

# Otho and Poppaea

(From an unfinished play.)

SCENE: The Gardens of Agrippina in the Vatican.

OTHO AND  
POPPAEA

Otho. A word, Poppaea!

Pop.

I will speak with you

If you will speak for kindness; but your brows  
Are sick and stormy: why do you frown on me?  
I will not speak unless it is for love.

Otho. Nothing but love, Poppaea; nothing less.

Pop.

Then sit by me and take my hand, and tell me  
Why you are sick and stormy and unkind  
For nothing less than love.

Otho.

If I should sit

So near you as to touch you; (*she comes near him*) no,  
this once

I will not touch you, and this once I will  
Speak to the end.

Pop.

(*sitting down*) Why, stand then, and so far,  
And come no nearer, and by all the gods  
Speak, and if you would have it be the end,  
You are the master here, not I.

Otho

Alas,

I fear the end is over. Yet, if once,  
As I thought once, you loved me, if you keep  
So much remembrance as to have not forgot  
How, when, how much, I loved you, tell me now  
What you would have me do.

Pop.

You love me still?

Otho.

Still.

Pop.

And no less than when you coveted  
My husband's wife, and still no less than when  
You heated Caesar, praising me?

Otho.

No less?

No more, Poppaea?

Pop.

There was a time once,

You loved me lightly; there was a time once  
You taught me to love lightly; and a time  
Before that time, if you had loved me then  
I had not loved you lightly, Otho. Now

OTHO AND  
POPPAEA

*Otho.*

I have learned your lesson, and I ask of you  
No more than what you taught me.

Miserable,

And a blind fool, and deadly to myself,  
I have undone my life; it is I who ask  
What you have taught me; for I cannot live  
Without that constant poison of your love  
That you have drugged me with, and withered me  
Into a craving fever. There is a death  
More cruel in your arms than in the grave,  
More exquisite than many tortures, more  
An ecstasy than agony, more quick  
With vital pangs than life is. If I must,  
Bid me begone, and let go and die.

*Pop.* There is no man I would not rather know  
Alive to love me. What have I done to you,  
Otho, that you should cry against me thus?

*Otho.* I will ask Nero: you I will not ask.

*Pop.* Otho, I hold your hand with both my hands,  
Look in my face, and read there if I lie;  
But I will love you, Otho, if you will.

*Otho.* I hold your hands, I look into your eyes,  
There is no truth in them; they laugh with pride  
And to be mistress of the souls of men.

*Pop.* I will not let you go unless you swear  
That you believe me; tell me, is it true,  
Nothing but truth, and do you really love  
Nothing but me?

*Otho.* There is not in the world  
Anything kind or cruel, anything  
Worth the remembering, else: but you are false,  
False for a crown, and you are Cressida,  
False for the sake of falseness.

*Pop.* On my life,  
I love you, and I will not let you go.  
The crown makes not the Cæsar; have I not found  
More than a kingdom here? Take this poor kiss,  
And this, and this, for tribute.

- Otho.                   Either the Gods  
                          Have sent some madness on me, or I live  
                          For the first time in my life.
- Nero *enters quietly and comes up to Otho and Poppaea.*
- Nero.                   My most dear friend,  
                          Once, being with this woman who stands here,  
                          (Do you remember?) you, with her good leave,  
                          Shut to the door upon me: I knocked then,  
                          Hearing your voices merry with the trick,  
                          And no man opened, and I went away.  
                          I ask now of this woman, and not now  
                          As Cæsar, but your rival, Otho, still,  
                          I bid her choose between us. Let her speak,  
                          And you, my Otho, listen.
- Otho.                   If the truth  
                          Live in your soul, speak now, Poppaea, now  
                          The last time in the world.
- Nero. (*smiling*) Poppaea?
- Pop. (*throwing herself into his arms*). Need  
                          Poppaea speak? Nero knows all her heart.
- Nero. Is this enough, Otho?
- Otho.                   It is enough;  
                          Otho knows all her heart.

ARTHUR SYMONS