



THE MAKERS OF VIOLENCE

A Play By

ROBERT GITTINGS

H E I N E M A N N

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A Play in Two Acts

BY
ROBERT GITTINGS

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IN AFFECTIONATE FRIENDSHIP
TO GEORGE PHILIP BAKER
Fellow of the Royal Historical Society
UPON WHOSE WORKS
PUBLISHED AND UNPUBLISHED
THIS PLAY IS BASED

The Makers of Violence was commissioned by the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral for the Festival of 1951. It was first produced in the Chapter House on July 18th by John Allen, with scenery by Harald Melvill and costumes by Elizabeth Haffenden. The music for the song was composed by John Hotchkis.

CHARACTERS :

Norse :

OLAF, *a very young man, heir to the throne of Norway.*

RANI, *an old man, hostleader of the Norse troops.*

THRYM, *head of the Norse fightingmen.*

Danish :

CANUTE, *a young man, heir to the throne of Denmark, and leader of the joint expedition against England.*

THORKEL, *known as the Tall, hostleader of the Danish troops.*

HAREK, *head of the Danish fightingmen.*

English :

ALPHEGE, *Archbishop of Canterbury, prisoner in the camp of the Northmen.*

STIGAND, *a monk of Canterbury, his companion, a young man.*

A WOMAN, *wife of the English rebel leader.*

Norse and Danish fightingmen and standard-bearers.

There are two acts. The scene is the camp of the Northmen at Greenwich, and the action is continuous.

ACT ONE

The time is the week after Easter in the year 1012. The scene is the camp of the Danes and Norsemen at Greenwich, on the bank of the Thames. A high stockade, with a gate right, forms the background. Centre, on a mound, is the double tent of the two princes, made of brightly-striped sailcloth; the raven flag of Denmark is planted on its right, and the Norse lion on its left, each with its standard-bearer. Further right is the single tent of the Danish hostleader, THORKEL, on the left that of his Norse counterpart, RANI. In front of both these tents are the trestles, benches, stools, drinking horns, flagons, platters and huge bones of old feasts. The flaps of all three tents are shut, and no one is about except the two standard-bearers, who stand motionless; but soon, from the stockade gate, Danish and Norse fightingmen appear, brawling and singing, led by THRYM the Norseman and HAREK the Dane.

ALL.

Haro! Haro!
The ox has bled for us!
Our feasting done,
He gives his head for us,
A skull to run with wine like blood,
A marrow bone to crack more food—
Haro! Haro!
The ox has bled for us!

Haro! Haro!
The earth is fed for us,
They fatten fields
To render bread for us,

We wear the wool that others weave,
We glut with gold that others give—

Haro! Haro!

The ox has bled for us!

Haro! Haro!

They live in dread for us,

Their men are slaves,

Their women bed for us,

Our foot is on their kings and priests,

We are the masters, they the beasts—

Haro! Haro!

The ox! The ox has bled for us!

[The tent-flaps are drawn apart. RANI and THORKEL appear from their tents, left and right.]

RANI. Silence!

THORKEL. Silence there, silence!

[The princes CANUTE and OLAF are seen playing chess in their tent.]

CANUTE.

Check.

[A pause while OLAF moves.]

And checkmate!

OLAF *[striding down to the men, very angry]*.

Who was that bawling and brawling here! Some drunken Dane!

CANUTE *[following]*. Or one of your Norsemen, Olaf?

OLAF *[turning on him]*.

One of my men!

CANUTE. Olaf! To lose at chess? So little!

OLAF.

But much,

Canute, that every day your Danes contrive
To kill my quiet and murder my men!

CANUTE.

Murder!

OLAF. I said Murder!

CANUTE. Now, Olaf—

OLAF. Now, Canute,
Companion and brother-commander!

CANUTE. And fellow chessplayer,
Do not forget!

OLAF. I do not. It is you forget
What we have done, we Norsemen. We invade England,
Break London Bridge, besiege the town, pitch camp
Here at Greenwich, keep this unready kingdom
Trembling in truce. We conquer England, and you,
You drinking-dowsing Danes, you quarrel and murder my
Norsemen!
What gratitude!

CANUTE. Gratitude goes as a god disguised,
Often lacking for want of looking. I notice
You set a very high value on your few Norsemen.

OLAF. In every fight my Norsemen have had first place;
We have reaped success, while you—

HAREK [*shouting from the crowd*]. What happened at Canterbury!

DANES [*taking up the cry*]. Yes, what happened at Canterbury!

THRYM [*leaping forward*]. What happened, Harek,
Harek, the Dane? Let Thrym the Norseman tell you.
Harek the Dane was not there!

HAREK. Then let Harek the Dane
Tell Thrym the Norseman this. There were cowards at
Canterbury.
Thrym the Norseman *was* there!

THRYM. Prove me a coward then!
Prove it! Prove it!

HAREK. Readily. Now, in this place,
Stand firmfoot, strike freely, then let me strike back if you dare!

THRYM. If you are still there to strike!

HAREK. Easy words! Do!

ALL [*Danes and Norse gathering round*]. Do it, Thrym!

[HAREK stands ready. THRYM lifts his axe, then pauses.]

THRYM. Here? In the princes' judging-place? Will it be judged
Lawful, my lords?

OLAF. This is fair fight, not murder.

CANUTE. We do not blame heart's blood.

THRYM. Then by the law of heart's blood,
The body and blood of— No! I cannot! I cannot! [*Drops his axe.*]

OLAF. Thrym!

THRYM. I will not strike him!

HAREK. I thought not! And why?
This is the courage you learnt at Canterbury!

DANES [*shouting and jeering*]. Canterbury!

RANI. Princes! Hostleaders! Bone-picking, haunch-biting hench-
men!

Let me tell you, I too was at Canterbury!

THORKEL. No!

How remarkable! The sun may forget to rise,
The moon to set, but Rani the Traveller is everywhere!

RANI. No, not everywhere. Not so near the gallows
As Thorkel the Tall, not by six inches. Did Thorkel
Lead our host to Canterbury? Did Thorkel make
His neck a watchtower to see what happened there? No,
Thorkel stayed here, but Rani was there.

THORKEL. And returned
The better to tell us what happened, no doubt!

RANI. No doubt,
And no doubt what happened.

THORKEL. We know. There was nothing there!

RANI. Then you know wrong. There was a Christ church there.

CANUTE. Was?

RANI. We burnt it. No loss! I have seen better—
Beyond the serpent straits and the peacock sea,
The giant's chessboard glimmering white as narwhale,
Black as basalt, the marble of Rome. We did not
Find that at Canterbury.

THORKEL. No?

RANI. No, Thorkel. Nor where
The east lets down its rosy sails, and eyesight
No longer feels the iceberg strain, but sees
Instead, above the golden bridge, the domes
Of glass, the glass coated with gold, the pale
Long bearded faces bowed beneath wedges of gold—
The floating domes, the rose, the golden city
Constantinople, that once these eyes have known,
I, Rani, the Traveller—well, we did not
Find that at Canterbury!

And some silver goblets as thin as skeleton leaves!

Whitening a dead whale.

Go stir in the ash themselves if they still disbelieve!

HAREK. And find the courage you left there!

There was treasure there. Some say you Norsemen have kept it.

OLAF. By the hammer of Thor, whoever—

Quite right, Olaf. We have got the treasure.

What treasure! Where is it?

Where? In the tent of Thrym.

OLAF. Thrym!

Not a coin, not one chink or clink of metal—

But men.

Men?

The men we brought from Canterbury.

[The Danish leaders are amused by this.]

CANUTE. What! That strange little Christ man and his companion!

THORKEL. The one who was so sick when we sailed from Sandwich!

HAREK. That little round egg-skull just ready for someone to crack it!

RANI. The Archbishop! You laugh? In Constantinople or Rome You would be laughed at. Patriarch, Pope, Archbishop— These are like rulers and princes among the Christ men. They value them.

CANUTE. I see. You mean that—

RANI. I mean
This Archbishop may not be strong like Harek,
Nor half the height of Thorkel, nor wear a king's mantle
As you do, Canute, but to these English Christ worshippers
He is worth royal ransom, and that we shall get for him.
That is the treasure we fetched you from Canterbury! I say—

CANUTE. What was that noise?

OLAF. Some sound in the air!

THORKEL. A swan's
Pinions passing above us?

HAREK [*suddenly pointing*]. Look! Look! Look there!

[*OLAF's standard-bearer collapses and rolls down the slope.*]

OLAF. My standard-bearer!

CANUTE. Dead.

OLAF. How?

THORKEL. This arrow.

RANI. Let me see.

OLAF. An arrow!

CANUTE. Shot over our heads.

OLAF. An arrow!

CANUTE. A death drop
Out of clear sky.

THORKEL. It came from outside the stockade.

OLAF. Another drunken trick, another murder, a—

CANUTE. Olaf!

OLAF. A Danish joke again! But this time—

RANI. But not a Danish arrow.

OLAF. What's that?

RANI. An English one.

CANUTE. English!

RANI. Its feathers were fledged on an English goose.
It bears a message in English.

THORKEL. Addressed to the man
It shot, no doubt.

RANI. Addressed to the Danish leader.
Read this, Canute!

CANUTE. So! [*reading*] " To the Danes and Norsemen
Camped on our land near Greenwich. We have kept truce
While you have broken it. You have havocked and burnt
Canterbury, and hold our Archbishop captive.
A barge from the Bishop of London waits off the wharf
Bearing what ransom you will. Only release him

First. If he remain a prisoner, be sure
The wrath from heaven will fall on you all."

OLAF. Who says this?

CANUTE. "One Englishman speaking for all the English."

HAREK. The wrath
From heaven!

CANUTE. That means more arrows! Scour the heath,
The marsh and the river margin! A bag of gold
To the man who brings the right hand of this English rebel!

[Exeunt HAREK and the Danish fightingmen.]

OLAF. My standard-bearer! Another man! Another man!

CANUTE. Let the Norsemen bury their standard-bearer.

[Exeunt the Norse fightingmen with the body.]

Come, Olaf,
It seems that Rani was right. They value these Christ men.
Let him be brought here.

OLAF. Thrym, he lodges with you.
Fetch him here.

THRYM. And the other one with him, the young one?

CANUTE. Yes, bring the monk Stigand. He is in the business.
He can tell us the market-price for Alphege.

[Exit THRYM.]

RANI These Christ men
Have some sort of saga or legend that one of their lords
In some market fetched only thirty silver pieces.

THORKEL. Thirty pieces! We must do better than that.

CANUTE. We shall. If he is reckoned as you affirm,
His ransom will put money in your pocket,
Which our joint expedition will value. Come, Olaf,
Take my hand and believe in Danish friendship.
There is no need for these differences between us:
My tongue and your temper! Forget them both!

OLAF. I am sorry.
Anger in me is like a fire at sea,
A danger to the whole ship. I am very sorry.
I was angry losing at chess. Let me play you again,
Let me show you I can play without losing my temper!

CANUTE. Play me now, while we wait.

[Going into their tent.]

The Archbishop finds,
They say, since he went in your longship, that the dry land
Dances and bobs up and down like a bear in a fairground.

[Exeunt OLAF and CANUTE into their tent. The flaps are drawn. RANI and THORKEL are left outside Thorkel's tent, drinking.]

RANI. We should leave England.

THORKEL. Why do you say that, Rani?

RANI. This arrow! It came out of nothing, a land of despair.
We have had the spoiling of England. Now we are beginning
To spoil ourselves, this camp with a quarrel a day.
We should be off. Let the salt wind gut our idleness
Before we become the victims.

THORKEL. Restless as ever,
Rani! Why, here is this kingdom as ripe and ready
As wasp-food.

RANI. Who wants it? Oh yes, I know Canute does.

THORKEL. And does not Olaf?

RANI. Olaf is bound for a kingdom
Beyond the compass of Canute.

THORKEL. Your swans
Have always to be the whitest! Now, why not talk sense?
Norway is only a vassal state of Denmark, and
Your Olaf only an orphan, a pretender to the throne.
He is lucky to share this adventure. If he can touch
A half of this land, I strongly advise him to take it.

RANI. And why do you give this advice?

THORKEL. I think it may help him.

RANI. No. You think two young rulers, dividing and quarrelling,
May leave the mastery of England to Thorkel the Tall!

THORKEL. Well! How you jump down the jaws of suspicion!
Perhaps it is your digestion, now journeys are done.
Come on, take a turn round the ramparts, Rani the Traveller!

RANI. And be a target?

THORKEL. My height will be your healthguard.
And talking of targets, what kingdom does Olaf aim at?

RANI. One that he does not know yet. One that comes not
To those who plot their life as they play a chess-game.
One that I know he was born for, though I cannot bring him
The way to win it. One that his own heart, or
A wiser than I must teach him.

THORKEL. A wiser than you!
Perhaps you mean a wiler?