

“The war of the chess-board”

a play by Manuel António Pina

Preface

A will of paint
A soul of wood

The buffoon comes to the front part of the stage and says:

Buffoon:

Once upon a time there was a chess-board.
Once upon a time there were also two boys.

They were both all day playing
with Kings, Queens, Bishops and Pawns.
Sitting face to face, in front of the chess-board,
each one commanded a whole army
of wooden pieces fighting fiercely
as if, instead of pieces, they were people.
All day long they played the fierce game
putting pieces and board to fire and sword.

Bedtime came
and they both went to bed without finishing
the playing War they had started.
But the pieces alone carried on,
In the dark, in the bedroom, making war,
fighting, struggling hard, opposing,
fighting one another without knowing
that the Generals were already dreaming ...

A confused War then began
being played in the middle of darkness.
Some Pawns fought, others talked,
a Bishop arrested a Knight
and they both played cards and had a snack
sitting at the Board corner.

Another Knight, when he was forced to
ride, fell down the horse
and as he had run and was caught
he was given as a runaway and was shot down.

With the Generals sank in a deep sleep
the conflict spread into the rest of the world,
and in the fight came in puppets and little bears,
toy-soldiers, balls and little horses...

The Queen did what she pleased,
a Always-in-Foot, lying, was playing dead,
the King was wandering around
giving orders who no one performed...

And if the Chess Pieces had a wish,
if they were capable of feeling and suffering,
if at they own way had a heart,
a wish of paint, a wooden soul?

If the King ruled, the Queen "to be king",
if the Bishop intrigued and prayed?
It can very well thus succeed
without them knowing or no one knowing.

And the game of the Chess is a life
lived by a wooden way
by people for whom the entire World
are the black and white Houses of the Board...

Scene 1

The declaration of war

The actor who plays the White King,
with the Crown in his hand:

Actor:

Attention, a lot of attention!
Come in, my lords, come in!
The War is going to begin!
It is almost beginning the performance!

There comes the White King armed,
With Soldiers surrounded!
But he is angrier with himself
than with his enemy!

The Black King also comes
entering the other entrance!
He has a worrying appearance
and also the Queen!
At no time there will be a chance meeting
of such cruelty:
they are going to fight one another
and against their will!

None of them wants to fight
but the Fight has begun!
The Pieces have to play
as the Player told so!
And the most open-hearted Fight,
The worst Confrontation,
will take place in the heart
of the White and Black Kings.

Attention, a lot of attention!
Come in, my lords, come in!
The War is going to begin!
It is almost beginning the performance!

Scene 2

The actor puts on the Crown in the head:

White King

Since the world is world that I move
in an endless war fighting.
I don't know why it began, nor when,
Nor how it is going to end.
On one side I and my Warriors,
my Bishops, my Knights;
on the other side the Black King my Enemy,
who also doesn't know why he is fighting with me.
Rooks against Rooks, Bishops against Bishops,
Queen against Queen, Pawns against Pawns...
Sometimes we ask: "Why all this?"
And we don't see any motives or reasons!
But we keep on fighting and making war
as if God was in command
of our lives and our will
and even if our freedom
wasn't free except in doing
what God's will wants.

The truth is that I am fed up with all this,
I don't even know why I don't give up
and I don't go to have a rest to any place
without Strategies and Secret Plans,
without White Friends or Black Enemies!

The Queen is crazy, the Bishop slightly crazy,
I fed up with Knights and Pawns,
and Tactics, and Orders, and Instructions...
What damn Kingdom is this where I rule
without at least a party now and then?
What Court so little joyful mine is:
everything is Army, even the Queen!

Then come the White Queen and the White Bishop.

White Queen

My Lord, we have bad news from the chess-board!
The Black Bishop attacked by the flank
and imprisoned the White Knight!
We had lost a Pawn, now the Knight!

White Bishop

With the Knight in prison and a Pawn less,
if the Black Tower comes to action
Your Majesty will stay without protection!
You need to change right now your position!

White king (Becomes very worried)

Do something! Attack as well!
Where are the Towers? Does the other Bishop come?
Change, rook, move backwards everybody,
Stand everyone in front of me!

(Remark)

Didn't I tell you so? I spend all my life attacking and moving backwards!
I just feel like leaving them and deserting!

White Queen (Unfolding a white paper with the Plans)

The way the Battle is,
moving backwards doesn't help nor delays.
And if the Black Tower arrives at the 2nd House
There are no sixes and sevens that save us!
My Lord, you can't lose your head!
We have time to organize the Defense!
If your Majesty gives your approval,
The Bishop and I will start the action.

White King

But what can you both do?
Take at least an escort of Pawns...

White Bishop

Stay calm your Majesty.
We have everything Very Well Planned.

White Queen

I move forward by the Middle of the Chess-Board
and the Bishop protects my moving.
I attack the Black King and I don't give him a rest
as long as the Knight isn't released!

White King

Go then, and the Lord be praised.
Bishop, pray to the Lord to protect us.
My life and my kingdom are in your hands and God's hand!

(The White Queen and the White Bishop leave.

The White King stays by himself. He sits in a chair, very sad.)

White King

This stupid war must have an end.
I have never harmed the Black King,
nor did he hurt me!
Why this foolish and bloody duel?
Some day I will order a cease fire
and I will put an end to this silly Game! –
Call the Buffon, I need silliness!
The Buffon is the only person with good sense!

The Buffon comes dancing and sings the
SILLY WAR SONG:

The Buffon comes to tell you
such a singular tale
that just a silly Buffon
could have made it up.

In a far away land
- Not this one, you see –
Two kings were fighting a War
and didn't know why!

They didn't want to fight,
They didn't wish to fight.
And fought without wanting,
And fought without wishing!

Nobody knew how to explain
how such a crazy War began
nor how it was going to end!

It was a War that existed
Because it existed and had existed,
Which didn't make sense
But it also didn't matter...
All this occurred
in a far away Country!
Here such thing I didn't see,
have faith in the Buffon I am...

Scene 3

Black King

At the Black King's Palace.

The Black Queen and the Black Knight enter running.

Black Queen (very worried)

My Lord, my Lord, The White Queen is marching up,
with the Bishop and the Towers protecting her!
We moved backwards the Troops, we lost two Pawns,
things are heavy to our positions!

Black King

Call the A8 Tower to come near me,
and the onward Bishop can also go backwards!

Black Knight

Pay attention, because if you expose yourself, it is the end,
You cannot come between nobody.

Black King

I can run...

Black Queen

Running is not an option!
The Towers would be blocked.
We would lose the Rook and to win it back
We would need two or three moves.

Black King

The Bishop, even so, can come back,
We need him here more than there!

Black Knight

But, my Lord, if the Bishop returns,
the White Knight gets loose,
and can cause us terrible surprises
with double attacks to our defenses...

Black King

What shall I do to defend myself?
We should continue to challenge the Centre...
Let us think well while we have time,
Soon we cannot have time...

(To the Black Queen:)

Meanwhile enter inside,
The Little Prince is crying
With fear from the roar of Guns.
A while ago I had to reprimand him,
he wanted to climb the Towers to play
and to play the top (child's toy) with the Pawns!

Black Queen

I cannot think in the Prince now:
we must take action without any delay!

(Unfolds a Big Map over the table:)

The Plan is to concentrate several Pieces
Around Your Majesty
And leave others with possibility
of retreat if necessary.
The Bishop will keep the Knight
imprisoned as long as he can;
our Knights, in their turn,
will not let the Enemy at peace.
You must maintain the pressure in the Centre
But ready to go backwards any time.
I, with your Majesty permission,
will also go to the Centre of the Chess-board;
if I can get there first,
the White Queen will not attack so easily.

Black King

What about the Prince? Don't you
want to go inside and see if he is sleeping?

Black Queen

No way. I must leave immediately
or the White Queen arrives in front.
I just need an approval
For the Action Plan!

Black King

I approve the Plan. It sounds intelligent.
Give the orders and take the Command.
I shall defend myself and when
I can I shall rock immediately.
Concerning the Prince, in order for him to sleep,
don't make any noise fighting.

The Queen leaves immediately. The black King stays alone.

Black King

This War doesn't make any sense.
I don't know how I am into it!
It is a War that doesn't say anything to me,
By mysterious wills declared.

(Thinks for a long time:)

I shall send the King a Peace Emissary.

(Speaking outward:)

Soldiers, tell the Queen to come back!
She must come to my presence immediately,
I have an urgent mission for her.

The Black Queen returns.

Black Queen

Did you call me, my Lord?

Black King

I had a task for you. But I shall do better.
I shall do it myself.
The Knight must announce me to the other King!
I want to discuss with him an important issue.
Peace is the most important issue in the World!
And you, my Lady, go and rock
The Prince for him not to cry...

Black Queen

I will go, my Lord, if that is Your Will.
After all I have the same opinion as Your Majesty.
The war doesn't fit neither us nor them.
We kill each other and, however,
the Chess-board is also Black and White
and has got plenty of Houses for everyone!

THE PEACE

The two Kings are standing in front of each other.

Black King

What brings me here is
to propose a Peace Proposal
The War has lasted for too long.
If you also think that
We could both call it an end.
It would be a great joy for me.

White King

My friend, I think exactly like you.
It will be also a great joy for me.
I dreamt with this day for so long,
Thank God that it came at last!
Let us sign right now the Peace Proposal
and let us organize a Great Party.
It never existed a War worst than this one...

Black King

There are no good Wars, they are all bad...

White King

Indeed, but this one that is over
was a War that no one had declared,
that nobody wanted, that nobody understood,
a War that existed just because it existed...

Black King

We didn't have reasons to begin it
but we have plenty of reasons to finish it!
Let us thus finish it once for all.
It shall be Peace in the Chess-board!

The two kings hug each other and put their weapons aside.

Epilogue

On the stage stays only the Actor that plays the White King,
with his Crown in his hands. At a great distance the Peace Rejoicings echo.

Actor

Everything ended, as you seen, well.
(At least till a future War begins...)
Both kings showed good sense,
Strength of will, gentleman personality,
But, in a Chess Game,
everything is decided outside the Chess-board.
When the children wake up what will happen?
Will they continue to dream and the Peace will occur?
Or it will begin again
The Chess-board War?
This time nobody gave checkmate,
But how long will the Stalemate last?
Finally, for us, Pieces, that is all the same:
As long as the Piece lasts, let's celebrate Piece.

The volume of the music increases outside. By the Chess-board rush in the Pieces, celebrating, and the Actor puts the Crown in his head and joins them. Everybody sings the Peace Song.