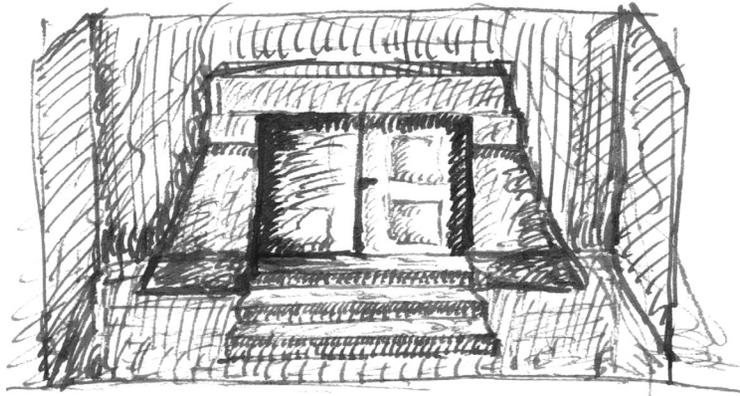


## A Play for Michaelmas

Written in 1942

Dedicated: *Into Ann's [Anke's] hands. For fortifying and strength in loving gratitude.*



### Cast

GUARDIAN	in Egyptian costume
MOTHER of the Virgin	(mankind's mother) in Greek dress
PRINCE	in Indian clothes
KNIGHT	in Babylonian armour
CONTEMPORARY MAN	in today's clothing
VIRGIN	timeless
PEOPLE	six to eight men and women
GIRL	a peasant

*The scene is the forecourt of an Egyptian temple. The GUARDIAN stands silently at the left side on the steps leading to the temple portal. He is a broad-shouldered man, holding a long supporting staff in his right hand. PEOPLE stand to the right and left of the temple portal (three or four on each side).*

PEOPLE ON RIGHT: See the Guardian  
How he stands before the door,  
Stark and steely  
Like a dragon,  
Evil and false,  
And no one may approach.

PEOPLE ON LEFT: What does he keep concealed  
Behind the portal?  
What does he keep protected  
With his power?

PEOPLE ON RIGHT: Do you not know?

PEOPLE ON LEFT: Can you not guess?

*[Peals of thunder resound, lightning flashes,  
then silence.]*

GUARDIAN: For decades am I standing,  
For centuries am I watching,  
For millennia my fate endures.

PEOPLE ON LEFT: Listen to his voice!  
He speaks but seldom,  
And always only  
Before he, the dragon  
Of the world,  
Gathers for the stroke  
Of death.

GUARDIAN: Be silent with your  
Anxious speeches!  
Just tell me for once  
What you want!

PEOPLE ON RIGHT: We want an answer,  
We want clarity.  
Whom are you keeping hidden  
From us men  
In your dark dungeon?

GUARDIAN: Nothing is hidden  
For one

Who truly perceives.  
 Nothing is closed off  
 From one  
 Who truly seeks.

PEOPLE ON RIGHT: Do you hear the dragon?

He utters countless  
 Dark sayings,  
 Incomprehensible  
 To us weary men.

*[Thunder and lightning. MOTHER appears.]*

GIRL *[among the People on Right]*: Look, beside me

Appears a woman!  
 Is she not  
 The Mother of us all?

*[GUARDIAN sighs deeply, and turns his head  
 to where the girl has spoken.]*

GUARDIAN: Mother, are you at last

Appearing again?  
 I stood waiting  
 Many decades  
 Longing for you.

MOTHER: You stood waiting,

A motionless stone,  
 A cold rock?  
 How could  
 Longing move you?

PEOPLE ON LEFT: Even the mother

Calls him to account,  
 And in her judgment  
 Accuses him of corruption,  
 Guilt and wrongdoing.

*[The GUARDIAN lays down his staff, lights a candle  
 and with both hands holds the burning light before  
 him. All the PEOPLE turn towards  
 the audience and fold their hands.]*

PEOPLE *[singing]*:

Once again the light burns in his hands,  
 Once again the candle shines towards us.  
 Once again we feel the times fulfilled,  
 Once again is love raying upon us.

*[A single voice sings next four lines.]*

From the stone breaks forth a gleam,  
 From the iron rays out light,  
 From the moist and craggy rock  
 Shines a countenance so bright.

PEOPLE *[singing]*:

Once again the light burns in his hands,  
 Once again the candle shines towards us.  
 Once again we feel the times fulfilled,  
 Once again is love raying upon us.

*[After the song has died away, the GUARDIAN  
 places the light in a candle-holder on the right side  
 of the door, takes up his staff and stands there as  
 sternly as before.]*

GUARDIAN: Since you have sung the song of light

To me in unison,  
 You have forced open from my heart  
 The binding judgment-chains.  
 Since you have given me again  
 The glorious song of light,  
 I have received the strength  
 To waken and to live.

PEOPLE ON RIGHT: Will you not at last

Tell it to us?  
 Will you not at last  
 Give us your trust?

PEOPLE ON LEFT: Will you not finally

Unseal  
 The portals of your house  
 With the words of revelation?

MOTHER: O Guardian, speak  
 And let the poor folk guess.  
 O dragon, open  
 Your own rocky ground.  
 Oh just fling away  
 Your ancestral chain,  
 Which fettered your blood  
 In the gullet of the world.

GUARDIAN: Mother, may I speak?

PEOPLE ON RIGHT: You must!

GUARDIAN: Mother, may I say it?

PEOPLE ON LEFT: You shall!

GUARDIAN: Mother, mother!

Cannot you,  
 Instead of the crowd  
 Form your own words,  
 Overcome your heart,  
 Enkindle your pain?

MOTHER: Guardian, speak!

And loosen the bonds!  
 Dragon, cast the raiment from you,  
 Open door and open portal  
 For atonement of all disgrace,  
 Reveal yourself!

*[Thunder and lightning. From among  
 the PEOPLE the PRINCE appears from  
 the right, the KNIGHT as well as the  
 CONTEMPORARY MAN from the left.  
 The PRINCE goes in front of the  
 Guardian, looking at him and holding  
 his sceptre towards him.]*

PRINCE: In this sign,  
 Which ensures my dominion,  
 I command you  
 To unravel

The destiny binding you  
 Here before this portal.  
 I know the solution  
 To the mystery  
 Which you  
 Keep hidden.  
 Unseal this portal,  
 Open up the temple's shrine!  
 Release your power,  
 Let me enter the door.

PEOPLE ON RIGHT: Open! Open!  
 Do you not see the sceptre  
 In his hand?

PEOPLE ON LEFT: Storm the doors!  
 Beat him down!

We want to be guardians now!

MOTHER *[covering her face, singing]*:

O Guardian, look to your strength,  
 O Guardian, look to your courage.  
 The dragon in you is menacing  
 And menaces the work.  
 O Guardian, waken and be good.

GUARDIAN *[turning to the Prince]*:

Tell me the words  
 Which unseal the portal.  
 Tell me the saying  
 Which your heart discerns.

PRINCE: The sceptre trembles  
 In my hands.  
 My heart is glowing  
 In firebrands.  
 My eyes are shining  
 Towards the goal.  
 The words are spoken:  
 'Heaven upon Earth!'

*[Thunder and lightning. The PRINCE lets his sceptre sink. The GUARDIAN steps to the right side of the temple door, bows his head, and is silent. The KNIGHT steps forward, raises his sword towards the Guardian.]*

KNIGHT *[authoritatively]*: In this sign,  
Which ensures me respect,  
I demand  
That you unseal  
The building's secret  
And the circle of destiny.  
I know the solution  
And can by my solving  
Tell you the rune  
Which conceals your office.  
I have the key  
And I know the number  
Which, when counted keeps you  
– Though reluctantly –  
On the high vantage point.

PEOPLE ON LEFT: Open the door!  
The avenger has come.  
Open the portal  
And step away!

PEOPLE ON RIGHT: Your rule must cease,  
Your power  
Must be changed!

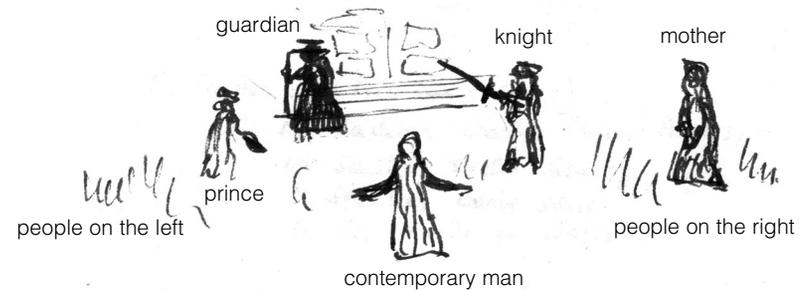
MOTHER *[covering her face, singing]*:  
O Guardian, look to your strength.  
O Guardian, look to your courage.  
The dragon in you is menacing  
And menaces the work.  
O Guardian, waken and be good.

GUARDIAN: Tell me the words,  
Which unseal the portal.

Tell me the saying,  
Which your mind discerns.

KNIGHT: The sword turns wild  
In my hands.  
The cry, 'It's right,'  
Streams down upon me.  
O Knight, gird up your loins,  
And once more a fighter be.  
I call out the words  
Which shatter the doors,  
So that your ears hear them  
Piercing through your heart:  
'In Heaven the Earth!'

*[Thunder and lightning. The KNIGHT lets his sword sink. GUARDIAN moves before the middle of the portal, bows his head and is silent. The CONTEMPORARY MAN comes forward into the middle of the stage, to the right side of the GUARDIAN.]*



CONTEMPORARY MAN: O Guardian mine,  
I perceive your strength.  
Look at my hands,  
They are tough from work.  
O Guardian mine,

I perceive your courage.  
 Look at my eyes,  
 They are full of pain.  
 O Guardian mine,  
 Could I redeem your heart  
 From the chains and shackles,  
 Which destiny has forged  
 And need has hammered.  
 O Guardian, I ask you:  
 'Are you prepared?'

PEOPLE ON RIGHT: A man, look!  
 PEOPLE ON LEFT: A man, listen!  
 PEOPLE ON RIGHT: Yet without knowledge,  
 Yet without power.  
 PEOPLE ON LEFT: Yet without strength,  
 Yet without courage.

MOTHER [*coming forward, singing*]:  
 O Guardian, carry out your office.  
 O Protector, seek protection.  
 O Strong One, become weak.  
 O Ice, turn into water.

GUARDIAN [*turning to Contemporary Man*]:  
 Tell me the words  
 Which unseal the portal.  
 Tell me the saying  
 Which sings in your soul.  
 Give answer!

CONTEMPORARY MAN: I was at work.  
 PEOPLE ON RIGHT AND LEFT: He was at work.  
 CONTEMPORARY MAN: I wandered through need.  
 PEOPLE ON RIGHT AND LEFT: He wandered through need.  
 CONTEMPORARY MAN: I want to behold the light,  
 In which I believe,  
 In which I hope,  
 The light which loves me.

PEOPLE ON RIGHT AND LEFT: He hopes,  
 He believes,  
 He wants to behold the light.

GUARDIAN: You have wandered,  
 You were at work,  
 You are waiting for the light!  
 Tell me the words.

CONTEMPORARY MAN: The words?  
 I do not know them.  
 Yet I might guess them,  
 From my labour,  
 From my work,  
 From my stillness,  
 From my belief.  
 Do they not sound like this:  
 'Revelation of Heaven  
 Upon Earth.  
 Redemption of Men  
 In Heaven?'

PEOPLE ON RIGHT AND LEFT [*singing*]: Revelation  
 MOTHER [*singing*]: Of Heaven upon Earth!  
 PEOPLE ON RIGHT AND LEFT [*singing*]: Redemption  
 MOTHER [*singing*]: Of Men in Heaven!  
 [GUARDIAN goes down steps, kneels and prays.]

GUARDIAN: Be thanked  
 You spheres, which in warmth of love  
 Had mercy on me.  
 Be thanked  
 You Heavens, which in light of love  
 Remembered me.  
 Be thanked,  
 You men, who in rays of love  
 Waited for me.  
 [The portal of the temple opens outwards, the VIRGIN  
 steps out, standing on the upper step.]

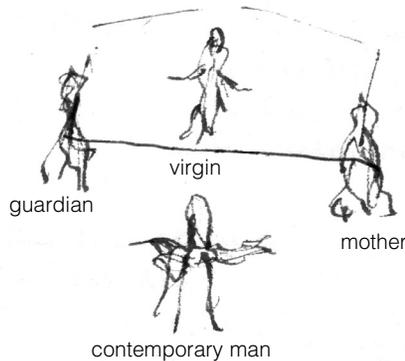
MOTHER: Daughter,  
 May I behold again  
 Your face?

VIRGIN: Mother,  
 May I again  
 Look on you?

GUARDIAN: Child!  
 May I again  
 Greet you?

VIRGIN: Father!  
 May I again  
 Be with you?

[GUARDIAN stands on the left, MOTHER on the right  
 before the portal. CONTEMPORARY MAN in the centre  
 foreground opposite the VIRGIN.]



CONTEMPORARY MAN [with outstretched arms]:

Thus do I greet you,  
 Soul of my life.  
 Thus do I greet you,  
 Light-star of my need.  
 Thus did you come down,  
 Ever-manifest existence  
 From the mountain to the valley.

Thus did corn turn to bread.  
 Thus did grape turn to wine.  
 Thus did night turn to day.  
 The heart's bird now sings  
 In the arbour of man,  
 The words resound to me  
 Which lay in the dark.

MOTHER: Thus the dragon now becomes  
 The Father.

GUARDIAN: Thus the Mother's need  
 Becomes manifest.

VIRGIN: Thus creation now becomes  
 The altar,  
 At which man  
 Sacrifices himself.

GUARDIAN, MOTHER, VIRGIN and CONTEMPORARY MAN  
 [holding hands]:

Thus becomes one again  
 What was long fragmented,  
 What through ancient force  
 Lay fettered and in prison  
 From night  
 Arises into day.  
 O Soul, now sing  
 That the way has been achieved.  
 O Spirit, rejoice  
 That you have been victorious.  
 O loyalty,  
 You were not disloyal.  
 O sorrow,  
 You were not discouraged.

GUARDIAN: I have watched.

MOTHER: I have suffered.

VIRGIN: I waited in stillness.

CONTEMPORARY MAN: I have battled.

PEOPLE ON RIGHT AND LEFT: Oh need,  
 Oh work,  
 Oh loyalty,  
 Oh stillness.

KNIGHT [*coming forward and offering his sword to Virgin*]:  
 My sword,  
 Let it be yours.

PRINCE [*coming forward and offering his sceptre to Contemporary Man*]: My sceptre,  
 Oh wield it.

VIRGIN [*holding the sword with both hands on the blade, showing the cross of the hilt*]:  
 Dark death did I experience  
 In the sign of the cross.  
 I died,  
 Yet was I awakened  
 In bright, unnameable realms.

CONTEMPORARY MAN [*holding the sceptre in both hands vertically before him*]: The staff of power do I turn  
 [*Stops and turns the staff horizontally.*]  
 Into the stem of life.

GUARDIAN: Need becomes love.

MOTHER: And the dragon  
 Becomes a lamb.

GUARDIAN, VIRGIN, MOTHER *and* CONTEMPORARY MAN:  
 O hands, be entwined,  
 O songs, fade afar,  
 O words, die away,  
 O needs, be achieved.

PEOPLE [*singing*]: So let us now live  
 Through the depths of winter,  
 So let us be bright  
 In the darkling night.  
 So let us wander

Whither voices call,  
 Which brought towards us  
 A first glimmer of light.  
 The Virgin soul let us now serve,  
 In human spirit place our trust.  
 The Light of the World on us has shone,  
 Mankind wanders, and is not alone.  
 The Light of the World on us has shone,  
 Mankind wanders, and is not alone.