and his own curse, for, as long as men compete there will be a hardiness, a vigour of youth to our race, and yet, as long as men compete, there will be hatred and violence. But, this must be, for if we cease to strive with each other, we will be pushed aside by some young, ambitious species, freshly come down from the treetops.

ELIZABETH: The state of Mr. Lyon's emotions and a discussion of love!

WILSON: It so happens that Lyon has struck up an acquaintance with my precocious classics pupil, unbeknownst to all. The fact of the matter being – Miss Thom's brother-in-law and guardian, my employer, is a bitter rival of Mr. Lyon's

employer; thus, no open contact would be allowed. The relationship is clandestine. They would meet in the oddest places . . .

(CAROLINE and LYON are lying side-by-side; she sits up, picking straw from her hair)

LYON: Caroline, I love you!

CAROLINE: You had better. I must go!

LYON: So soon? When can I see you again?

CAROLINE: I don't know. Perhaps next week. If I can get away.

LYON: What shall I do until then?

CAROLINE: I promise you, you'll live. Devote yourself to your studies.

LYON: It's not the law I want to study.

CAROLINE: Oh, no? What, then?

LYON: You! Every inch of you, in detail, for hours.

(he draws her back down; WILSON steps forward)

WILSON: Ahem! That will be all, thank you, for now.

CAROLINE: There's more.

WILSON: Perhaps, later.

(she withdraws; LYON sighs, remains prone)

Define love.

(LYON laughs)

Now is a good time for it. You use the word quite glibly in the – if you'll pardon me – heat of the moment. Define it, please.

LYON: What, and put the poets out of business?

WILSON: Do you love her?

LYON: Caroline? I said I did, didn't I?

WILSON: No equivocating, please. Do you love her?

LYON: In the heat of the moment, as you say, yes!

WILSON: Do you lust for her?

LYON: Oh, yes. Don't you?

WILSON: She is entitled to dignity, which you take from her with your lust.

LYON: And, love – sweet, gentle love would allow it for her? I have no time for timid emotions. Love is too soft-spoken for me. Give me roaring, bellowing emotions any day. You're too timid by half, Wilson. You're doomed to failure from the start. Your love is no stronger than — compassion.

WILSON: Compassion must doom me to fail? In your world, perhaps, not in mine.

LYON: We occupy the same planet, the same bit of dirt rotating in the void. Answer me this: what has any man ever done to earn your compassion?

WILSON: Compassion is given, not earned!

LYON: Everything is earned, from your daily bread, to the kick you get from the lord of the manor. Everything, from birth to death.

WILSON: And those are the very things from which compassion is derived: our common humanity – birth and death. These are unearned, unrequested and unrewarded.

LYON: Which is as it should be.

WILSON: You still have not yet defined love.

LYON: How can anyone define it? It's different for all – one thing for me; another for you. But, I do not envy your version of love. It is pale, Wilson. It has no voice. It is a thinking man's love. Let me not think. Let me do.

(WILSON faces the audience)

WILSON: The Duelling Code!

(the players arrange themselves)

ELIZABETH: The code of laws for duellists, ordained by the gentlemen delegates of . . .

(they sing an ascending 7th chord)

LeLIEVRE: TIPPERARY . . .

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JOANA: GALWAY . . .

WILSON: MAYO . . .

LYON: SLIGO . . .

CAROLINE: AND, ROSCOMMON . . . !

ELIZABETH: . . . prescribed for general adoption throughout the world.

ALL: Rule number one!

LeLIEVRE: The first offence requires the first apology, though the retort may be more offensive than the insult.

ALL: Example!

JOANNA: A tells B that he's impertinent; B tells A that he lies, yet A must make the first apology, then B may explain the retort.

ALL: Rule number two!

WILSON: But, if the parties would rather fight on, then, after two shots, each . . .

ALL: But, in no case, before . . . !

WILSON: B may explain and A can apologize.

ALL: Rule number three!

LYON: If doubt exists who first gave offense, the decision rests with the seconds . . .

CAROLINE: . . . but if they'll not decide or cannot agree, the matter must proceed to two shots each, or on to a hit.

ALL: Rule number four!

ROBERTSON: When the lie direct is the first offence, the aggressor must either beg a pardon expressly . . .

ALL: Or!

ELIZABETH: Fire two shots and apologize . . .

ALL: Or!

LeLIEVRE: Three shots followed by an explanation . . .

- ALL: Or!
- JOANNA: Fire on until a severe hit is received by one . . .
- ALL: Or!
- WILSON: The other.
- ALL: Rule number five!
- LYON: As a blow is strictly prohibited under any circumstances, no verbal apology can be made for such an insult. The alternatives therefore are . . .
- CAROLINE: The offender handing a cane to the one who received the blow, to be used upon his back while, at the same time, begging pardon.
- ROBERTSON: Firing on until one, or both are disabled.
- ELIZABETH: Exchanging three shots and then asking pardon, without the offer of the cane.
- ALL: Rule number six!
- LeLIEVRE: If A gives B the lie, and B retorts with a blow, no reconciliation can take place till after two shots each or when one has been hit; B may then ask pardon for the blow and A may explain the lie, because a blow is never allowed and the lie is the lesser offence.
- ALL: What?
- (LeLIEVRE shrugs to the audience)*
- ALL: Rule number seven!
- JOANNA: No apology can be received after the parties have taken their ground, without an exchange of fires.
- ALL: Rule number eight!
- WILSON: No dumb-shooting or firing in the air is allowed in any case – the challenger ought not to have challenged without receiving offense. The challenged, if he gave offense, ought to have apologized before the event. Therefore, children's play must be . . .
- ALL: Dishonourable!
- WILSON: And, is accordingly . . .

ALL: Disallowed! Rule number nine!

LYON: No party can be allowed to bend his knee or cover his side with his hand, but he may present at any level, from hip to eye.

ALL: Rule number ten.

CAROLINE: None can either advance or retreat, if the ground be measured out.

(she does so)

ROBERTSON: If it is not measured, any party may advance at his pleasure, even to touching muzzles.

(he advances on CAROLINE, with the obvious intention of kissing her; as he gets close, she slaps his face and runs to her spot)

ALL: Note of importance!

ELIZABETH: All matters and doubts not herein described will be explained by application to the committee, who meet alternately at Clonmell and Galway, at the quarter-session, expressly for that purpose.

ALL: Signed!

(they sing the chord again)

LeLIEVRE: CROW RYAN!

JOANNA: JAMES KEOGH!

LYON: AND AMBY BODKIN!

WILSON: Secretaries for the committee.

(ROBERTSON steps in front of the group)

ROBERTSON: Mr. Wilson writes a poem!

(WILSON pulls out a sheet of paper in an envelope)

WILSON: This is, uhm, not very good, but, it's the intention that counts.

What can it be that makes me sad?
I surely can't be turning mad,
And yet, indeed, 'tis very plain

I am in – ; let me think again.

It cannot be, for love is bliss,
Not a heart-rending thing like this –
'Tis true there's one bewitching being,
And, one whom I can scarce help seeing,
Who makes me, every time we meet,
Fain to say something wond'rous sweet.

But, how it is, you won't believe,
My memory is a perfect sieve,
And, pretty speeches fly; you laugh!
Just as the whirlwind blows the chaff;
And then I feel so quite put out,
'Tis no great wonder that I pout;
Besides, you know, 'tis wracking pain
"To love and not be loved again."

And, if the matter thus should be,
What shall I do? Now, come, let's see,
Why, I'll turn poet and I'll sing
That loving is a desperate thing.
But, this won't do, for sure enough,
They'll say 'tis canting, childish stuff.
Well then, I'll try, well what d'ye say?
I'll mourn and fret for one short day
And, bear it after, as I may.

(he puts it in the envelope and hands it to ROBERTSON)

For Elizabeth.

ROBERTSON: Are you sure?

(WILSON glares)

As you please.

(ROBERTSON hands it to CAROLINE)

ROBERTSON: For Elizabeth.

(she hands it to LeLIEVRE)

CAROLINE: For Elizabeth.

(he hands it to JOANNA)

LeLIEVRE: For Elizabeth.

(she hands it to LYON)

JOANNA: For Elizabeth.

(he hands it to ELIZABETH)

LYON: For you.

ELIZABETH: For me? Oh, thank you!

(she scans it and they all look at WILSON)

WILSON: Well . . .

(LeLIEVRE accosts ELIZABETH)

LeLIEVRE: This is your poet? A weaver? Worse yet, a weaver's son! Elizabeth, the man has no standing.

ELIZABETH: I know, I know. But, at least, he is in earnest, Henry. Can I say the same of you?

LeLIEVRE: Always!

ELIZABETH: I want to believe you, but I have been warned about you.

LeLIEVRE: By whom? The poet?

ELIZABETH: No! He's too much of a gentleman to interfere.

LeLIEVRE: He's no gentleman; he's a weaver!

ELIZABETH: Henry!

LeLIEVRE: Forgive me. I can't bear the thought that I might lose you.

ELIZABETH: You do not have me, as yet, sir.

LeLIEVRE: That I might not win you.

ELIZABETH: I can't see you, anymore.

LeLIEVRE: What?

ELIZABETH: My guardian won't allow it.

- LeLIEVRE: Mr. Ackland? I'm his favourite pupil.
- ELIZABETH: I'm not allowed to see you, anymore, unless, of course, I should chance to meet you on the street.
- LeLIEVRE: It's Wilson! What's he said to Mr. Ackland?
- ELIZABETH: I don't know. Is there anything to be said?
- LeLIEVRE: No!
- ELIZABETH: Then, what are you angry about?
- LeLIEVRE: Weavers!
- (he leaves ELIZABETH; WILSON addresses him)*
- WILSON: I didn't say anything to Ackland.
- LeLIEVRE: It doesn't matter. It's more than that.
- WILSON: It's the pride of an ancient and aristocratic family, being affronted by a weaver's son.
- LeLIEVRE: It's my honour, being affronted by a jumped-up . . . peasant! And, your poetry is abominable.
- WILSON: True.
- LeLIEVRE: Then, why write it?
- WILSON: I have been accused of having no voice for my emotion.
- LeLIEVRE: And, poetry can help you find one?
- WILSON: Perhaps, it can help me find if I need one.
- LeLIEVRE: What good are emotions without a voice? They are useless. Kept inside yourself, they can only hurt you.
- WILSON: Hatred, perhaps. Jealousy. Pettiness. But, these will hurt whether kept inside or not.
- LeLIEVRE: And, love cannot? I tell you, love, kept to yourself, kept bottled up and locked away, can destroy you as surely as festering hatred. Emotions, all emotions, are volatile acids, which must be diluted before they erode the soul.

WILSON: Another poet.

LeLIEVRE: Never.

ROBERTSON: A conversation!

(ELIZABETH and WILSON are strolling)

WILSON: I hope to live without hurting others. That seems a high enough aim.

ELIZABETH: It would certainly make you unique.

WILSON: Thank you.

ELIZABETH: Can you do it?

WILSON: I can try. I think that may be the only real sin – hurting someone.

ELIZABETH: What about the Ten Commandments?

WILSON: That covers seven of them.

ELIZABETH: And, the other three?

WILSON: Who can say? I don't break them – consciously.

ELIZABETH: But, do you break them, unconsciously?

WILSON: Can I be held responsible for that?

ELIZABETH: I'm sure I don't know.

WILSON: At any rate, I'm not afraid of that.

ELIZABETH: What, then?

(he glances at her)

. . . are you afraid of?

WILSON: Failure. Inability. Afraid of finding in myself that which I despise in others; afraid that I will prove to be a man and mortal, like others.

ELIZABETH: Death?

WILSON: No. Oddly enough, no. I'm afraid of mortality, but not of death.

ELIZABETH: That's hair-splitting of a rather close order.

WILSON: Yes, it is. If it is possible to do so, let us, by all means, split them. That's what they are for.

ELIZABETH: Why make the distinction?

WILSON: I don't know.

(LYON steps between them)

LYON: Nonsense. Of course, he knows. Mortality and death are two separate entities. Death is an event; finite, knowable and bounded. Mortality is not an event; it is a state and it signifies the futility of effort; the possibility that everything done on this earth, from your first day to your last can never have any effect, or worse, if it does, you can never know. There is the fear. Death simply kills. Mortality erases.

(WILSON continues)

WILSON: Your turn.

ELIZABETH: To tell my secrets? I'm not sure I have any.

WILSON: We all do. We all have our fears.

ELIZABETH: Do we? What do I fear? Death. Loneliness. I fear I may wake one day and find my bed cold, my passions dimmed, my youth vanished. Mostly, an image: ash – morning ash in winter, chilled, damp, burned-out. Perhaps, that's what I fear most – the coldness of the burned-out hearth at life's end. Whatever chances, I won't let that happen, John. I'll fight for my life.

(they kiss; music)

CAROLINE &
JOANNA: ONE DAY, THERE WILL BE A
BETTER WORLD . . .
SAFE FOR LOVE . . .
SAFE TO DREAM A
THOUSAND DREAMS OF LIFE.

(ELIZABETH leaves WILSON and joins in the song)

THE WOMEN: AND, THERE, IN THAT WORLD I
HOPE TO BE, TO
LIVE MY DREAMS AND
THEN, I'LL SEE THE
COMING OF A

GOLDEN AGE OF DREAMS . . .

(LeLIEVRE and LYON come forward; LYON practices fencing)

LeLIEVRE: The man is a positive cad! She's made it perfectly plain that his attentions are unwelcome, repugnant to her, in fact, yet he persists in his attempts. If the man weren't beneath me, I'd tell him a thing or two.

LYON: Good lord, man, if the fellow's behaving like a cad, tell him so. It's the thing to do.

LeLIEVRE: Well, I don't know as it's my place, you see. She did confide this to me, but I hardly know the man. And, he is a weaver, after all.

LYON: But, he's a man, and by God, he'll behave as one or I'll know the reason why. Elizabeth will have none of him, you say?

LeLIEVRE: Detests the man. Told me so herself.

LYON: Well, if you won't put him in his place, I will.

LeLIEVRE: Steady on, Robert. Is it our place?

LYON: Are we gentlemen?

LeLIEVRE: Of course.

LYON: Well, then?

(he tosses the sword to LeLIEVRE and turns DOWN; LeLIEVRE moves away)

You there! Wilson!

WILSON: Mr. Lyon?

LYON: See here, I've just had a talk with Miss Hughes!

WILSON: Oh, yes?

LYON: She has informed me of your attentions and I find your behaviour reprehensible, at the least. Your persistence is not the behaviour required of a gentleman, sir.

WILSON: Assuming, for the moment, that I have the least idea to what you're referring, what business could it possibly be of yours?

LYON: How dare you, sir? I had assumed I was speaking to a gentleman. A man of honour.

WILSON: My honour is, at no time, open to your scrutiny, Mr. Lyon. I'll thank you to take your aristocratic nose and place it back where it belongs. Keep your own affairs in order, before you look into others'.

LYON: Affairs? What are you implying, sir?

WILSON: What I imply is my own business and you'll damned well keep out of it!

LYON: That's the sort of answer I should have expected . . . from a weaver!

WILSON: Take care, Mr. Lyon. Even weaver's have a limit. Good day.

LYON: Don't you walk away from me, you . . . merchant! I'm not finished with you!

(ROBERTSON crosses to LYON; they stare after WILSON, then exchange a look)

ROBERTSON: Mr. Wilson's continued poetical endeavours!

WILSON: No laurel wreath adorns this simple page,
Nor heart of flame, expressing passion's rage,
Nor words can give me any cause to fear
Would be offensive to thy modest ear.
Much would I say, but little would suffice,
A word is always ample to the wise,
For one brief line discloses what is true:
This world, tho' large, is nothing without you.
But, talking's vain when little's in my power,
Then, I'll be silent till a happier hour,
And should that happier hour never be mine,
I'll mourn my lost, my dearest Valentine.

Your ever faithful servant,

John Wilson.

(he passes it to ROBERTSON)

For Elizabeth.

(ROBERTSON passes it to JOANNA)

ROBERTSON: For Elizabeth.

(JOANNA passes it to LYON)

JOANNA: For Elizabeth.

(LYON passes it to CAROLINE)

LYON: For Elizabeth.

(CAROLINE passes it to LeLIEVRE)

CAROLINE: For Elizabeth.

(LeLIEVRE passes it to ELIZABETH)

LeLIEVRE: For you.

ELIZABETH: Oh! Thank you!

(again, they all look at WILSON)

WILSON: Second polemic – on the nature of hatred! LeLievre!

LeLIEVRE: Polemic on Hatred – As Evolutionary and Developmental Force in Mankind.

Man is capable of two contrasting and overwhelming emotions; each, arguably, an intrinsic part of the other. Love is considered to be the stronger of these, by most philosophers; hatred, the lesser, more primitive, destructive corollary. Yet, think of the changes wrought by the great outcroppings of hatred throughout man's history --- the English Civil War; the American War of Independance; the French Revolution. Hatred is the most powerful tool the common man has in his struggle for life. The problem with it is that it is a force of nature, like hurricanes, volcanoes and tidal waves, and, while it can no more be withstood than these, neither can it be controlled. Hatred, released, will run searing through a generation, killing and maiming hated and hater alike, until it exhausts itself, sated, and the survivors are left to start their new-won, new-lost lives. Hatred, like nature, does not care for the individual. It is a tool for the race.

Mr. Wilson writes yet another poem!

WILSON: If I call you Phyllis, I hope you understand
The thought that drives the mind that drives this hand.
I know you are not she; you live beyond,
In worlds where she could never be.
You know the sounded way stretched darkly past
The garden walks where Phyllis' foot might stray.
At the least, you have a Wisdom grown in depth beyond your years;

A wisdom grown from closeness past with Life and fears and tears.
I call you all the same, Phyllis, fair; what's in a name?
If a Rose could dare to always smell the same,
Then are you Phyllis, while I remain alone.

(he hesitates)

WILSON: . . . and, sign it, Your Admirer.

(he hands it to LYON)

LYON: For Elizabeth?

WILSON: For Caroline.

LYON: Oh.

(he hands it to JOANNA)

For Caroline.

(she hands it to LeLIEVRE)

JOANNA: For Caroline.

(he hands it to ELIZABETH)

LeLIEVRE: For Caroline.

(she hands it to ROBERTSON)

ELIZABETH: For Caroline.

(he starts to take it to CAROLINE, but peeks at it first, mumbles through it and gets a mischievous look)

ROBERTSON: . . . your admirer. Your Admirer, Robert Lyon.

(he marks in the name and passes the poem to CAROLINE, who reads it and kisses LYON)

JOANNA: Why no poetry for me, John?

WILSON: Do you want poetry?

JOANNA: No.

WILSON: You see? For you, there are no rhymes, only hours, days, years.

JOANNA: Yet, sometimes, there should be verses.

WILSON: For what?

JOANNA: For release.

ELIZABETH: Caroline, my dear, would you care to come for a walk?

LeLIEVRE: Robert, care for a walk?

LYON &
CAROLINE: Where to?

LeLIEVRE &
ELIZABETH: Oh, nowhere in particular. How about this way?

LYON &
CAROLINE: (AS THE FOUR MEET) Oh, hello! We were just going for a walk.

LeLIEVRE &
ELIZABETH: Really? So were we! May we join you?

ALL FOUR: Thank you!

(LeLIEVRE and ELIZABETH go off arm-in-arm; LYON and CAROLINE watch them, shrug and do the same; WILSON and JOANNA watch)

JOANNA: Do you envy them their ease?

WILSON: No. I seem to have no use for glibness, either of tongue or emotion. To be at ease with your emotion is to feel it the less. I want to feel my life.

JOANNA: All of it? The good with the bad? The pain, as well?

WILSON: Most especially, the pain. All of those fleeting emotions which are there for a moment, then gone, with no trace but an empty spot where they were; those are the fiercest, the sharpest and we have the most to learn from them, yet, those are the ones we rarely face, rarely hold as part of our lives and examine and discover. We seem to be ashamed of them, perhaps because we are most afraid of them.

JOANNA: That's so. I'm afraid of them, John. I see them, perhaps, as interruptions. I don't want my life interrupted.

WILSON: But, without interruptions, without the breathing space that calamity forces upon us, life must stagnate, suffocate. It is calamity which gives life a chance to renew.

JOANNA: I'm still afraid.

(ROBERTSON comes forward)

ROBERTSON: A song dealing with some aspects of love!

(music)

JOANNA: TO HAVE AND TO
HOLD AND TO
KISS YOU . . .
I DO NOT ASK
ANYTHING MORE.

I WAKE IN THE
NIGHT AND I
MISS YOU . . .
THAT NOT WHAT
LOVING YOU'S FOR.

DON'T COUNT THE
DAYS OF OUR LOVE;
NEVER COUNT THE
NIGHTS, FOR THEY ARE
ONE DAY,
ONE NIGHT FROM
THIS NIGHT TILL THE
LAST DAY OF OUR LIVES . . .

ROBERTSON: A meeting in Bytown!

LYON: Wilson! You, there! Wilson! Come here, sir! I want a word with you.

ROBERTSON: Robert, take care.

LYON: I'll take care, right enough. I'll take care of him!

WILSON: What do you want?

LYON: Do you hear him, Simon? What do I want? An apology, first, and a piece of your hide, second, sir!

WILSON: Robert, it's plain you're either drunk or mad, so kindly quiet down and go

home.

LYON: Did you send a letter to Caroline Thom, with my name affixed to it; a letter containing some verses of a rather questionable nature?

WILSON: Nonsense! If I write any verses, Robert, I'm not in the habit of signing other people's names.

LYON: She showed me the poem, man! Now, her guardian's seen it and refused me permission to see her. Not that that's stopped us. She and I and Elizabeth and Henry had an interesting picnic, last weekend. Very interesting.

WILSON: What does that imply?

ROBERTSON: I think this has gone far enough.

LYON: Stay out of it, Simon. It seems our weaver has an interest in Miss Hughes, the way his ears pricked up at her name. Is that so?

WILSON: What are you implying about that "picnic"?

LYON: Just that the four of us spent some time alone. Is it any of your business?

ROBERTSON: Robert, stop this!

LYON: Quiet! I want to know about the weaver's poetry. Admit you sent a poem with my name on it!

WILSON: Never!

LYON: Never, what? You'll never admit it?

WILSON: I never sent it, you stupid jackass!

LYON: I say you did, you damned lying scoundrel!

(he hits WILSON in the face, who falls; ROBERTSON grabs LYON)

ROBERTSON: Stop it!

(ROBERTSON bends over WILSON)

John! John!

ELIZABETH: *(echoing)* John . . . John . . .

(CAROLONE comes forward)

CAROLINE: In order that we may increase
The drama, the action now will cease,
And we shall here insert an intermission.

We ask you to go reflect on
Us and on our play's object
And return, refreshes, prepared once more
To begin where we have left before.

An intermission now we call,
And then return, to see who'll fall.

*(music; the players leave the stage one by one, WILSON last;
lights to black; as house lights come up, the stage is empty)*

END OF ACT ONE

THE LAST DEAD MAN

a drama with music

Act Two

(black; out of the black, we begin to hear whispers)

COMPANY: John . . . John . . . John . . . *(etc.)*

WILSON: *(Covering his ears)* STOP!

(music as spots pick out one character at a time)

SEVERALLY: WE'RE WAITING HERE, AND
SO ARE YOU.
EACH OF US WAITS FOR OUR
DREAM COME TRUE.
WAITS TO BE RICH;
WAITS TO BE FED;
WAIT WHILE YOUR LIFE CRASHES
'ROUND YOUR HEAD.

WE'RE WAITING HERE, AND
WAITING STILL.
IF WAITING WILL HELP US, THEN
WAIT WE WILL.
WAIT FOR A DAY,
WAIT FOR A YEAR,
WAIT FOR A CENTURY,
WE WAIT; WE FEAR.

IF WE ALL WAITED,
SILENTLY,
WOULD SOMEONE COME TO
SET US FREE?
WAIT FOR THE TIME!
WAIT FOR THE MAN!
WAIT THE MESSIAH'S COMING
IT'S AT HAND.

WE'RE WAITING HERE, AND
SO ARE YOU.
EACH OF US WAITS FOR OUR
DREAM COME TRUE.
WAITS TO BE RICH;
WAITS TO BE FED;
WAIT WHILE YOUR LIFE CRASHES
'ROUND YOUR HEAD.

WILSON: Don't misunderstand this! I'm not talking about revolution! Revolution always

holds within it the seeds of its own failure. Look what happened to the French . . . or the Americans. No, I'm certainly not talking about revolution.

JOANNA &
ROBERTSON:

WHEN THE REVOLUTION COMES . . .

WILSON:

Mind you, I'm sure it's going to happen, one day.

JOANNA &
ROBERTSON:

. . . AND, WE, AT LAST, ARE FREE . . .

LYON:

Free to do what? Stand about, looking for work? Free to starve or fight for potato peels from someone's dustbin? Free to murder and torture each other without hinderance? That's all revolution amounts to – a brief orgy of bloodletting and revenge, followed immediately by a tyranny even worse than that which inspired your revolt in the first place. And you'll be no better off than before – worse, in fact, for now your oppressor will be yourself – and, you'll have no one else left to hate!

(the players have moved so that their positions are as they were at the end of the first act; as LYON finishes, he turns and strikes WILSON)

ROBERTSON:

Stop it!

(WILSON falls; ROBERTSON grabs LYON and pushes him away; WILSON gets to his knees, but can't rise)

John! John! Are you hurt?

WILSON:

Feels like he broke it.

ROBERTSON:

Was that necessary?

LYON:

I'll treat him the same way, next time I see him, and every time thereafter, until he admits that letter.

WILSON:

Go to the devil.

(LYON shakes ROBERTSON off and settles his clothing)

LYON:

If you wish to carry this further, I shall be at your convenience.

WILSON:

Go to the devil.

(WILSON is on his feet by now)

ROBERTSON: Are you going to challenge him?

WILSON: No.

ROBERTSON: Good.

WILSON: It's not worth that. If it doesn't go any further than this, I don't care.

ROBERTSON: And, if it does..?

WILSON: It won't.

(LeLIEVRE comes to him)

LeLIEVRE: But, it did, didn't it? Didn't it! You dreamed that night, letting it squirm in you! And, you found that there was nothing in the mind of the worst of us that was not in your own. The more you thought about that one little blow the more your anger became hatred and the more you hated, the deeper the chasm in your mind opened and you saw that you were capable of everything – of every treachery and every form of violence; and, what's even more remarkable, you found that it was enjoyable to entertain these thoughts.

WILSON: Yes! I imagined all sorts of punishments, all sorts of revenge. I found these within me, took them out, examined them and, to my horror, found that they excited me.

LeLIEVRE: Horror?

WILSON: Yes! For, within that, is a fascination, a wonder at one's own ability to conceive of such pain. This is the fascination of the fire, the shipwreck, the accident. A desire, deep-rooted and often not even hinted at, a desire to be a part of the pain, the blood and the fear . . .

LeLIEVRE: Perhaps, even to be its inflictor, to be the instrument of horror.

WILSON: And, I found that, deep as my belief is in the goodness of man, this abomination was within me, as well.

LeLIEVRE: Yes, that was the frightening part. The capability for atrocity was within you, not only within those whom you look upon as oppressors. To see it in them is simply an affirmation of all you've thought; to find it in yourself is to throw out every concept you have sweated out through the insults and prejudice you've born. So what to do, John? What to do?

WILSON: Overcome it.

(LeLIEVRE simply chuckles; he motions widely)

LeLIEVRE: Wilson's nightmare!

(eery music -- rolling glissandii and choppy, shrill chords; the others have covered themselves in black cloaks and enter moaning and breathing heavily)

LeLIEVRE: Listen, now! Hear them coming? Out of the depths of your closest fears, you can hear them coming. Closer, closer! And, see! Your hands are tied! Your feet are bound! You cannot move! And, closer, closer, they're coming! John, what will you do?

(they are around WILSON and their hands caress or grab or pull at him)

Every thought, every petty, hateful thought that you've ever nursed at your bosom is conjured up, vomited forth to taunt you now. That one! That's a little murder you once committed; rape! . . . one of hundreds you've performed. There's a theft; there an incest; another murder – two, three! A record to be proud of!

WILSON: Where?

LeLIEVRE: In your mind, John, in your mind. Hidden, tucked away, chained, barred, muted, but nevertheless, always there, waiting.

WILSON: How can you know?

LeLIEVRE: Because, you and I are one, John. We ARE brothers, after all. In this one thing, only, men become brothers. In their shared burden of guilt. Not original sin – original guilt.

WILSON: These are not actions, they are only thoughts, not even thoughts, for I never gave them a voice!

LeLIEVRE: Yet, you bear the guilt for them. Look at them, John! Voila! What are they, John?

WILSON: Blackness . . .

LeLIEVRE: What?

WILSON: Blackness! All the blackness of life, of guilt, of hate. The blackness of myself . . . yet, within that, the joy of abandon, to face the blackness and acknowledge it. Where does hope lie if this is the state of man? Can I say, you are my brother, if within my grasp is the motive, the will to murder you? Is that an answer?

(the ghosts are receding)

Is that an answer? Is it?

(JOANNA comes forward)

JOANNA: John . . .

THE OTHERS: *(jeering)* John!

JOANNA: John . . .

THE OTHERS: John!

JOANNA: John! It is possible, now, to stop this; make an end to it. If you reach out, now, and take my hand, we can turn our backs and walk away! If you could see yourself..! Look at your hands. Now, you are weak, but there are others who are strong. Stand up. Come away.

(ELIZABETH comes in to WILSON's side)

ELIZABETH: But, he must stay. Don't you see? He's tasted it, the abandon; and once the forbidden fruit is tasted, there's no sense in throwing it away.

(her attentions to WILSON are decidedly sexual)

John, there's more than guilt, here. You speak of the blackness, but remember the pleasure, as well. Both are in you. Both are part of you, no matter what you do. If you must have the guilt, remember the pleasure. Remember the pleasure . . .

(the two women withdraw, leaving WILSON in the spasms of his sexual dream; he lays gasping as it subsides)

WILSON: Oh, Jesus . . .

(LeLIEVRE steps forward)

LeLIEVRE: And, in the morning, the birds sang, as birds will do in the morning; the sun rose, as suns will do, but the heart of a man was, that morning, as dark as if night were a century long.

WILSON: Sun, birds, morning . . . all here, all the same, as if nothing could have changed overnight. It has, though. Where, last night, my anger, my pain were only a crack, the merest scratch in the earth, this morning they have become a chasm – bottomless, infinite, into which one of us must fall. If it is he, then there can be no more guilt than what I bear for thinking it; if it is I, there can

be no more guilt, at all. What a marvellous thing it can be . . .

(music; the others sing and dance with abandon)

ALL: WE DON'T NEED TO BE AFRAID, ANYMORE!
WE'VE FOUND OUT HOW TO OPEN THE DOOR TO A
MARVELLOUS WORLD; WHAT A
MARVELLOUS WORLD IT IS!

WE WON'T STOP AT ANYTHING!
WE'VE SET OUT ON A WILD, FINAL FLING IN THIS
MARVELLOUS WORLD; WHAT A
MARVELLOUS WORLD IT IS!

(WILSON goes to ROBERTSON)

WILSON: Simon, it has to be settled.

ROBERTSON: I thought it was.

WILSON: He struck me! That's beyond bearing.

ROBERTSON: You've borne it so far; bear it a while longer.

WILSON: His attitude is intolerable! I won't be pushed by any man. Simon, it must end.

ROBERTSON: Then, let it.

WILSON: Not like this.

ROBERTSON: He'll kill you.

WILSON: Perhaps.

ROBERTSON: Perhaps? Sword or pistol, he's your master.

WILSON: I won't accept swords.

ROBERTSON: Pistols, then. When have you fired one?

WILSON: I did plenty of shooting, as a boy.

ROBERTSON: Not at something that shot back.

WILSON: Will you second me or not.

ROBERTSON: If it wasn't this, you'd find something else.

WILSON: He'd find something else.

ROBERTSON: You both want this! One way or another, it'll come.

WILSON: What's your answer?

ROBERTSON: I'll second you, but, not until I've spent every effort to prevent it.

WILSON: Fine. If Mr. Lyon will apologize, I'll forget the whole thing.

ROBERTSON: And, if he won't?

(WILSON moves away)

If he won't? John! If you stop this, now, right now, it will be finished forever, but if you force this, if you try to bring it to a conclusion, it can never end! No matter what happens, it will be with you to your dying day!

JOANNA: This "affair of honour" can have no hint of honour about it. There can be no honour in dying and killing; there can be nothing in death, but death.

ROBERTSON: Correct.

JOANNA: Yet, you will take a part in it.

(he looks at her for a long moment)

ROBERTSON: What choice have I?

WILSON: What choice? The same choice as everyone else – the choice of yes or no. As simple as that.

ROBERTSON: How could it be that simple? Nothing is. What to wear each morning is not that simple, so how could this be?

WILSON: Because, here there are issues; issues of importance which should not admit of debate.

ROBERTSON: You can say to me: "There can be no debate"? What are we doing here, then? What is all this for? If I have no room for debate, think how much clearer your role should be.

WILSON: I know my role.

ROBERTSON: And, that is?

WILSON: It is what it is. No more – but, certainly, no less.

ROBERTSON: Rationalization.

WILSON: Yes.

ROBERTSON: You reserve it for yourself? Why not allow me to rationalize, too?

WILSON: Very well, rationalize. This "affair" is being precipitated through a rather immature prank on your part. Why not admit it? What is your rationalization?

ROBERTSON: Because, I can still stop this without admitting it. I no more want to be diminished than you, John. My pride is as important as yours.

WILSON: But, I took a blow for your pride.

ROBERTSON: And, now, you will pull a trigger for it. Whichever way it goes, your part becomes greater.

WILSON: Only as the situation magnifies. And, your role with it. I will be no more culpable in relation to you. Our collective culpability increases, that's all.

(CAROLINE steps forward)

CAROLINE: The challenge is given!

(ROBERTSON goes to LYON)

LYON: I won't apologize! Do you hear me, Simon? I won't apologize!

ROBERTSON: You'd prefer a bullet? How hard can it be? You struck him, man; it's just not done!

LYON: He lied to me. *That's* not done!

ROBERTSON: Apologize for the blow and he'll explain the lie, or whatever it was.

LYON: Whatever! A bald-faced lie, just like I'd expect from a weaver!

ROBERTSON: Will you, at least, talk to him?

LYON: No. My talking will be down the length of a sword, if he wants to talk.

ROBERTSON: I don't want it to come to that, Robert.

LYON: Then, you can leave! Either state your business or get out!

(ROBERTSON is forced to the point)

ROBERTSON: If you will neither apologize nor parley with him, I am instructed by my principal to ask for satisfaction, at a place and time of your convenience.

LYON: My second will call on you, later, sir.

ROBERTSON: As Mr. Wilson is no swordsman, he requests your indulgence in this, in your choice of weapons.

LYON: Naturally.

ROBERTSON: I have nothing more to say.

LYON: Good day, then. Please be available this afternoon. My second will visit you, then.

(ROBERTSON moves away)

ELIZABETH: How far will it go?

LYON: How far?

ELIZABETH: How far will it go?

LYON: To a conclusion.

ELIZABETH: For what?

LYON: Satisfaction.

ELIZABETH: And, if you kill him, will you find it?

LYON: How can I know that, before I've killed him?

(LYON moves away from her; CAROLINE shouts at his back)

CAROLINE: Don't be fooled for a minute! Don't think that anything, any question, any argument could be settled in this way. Whatever happens, it won't change anything one tiny bit. The sun will rise, the earth will turn and nothing will be settled!

LeLIEVRE: Ah, but that's where you're wrong, my dear. Violence is an extremely effective way of settling things. If you want proof, ask any citizen of Troy, if you can find one. Violence has permanently settled far more questions than diplomacy ever will. What you mean to say is that violence won't relieve the guilt, but, then, nothing will. Is everything, then, futile?

CAROLINE: You twist my words; my meanings.

LeLIEVRE: You leave them open to twisting, therefore, expect them to be twisted. Naiveté is not a virtue, Caroline. Natural naiveté is a fault corrected quickly by life; cultivated naiveté is vice of the worst sort, an affectation not to be tolerated.

CAROLINE: You are hateful.

LeLIEVRE: No. I have no hate within me. I have no emotion which I cannot use. Hatred is not for the individual; in a single person, it is counterproductive. I am not hateful, only hated. And, that is useful.

CAROLINE: Is it useful to be outcast? To have every person on their guard in your presence? To know that you will never be taken into someone's confidence, because your scheming may be read in your face?

LeLIEVRE: Whereas, your scheming lies buried much deeper? I, at least, am honest in my treachery, Caroline. Sooner an honest villain, than a scheming friend.

(JOANNA comes between them)

JOANNA: The industrialization of the nations and the condition of the poor!

WILSON: Toward the end of the 18th century, there began to develop a system of trade which has become known as world commerce. This system, through the use of technological advances, such as the steam engine . . .

(one of the others begins to imitate a steam engine)

. . . no longer relies on the limited resources of a single area to provide raw materials. Now, with fast ships and heavier machinery . . .

(another joins in as heavy machinery)

. . . the manufacturer can draw on regions thousands of miles away to provide needed materials, without any interruption in the flow of finished products.

(another joins in)

The problem with this system is the enormous cost entailed in the creation and maintenance of adequate facilities. Those who are content to work in the old way, providing limited services to a limited area, can no longer compete with the now international competition and, unable to meet the cost of expansion, go under.

(by now, there is a huge inhuman din; WILSON is caught in the machine)

And, from this process, we end up with a few extremely rich and xtremely powerful people, and an enormous number of extremely poor and extremely weak people; and, each day, the gap gets wider and the rich get fewer and the poor get more numerous.

(the din stops)

This is known as "good business."

(the engine starts again)

Everywhere, for the betterment of the few, the many are fed into the machine, are ground up and spewn out and, always, more are marching in to take the place of those used up. But, don't make the mistake of thinking this has anything to do with class! There are no classes! There are only individuals! There's only you and me . . . and you . . . and me . . . and you . . .

(he breaks free of the engine and falls to his knees)

And, until we realize that..! Until we realize that . . . !

(JOANNA comes up behind him and cradles him in her arms as he pulls himself together)

ELIZABETH: Until we realize that, there is no hope of liberty, equality or fraternity.

(a moment)

WILSON: Lyon's nightmare!

(LYON comes forward, wrapped in a blanket; he shudders as he speaks)

LYON: The groaning! The groaning! All around, from all sides, from out of the earth, from the air, itself! A world filled with the groans of millions of souls, souls trodden down under centuries of marching feet, squashed flat under the weight of their own agony. And, everywhere was black, not colour "black", but empty-black, the black of the void, of the pit. And as I listened to the groans, I realized that I, too, was groaning, heart-wrenching, agonized sobs, and, as it went on, unable to stop unable to do anything but join in the general outcry of pain, I slowly became the groaning. It filled me to the uttermost, reaching into every extreme of my being. I became the voice of the pain of those millions of souls and, through me, they cried out their anger and their frustration. "Injustice", they cried, and, "Cruelty!", and with every new soul that fell shuddering onto the heap, the cry began anew: "Injustice! This must stop!"

(he has fallen to his knees)

Above us, the marching feet trampled the newly fallen souls into that quagmire of indignity and, as my cries faded into the black, marched on, unmoved and uncaring.

WILSON: Now, you see it. Finally, at last, when it is too late, you see it. Where was your compassion when it could have helped? Where was your charity, man? Now, it has no value! Now, is too late!, for soon, one of us will be dead, and whichever it is, it will be too late for either the living or the dead. Too late and too little.

(CAROLINE moves to LYON)

CAROLINE: And, where is your compassion, John? What compassion you have is reserved for John Wilson. What gives you gives the right to condemn him? Who says that you can speak for the victims?

WILSON: I say it! As one who has lived it; as one who knows what it is to be without clothing, without food, to work endlessly for every morsel and every penny; as one of the victims, I claim the right to speak!

CAROLINE: The millions have a voice far more eloquent than yours! Their voice is the voice of terror, of atrocity; yours, the mewling of petty anger. There are greater emotions in the world than yours, John. Find them first, and you'll see the absurdity of spokesmen, orators, pontificators and politicians of all sorts. Find the great emotions and start there.

JOANNA: A song of a dream!

(music)

CAROLINE: WE DREAMED, YOU AND I, OF A
CLOUDLESS BLUE SKY AND AN
ORDERED WORLD TURNING BELOW, BUT
PLAINLY, WE SEE THAT THIS
DREAM'S NOT TO BE FOR THE
STORM CLOUDS ARE THREATENINGLY LOW.

WE PLANNED TO MAKE PLANS, AND WE'D
WALK HAND IN HAND, AND THE
SUN WOULD SHINE EVERYWHERE BRIGHT, BUT
THIS IS THE DAWN AND THE
SUN WHICH ONCE SHONE HAS BEEN
BURIED AND LEFT IN THE NIGHT.

WE WILL NOT FORGET;

WE WILL STRUGGLE THROUGH;
WE WILL KEEP OUR DREAM ALIVE!
WE, WHO'VE SEEN THE VISION;
WE, WHO'VE SENSED THE SUN;
WE WILL STRUGGLE THROUGH, SURVIVE.

WE WILL NOT FORGET;
WE REMEMBER STILL;
WE WILL KEEP ALIVE THE WORD!
WE, WHO WAIT THE DAWNING;
WE, WHO WATCH THE NIGHT,
WE WILL SHOUT TILL ALL HAVE HEARD!

(LeLIEVRE comes forward as the music ends)

LeLIEVRE: The words Shakespeare put into Richard's mouth seem to fit my every mood. Now, since I cannot prove a lover, I am determined to prove a villain. Whatever happens now, I must surely gain from it. If Lyon kills Wilson, my problem's solved; if Wilson kills Lyon, she will hate him forever for it. Either way, I win. Except, of course, if neither finds a mark, or if an apology is made. So, Henry, there is your work. Only that which is useful.

WILSON: The duel!

(the players position themselves)

June 13, 1833. A heavy rain . . .

LYON: Damned weather.

WILSON: A ploughed field . . .

ROBERTSON: Damned mud.

WILSON: And us.

(he turns to face the men)

ROBERTSON: Are you determined on this, gentlemen?

LeLIEVRE: We are, sir.

ROBERTSON: I meant Mr. Lyon.

LeLIEVRE: I speak for him.

ROBERTSON: John?

WILSON: Let's get on with it.

LeLIEVRE: Will you assist me with the loading?

ROBERTSON: Certainly, sir.

LYON: *(aside)* Everything is so hazy. I can hardly see the forest, scarcely a hundred yards. The rain. The rain. Each drop hits the sodden earth with a sound like . . . like a pistol shot. I may soon be dead.

WILSON: Strange, how clearly I see and hear everything. I had imagined everything would be a blur, indistinct, rushing and roaring toward the final crash, but each sound, each sight is distinct, crystalline, despite the rain, the mist. It's as if my mind were hoarding each detail, storing it away. I may soon be dead.

LeLIEVRE: Your weapons, gentlemen.

(LYON motions for WILSON to choose)

WILSON: There is the tiniest of engraving on the scroll work of this pistol. Incredibly delicate etching done by some craftsman in . . . where? . . . Paris? Odd, that he would spend so much time on some thing no one would notice. I may soon be dead.

LYON: Confound this mud. I can scarcely move. I wonder if he can see me shiver? I should have worn a cloak. This rain covers me like a blanket, smothering all sound, all light, only the roar of my heart and the pulse of blood at the back of my eyes. I wonder if he can see me shiver? I may soon be dead.

ROBERTSON: Take your marks, please, gentlemen.

(LYON and WILSON go to opposite sides of the stage, to positions ROBERTSON has paced out during the above; they face away from each other)

ROBERTSON: At Monsieur LeLievre's count, you will turn, take aim and fire. God bless you, both.

LeLIEVRE: Check your priming, gentlemen.

(they do so)

LYON: Ready.

WILSON: Ready.

LeLIEVRE: When I count three, you may turn and fire, gentlemen. Full cock.

(they cock their pistols)

One!

(music; the aim is to time the boom-chuck of the accompaniment with his count)

Two!

(as the pianist holds the chord, the WOMEN gather and ROBERTSON and LeLIEVRE turn down to form a choral pose)

THE GROUP: STANDING FACE TO FACE ALONG THE BARREL OF A GUN!
RESISTING THE TEMPTATION TO JUST TURN AWAY AND RUN!
THE THOUGHTS THAT COME TO LAUGH AT YOU AND
HAVE THEIR HOWLING FUN, WHILE YOU'RE
STANDING FACE TO FACE ALONG THE BARREL OF A GUN.

(suddenly, double tempo)

STANDING FACE TO FACE ALONG THE BARREL OF A GUN!
RESISTING THE TEMPTATION TO JUST TURN AWAY AND RUN!
THE THOUGHTS THAT COME TO LAUGH AT YOU AND
HAVE THEIR HOWLING FUN, WHILE YOU'RE
STANDING FACE TO FACE ALONG THE BARREL OF A GUN.

(the group go back to their places; LYON and WILSON come DOWN)

WILSON: We have discussed love, Lyon. Let us continue with honour; honour in a world of inequality.

LYON: You first, this time.

WILSON: Very well. You claim to be a man with honour, but on every hand are the weak, the poor, the unfed. Slavery still exists, and injustice . . . hunger. How can you have honour while you ignore this? How do you justify yourself? I don't care one whit for honour. It is an archaism which has never belonged to the real world. You speak of honour, but where is it, when men are starving? You speak of truth, but the truth is that men are enslaved in shackles made by people like you, to serve people like you. There can be no honour in a world which contains hunger, injustice and cruelty. A world which denies men's dignity.

LYON: It exists in spite of these things! It exists to hold in front of them and say,

"This, at least, is good!" For, as long as men can look to those ideals, there is hope, beyond the pain and the hatred.

- WILSON: What do you know of that? All you know of pain is its infliction! What do you know of the pain around you? Do you think your petty heartaches can be compared to the misery in this land?
- LYON: I have no petty heartaches, sir. I am not going to be involved with pettiness. I am reserving myself for grander passion than that. My emotions are not those of some animal, to be whipped to and fro with each change of wind. Give me no pettiness! I would roar to the sky; challenge Olympus with my passions. I will not squander them in fleeting urges, affixing them for a time to each pretty face, each well-turned ankle that falls within my gaze.
- WILSON: Have a care, sir.
- LYON: My passion is reserved for some mighty cause, something which will carve a path across time, so people may look and say, "Here lived, here loved a man!"; and my guide-post to that point, which will hold me to that course of grander passion, will be my honour, which is dearer to me than all else. Do you think humanity thanks you for your concern? No, keep your concern and let me find my passions. That is the measure of a man.
- WILSON: What do you know of passion; what could you know? By your own admission, you love no one, nothing except your honour. You make me laugh, with talk of passions.
- LYON: How can you have passion, real passion which means something more than animalism, without honour? You boast that honour means nothing to you without dignity, but what is dignity but honour?
- WILSON: Human dignity does not require written codes and rules of pretty etiquette. It is what elevated man above the beast to start with and what has kept him above them, no matter what horrors are inflicted upon him; and, it is equal, as freely given to the rich as the poor, to the cripple as the athlete, to the idiot as the genius. It is the simple right to assert – I AM A MAN.
- LYON: And, if I strip you naked, throw you among the pigs, beat you, force you to eat the swill that is served up to the swine? What do you become, then?
- WILSON: It remains. I am a man. It is not a function of clothing, diet or habitat, Lyon. It is a function of identity.
- LYON: Suppose I reach into that region of your mind which contains your identity? If I could find that area of your brain labelled "John Wilson" and if I cut it out? What then?

WILSON: It is then a function of what you have become, for in trying to degrade me, you will have degraded yourself.

LYON: A pretty distinction. No, Wilson, man, any man, is simply what he makes of himself. There is nothing inherent, no rights which come into effect with his first squawling lungful of air. He has no more right to walk the earth than the monsters of old, which once did, and are now extinct.

WILSON: And, if the mass of man whom your kind would grind under-foot should rise up and destroy you all?

LYON: Then, I shall join the millions of others who have likewise been trodden under, and I shall be neither the first nor the last dead man, and you will never hear me complain, any more than you hear their complaints.

WILSON: One day, Lyon, you will be trod under.

LYON: One day, Wilson, so will you.

(JOANNA interrupts)

JOANNA: John, you have given us words, put into our mouths thousands and thousands of words, but what do they mean, measured against your actions? Measured against what you have done to me; what is happening with Robert . . . by this standard, no amount of words will stand.

WILSON: Correct. Yet, a man will never escape the gallows if the measure of his worth is to be predicated only on his actions. There is, there must be more to it. Still, you mistake my intentions, if you think I am trying to justify myself with words. The action we, you, are playing here is a part of history. The words we are speaking are not. They are words, nothing more, and go out from me to you and vanish forever. Who remembers, five years after his death, what a man thought on any subject? Neither words nor actions are useful as tools to measure the worth of a man.

JOANNA: What, then?

WILSON: Perhaps, nothing.

JOANNA: Monsieur LeLievre counts three!

(they take their positions for the duel)

LeLIEVRE: When I count three, you may turn and fire, gentlemen. Full cock.

(LYON and WILSON cock their pistols)

One! Two! Three!

(LYON and WILSON turn to each other and fire; a moment)

ROBERTSON: Missed, by God! Both of 'em!

LYON: *(aside)* I'm still alive.

WILSON: *(aside)* I'm still alive. *(aloud)* That's it, then?

ROBERTSON: That's it.

LYON: Fine.

LeLIEVRE: Gentlemen, I'm sorry, but there must be another shot.

ROBERTSON: Damn you, sir! These men are satisfied!

LeLIEVRE: But, the rules are not. If we do not follow the rules, then what we have done here is not an honourable duel, but attempted murder. The contest must follow the code.

ROBERTSON: The code's fifty years old!

LeLIEVRE: I like to believe that my honour follows a code much older than that. Fashions in honour do not change.

ROBERTSON: Do you want to see someone dead?

LeLIEVRE: The code is very specific in this case. With no apology offered before the fire . . .

ROBERTSON: John?

WILSON: I won't apologize.

ROBERTSON: Do you think he'll miss, next time?

WILSON: I won't apologize.

ROBERTSON: Robert, for God's sake . . . !

LYON: No.

LeLIEVRE: I must ask you not to adress my principal, Mr. Robertson, unless acting as president. If you will allow me to finish – with no apology offered before the fire, by the one who struck the blow, the contest must continue for two shots,

or until a serious hurt is incurred. Any apology must come from the one who has struck the blow, after which the other party may simply explain his lie.

WILSON: I did not lie!

LeLIEVRE: Gentlemen, it remains. There must be another shot, at the least. Mr. Robertson, you shall act as president.

(ELIZABETH comes forward)

ELIZABETH: Now, we are looking at the supreme foolishness of which man is capable. Two men, neither of whom wishes to harm the other, fighting to the death over a woman who does not, and likely will not belong to either.

JOANNA: You are wrong, Elizabeth. This has nothing to do with you. It has to do with many things, some of them admirable, others frightening, some simply foolish, as you say, but it has nothing to do with you.

(WILSON steps forward)

WILSON: Polemic on Inequality, Injustice and Poverty.

(he motions to JOANNA)

JOANNA: We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created unequally; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are death, bondage and the persecution of non-conformists; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men.

This is the voice of the cynic crying in the wilderness and you smile. This is the agitator, rabble-rouser and you smile. Yet, the simple fact is that no government anywhere, no matter how benignly conceived, has ever avoided falling under the control of the powerful few. And the powerful few can maintain their power only through the exploitation and eventual destruction of the weak. Governments are created by a society and a society implies both inequality and injustice . . . and these can be found wherever we see the outward sign of their existence. Poverty! Wherever there is poverty, there is injustice. Not simply poverty of impecunity, but poverty of the mind, poverty of disease, poverty of hopelessness. There is the real weapon. The removal of hope! The systematic deprivation of man's most treasured concepts – freedom, love, dignity – leading to the utter confounding of the human soul. And, you say, "It cannot happen to me. It will not happen to me" . . . and I smile.

(she retires; silence for a moment)

ELIZABETH: More words.

WILSON: Exactly.

ELIZABETH: More words! Nothing else. Words! Words! Words! I can give you words!

(she goes to ROBERTSON)

ELIZABETH: Give me words!

ROBERTSON: Brotherhood!

(she goes to CAROLINE)

ELIZABETH: Give me words!

CAROLINE: Equality!

(she goes to LYON)

ELIZABETH: Words, Robert!

LYON: Liberty!

(she goes to LeLIEVRE)

ELIZABETH: Words!

LeLIEVRE: Revolution!

ELIZABETH: That's the word! Again!

LeLIEVRE: Revolution!

ELIZABETH: Everyone!

THE GROUP: REVOLUTION! REV-O-LU-TION! REV-O-LU-TION! REV-O-LU-TION!

(WILSON watches; the chant stops; silence)

ELIZABETH: Now, listen, John. What do you hear?

WILSON: Nothing.

ELIZABETH: If we added a thousand more words to what we have said, it would mean no more than it does, now.

WILSON: Now, you see it!

- JOANNA: We see that all of this has been for nothing.
- WILSON: Yes! For nothing. Exactly for nothing! Think! And, see! We have given meanings to words, ideas, concepts and now we are forever trapped by meanings. So, I give you words! I give you thousands of words, and hope that from those words NOTHING will come, an absence of meaning, that we may start again from nothing, and think, this time, from possibility, instead of meaning.
- LYON: You defeat yourself, with the very meaning of your own words. Futility, reduced to absurdity. We must, by our very natures, find meaning in what we see and do, and, having found meaning, it becomes forever a part of us.
- ROBERTSON: Remove the absolute.
- WILSON: Yes! Absolute meanings require absolute responses! Remove them and what do you have, then?
- ELIZABETH: Nothing.
- WILSON: Nothing.
- LeLIEVRE: More words. More rhetoric. There is one absolute you can never remove – the absolute of humanity. Beneath the rhetoric, you are still a man.
- WILSON: But, what is a man? Define me, please.
- LYON: What, and assign meaning to words?
- WILSON: With the hope of removing it, later. What is man?
- CAROLINE: Man is the animal who laughs.
- ROBERTSON: Man is the animal who reasons.
- ELIZABETH: Man is the animal who grieves.
- LYON: Man is the animal who dreams.
- JOANNA: Man is the animal whose delight is the destruction of his own kind.
- LeLIEVRE: Man is the animal who conceives of "I".
- WILSON: All different; all unique; all very human.
- LeLIEVRE: Human, yes! For the absolute is still there. We are all still human – carnivorous, jealous, petty . . . and a hundred more things, none of them

promising anything more than what has gone before.

CAROLINE: You're a pessimist.

LeLIEVRE: As if labelling it proves it wrong.

JOANNA: But, where does this lead to, John? What can come of this? I still don't see what you hope to accomplish.

WILSON: The removal of concepts! Repeat the words often enough and they will lose all meaning, requiring re-definition before they are used again.

LeLIEVRE: Which leaves you where you were.

WILSON: Perhaps, but, for an instant, there is a chance, just a chance, to remove all the meanings and all the structures and all habits and prejudices which we have piled on ourselves and replace them with freedom — freedom to define our patterns for ourselves, as befits each individual, based, not on custom or prejudice, but on our own peculiar needs and desires; and, that is where it must ultimately lead, for, in the end, we are alone . . .

(music – very soft, building into the REVOLUTION SONG intro)

. . . sailing a voyage that no other man can know, that no other man wants to know, moving along a path charted by our beliefs, our actions, our thoughts, from our first fearful breath to our last . . . and the final measure of a man, of humanity, must be his responsibility!

LYON: Words, again. Nothing more.

WILSON: Of course! Words! Words! Let us have words!

(music --- he shouts to be heard over it)

WILSON: For, call yourselves what you will, not one of us can be free until we take the responsibility for the world onto ourselves and hold it tightly and know it for our legacy, our birthright!

THE OTHERS: WHEN WILL THE REVOLUTION COME?
WHEN, WHEN, WHEN, WHEN?
WHEN WILL THE HEARTS OF MEN BE FREE?
WHEN, WHEN, WHEN, WHEN,
WHEN?

WHEN WILL WE STRING UP ALL DICTATORS?
WHEN WILL THE MASSES RISE?

DO IN ALL MANIPULATORS?
CHOP THOSE WE DESPISE?

WHY DO WE SUFFER THIS OPPRESSION?
WHY, WHY, WHY, WHY?
WHY BOW DOWN BEFORE AGGRESSION?
WHY, WHY, WHY, WHY,
WHY?

WHY DO THE POOR STILL VAINLY STRUGGLE,
WHEN WE COULD FEED THEM NOW?
WHY ARE OUR LIVES A WASTED HOPE,
WHEN SAINTS HAVE SHOWN US HOW?

GIVE US BREAD AND
GIVE US WINE AND
LET MEN NOW BE FREE!

(the song ends with a crash)

LeLIEVRE: The final shot!

(WILSON and LYON each take a pistol; the others arrange themselves)

WILSON: I'm going to scream any moment. It's a wonder I haven't before now. I fired that first shot without even seeing him; I think I closed my eyes. I'm going to scream, I know I am.

LYON: One of us will be hit, this time, I know it. That damn-fool Henry! We could have been half-way home, by now, but I'm afraid . . . my God, I am afraid! I never thought I would be, but I'm afraid.

ROBERTSON: Gentlemen! I shall give the signal this time. When I say, "Take your marks", you will do so. When I say "Prepare", you will cock your weapons; when I say "Now", you will turn and fire. Understand?

WILSON: Yes, of course.

ROBERTSON: Mr. Lyon?

LYON: Yes.

ROBERTSON: Take your marks, gentlemen.

(they stand as before)

WILSON: Oh god, I'm going to be sick. The ground is going up and down. I'm going to vomit on the spot. Come on, Simon, get on with it! What did he say? What . . . ?

(half-turning, he sees LYON cock his weapon, so he does likewise)

God, I'm going to be sick. I'm going to be . . .

LYON: Oh, god, what are we doing? We're going to kill each other! Damn you, Henry, it's not worth that!

(he spins, lifting his pistol well out of the line of harm)

NO! *(aloud)*

LeLIEVRE:

NOW!

(WILSON spins and fires; LYON falls; slowly the others gather; ROBERTSON takes WILSON's pistol and joins the others; WILSON is alone at one side of the stage)

JOANNA: And, now there is one more.

CAROLINE: One more dead man and to no more purpose than all the others.

(she exits)

ELIZABETH: Look at them! Piling one upon the other, mountains of dead!

JOANNA: And, the others. See them? See the poor? The starving? Lifting their hands high, while their children cry out!

ROBERTSON: And, the poor, too, are added to the heaps, the quivering piles; and still they grow in number!

(he exits)

LeLIEVRE: Here, there and everywhere and what can you do, John?

WILSON: Live! Live and work to give back the what's been taken.

LeLIEVRE: Give it back? What can you give back to Lyon, now? What can you give back to yourself?

WILSON: Dignity.

JOANNA: Empty words! Actions speak, John, not words.

(she exits)

WILSON: It is not actions, but responsibility! I have, I will bear responsibility!

LeLIEVRE: A martyr, now? St. John of the Gun? Hypocrite! This is the sum of it, John, and the sum is nothing.

(he exits)

WILSON: But, sum the nothings and they are something! Does no one see?

ELIZABETH: I see . . . something.

WILSON: So?

ELIZABETH: So. I see the measure of a man that goes beyond the words. I see a truth. I see what can come of you and I.

WILSON: And, what is that?

ELIZABETH: Perhaps . . . nothing.

(lights down suddenly to WILSON; ELIZABETH exits in the darkness; WILSON sits CENTRE; LYON stands just behind and to one side)

WILSON: Are you still there, Robert?

LYON: Oh, yes.

WILSON: When will you leave me?

LYON: When it is time, John.

ELIZABETH: John . . .

LYON: John . . .

ELIZABETH: John!

LYON: John . . .

WILSON: Here.

ELIZABETH: There will be a half-century of June 13th's to come.

WILSON: No. Only one. Again and again. Only one.

ELIZABETH: What do you hope to find in them?

WILSON: One moment. One moment with a vast nothing of possibility . . . for just one, brief moment.

ELIZABETH: And if you find that moment, that nothing, what will you make of it?

WILSON: Everything.

(Lights to black)

END OF PLAY