

William Jones

(1746 – 1794)

C A I S S A



Or

The Game at Chess

A Poem

Written in the Year 1763

Advertisement.

The first idea of the following piece, was taken from a Latin poem of [Marcus Hieronymus] Vida, entitled *Scacchia Ludus*, which was translated into Italian by [Giambattista] Marino, and inserted in the fifteenth canto of his *Adonis*: the author [Jones] thought it fair to make an acknowledgment, in the notes, for the passages which he borrowed from those two poets; but he must also do them the justice to declare, that most of the descriptions, and the whole story of *Caissa*, which is written in imitation of *Ovid*, are his own, and their faults must be imputed to him only. The characters in the poem [Jones] are no less imaginary than those in the episode [Vida]; in which the invention of chess is poetically ascribed to *Mars*, though it is certain that the game was originally brought from *India*.

Of armies on the chequer'd field array'd,
and guiltless war in pleasing form display'd;
when two bold kings contend with vain alarms,
in ivory this, and that in ebon arms;
sing, sportive maids, that haunt the sacred hill
of *Pindus*, and the fam'd *Pierian rill*.
Thou, joy of all below, and all above,
mild *Venus*, queen of laughter, queen of love;
leave thy bright island, where on many a rose
and many a pink thy blooming train repose: [10]
Assist me, goddess! since a lovely pair
command my song, like thee divinely fair.

Near yon cool stream, whose living waters play,
and rise translucent in the solar ray;
beneath the covert of a fragrant bow'r,
where *Spring's* soft influence purpled every flow'r;
two smiling nymphs reclin'd in calm retreat,
and envying blossoms crowded round their seat;
here, *Delia* was enthron'd; and, by her side,
the sweet *Sirena*; both in beauty's pride: [20]
Thus shine two roses, fresh with early bloom,
that from their native stalk dispense perfume;
their leaves unfolding to the dawning day,
gems of the glowing mead, and eyes of *May*.
A band of youths and damsels sat around,
their flowing locks with braided myrtle bound;
Agatis, in the graceful dance admir'd,
and gentle *Thyrsis*, by the Muse inspir'd;
with *Sylvia*, fairest of the mirthful train;
and *Daphnis*, doom'd to love, yet love in vain. [30]
Now, whilst a purer blush o'erspreads her cheeks,
with soothing accents thus *Sirena* speaks:

«The meads and lawns are ting'd with beamy light,
and wakeful larks begin their vocal flight;
whilst on each bank the dew-drops sweetly smile;
what sport, my *Delia*, shall the hours beguile?
Shall heavenly notes, prolong'd with various art,
charm the fond ear, and warm the rapturous heart?
At distance shall we view the sylvan chase;
or catch with silken lines the finny race?» [40]

Then *Delia* thus: «Or, rather since we meet
by chance assembled in this cool retreat,
in artful contest let our warlike train
move, well-directed, o'er the colour'd plain;
Daphnis, who taught us first, the play shall guide;

explain its laws, and o'er the field preside:
No prize we need, our ardour to inflame;
we fight with pleasure, if we fight for fame.»

The nymph consents: the maids and youths prepare
to view the combat, and the sport to share; [50]
but *Daphnis* most approv'd the bold design,
whom *Love* instructed, and the tuneful *Nine*.
He rose; and on the cedar table plac'd
a polish'd board, with diff'ring colours grac'd;
squares eight times eight in equal order lie,
these bright as snow, those dark with sable dye;
like the broad target by the tortoise born,
or like the hide by spotted panthers worn.
Then from a chest, with harmless heroes stor'd,
o'er the smooth plain two well-wrought hosts he pour'd; [60]
the champions burn'd their rivals to assail,
twice eight in black, twice eight in milkwhite mail;
in shape and station different, as in name,
their motions various, nor their pow'r the same.
Say, *Muse*! (for *Jove* has nought from thee conceal'd)
who form'd the legions on the level field?

High in the midst, the reverend kings appear,
and o'er the rest their pearly scepters rear:
One solemn step, majestically slow,
they gravely move, and shun the dangerous foe; [70]
if e'er they call, the watchful subjects spring,
and die with rapture if they save their king;
on him the glory of the day depends,
he once imprison'd, all the conflict ends.

The queens exulting near their consorts stand;
each bears a deadly falchion in her hand;
now here, now there, they bound with furious pride,
and thin the trembling ranks from side to side:
Swift as *Camilla* flying o'er the main,
or lightly skimming o'er the dewy plain: [80]
Fierce as they seem, some bold plebeian spear
may pierce their shield, or stop their full career.

The valiant guards, their minds on havoc bent,
fill the next squares, and watch the royal tent;
though weak their spears, though dwarfish be their height,
compact they move, the bulwark of the fight.

To right and left the martial wings display
their shining arms, and stand in close array.
Behold! four archers, eager to advance,
send the light reed, and rush with sidelong glance: [90]
Through angles, ever, they assault the foes,
true to the colour, which at first they chose.
Then four bold knights for courage fam'd and speed,
each knight exalted on a prancing steed:
Their arching course no vulgar limit knows,
transverse they leap, and aim insidious blows:
Nor friends, nor foes, their rapid force restrain,
by one quick bound two changing squares they gain;
from varying hues renew the fierce attack,
and rush from black to white, from white to black. [100]
Four solemn elephants the sides defend;
beneath the load of pond'rous towers they bend;
in one unalter'd line they tempt the fight;
now crush the left, and now o'erwhelm the right.
Bright in the front the dauntless soldiers raise

their polish'd spears; their steely helmets blaze:
Prepar'd they stand the daring foe to strike;
direct their progress, but their wounds oblique.

Now swell the embattled troops with hostile rage,
and clang their shields, impatient to engage; [110]
when Daphnis thus: «A varied plain behold;
where fairy kings their mimic tents unfold,
as Oberon, and Mab, his wayward queen,
lead forth their armies on the daisied green.
No mortal had the wondrous sport contriv'd,
by gods invented, and from gods deriv'd;
from them the British nymphs receiv'd the game.
And play each morn beneath the crystal Thame;
hear then the tale, which they to Colin sung,
as idling o'er the lucid wave he hung. [120]

A lovely dryad rang'd the Thracian wild,
her air enchanting, and her aspect mild;
to chase the bounding hart was all her joy,
averse from Hymen, and the Cyprian boy;
o'er hills and valleys was her beauty fam'd,
and fair Caissa was the damsel nam'd.
Mars saw the maid; with deep surprise he gaz'd,
admir'd her shape, and every gesture prais'd:
His golden bow the child of Venus bent,
and through his breast a piercing arrow sent: [130]
The reed was hope; the feathers, keen desire;
the point, her eyes; the barbs, ethereal fire.
Soon to the nymph he pour'd his tender strain;
the haughty Dryad scorn'd his amorous pain:
He told his woes, where'er the maid he found,
and still he press'd, yet still Caissa frown'd;
but ev'n her frowns (ah, what might smiles have done!)
fir'd all his soul, and all his senses won.

He left his car, by raging tigers drawn,
and lonely wander'd o'er the dusky lawn; [140]
then lay desponding near a murmuring stream,
and fair Caissa was his plaintive theme.
A Naiad heard him from her mossy bed,
and through the crystal rais'd her placid head;
then mildly spake: «O thou, whom love inspires,
thy tears will nourish, not allay thy fires.
The smiling blossoms drink the pearly dew;
and ripening fruit the feather'd race pursue;
the scaly shoals devour the silken weeds;
love on our sighs, and on our sorrow feeds. [150]

Then weep no more; but, ere thou canst obtain
balm to thy wounds, and solace to thy pain,
with gentle art thy martial look beguile;
be mild, and teach thy rugged brow to smile.
Canst thou no play, no soothing game devise,
to make thee lovely in the damsel's eyes?
So may thy prayers assuage the scornful dame,
and ev'n Caissa own a mutual flame.»

«Kind nymph» said Mars, «thy counsel I approve:
Art, only art, her ruthless breast can move. [160]
But when? or how? Thy dark discourse explain:
So may thy stream ne'er swell with gushing rain;
so may thy waves in one pure current flow,
and flowers eternal on thy border blow!»

To whom the maid replied with smiling mien:

«Above the palace of the Paphian queen
Love's brother dwells, a boy of graceful port,
by gods nam'd Euphron, and by mortals Sport:
Seek him; to faithful ears unfold thy grief,
and hope, ere morn return, a sweet relief. [170]
His temple hangs below the azure skies;
see'st thou yon argent cloud? 'Tis there it lies.»
This said, she sunk beneath the liquid plain,
and sought the mansion of her blue-hair'd train.

Meantime the god, elate with heart-felt joy,
had reach'd the temple of the sportful boy;
he told Caissa's charms, his kindled fire,
the Naiad's counsel, and his warm desire.
«Be swift,» he added, «give my passion aid;
a god requests.» – He spake, and Sport obey'd. [180]
He fram'd a tablet of celestial mold,
inlay'd with squares of silver and of gold;
then of two metals form'd the warlike band,
that here, compact, in show of battle stand;
he taught the rules that guide the pensive game,
and call'd it Cassa from the Dryad's name:
(Whence Albion's sons, who most its praise confess,
 approv'd the play, and nam'd it thoughtful Chess.)
The god delighted thank'd indulgent Sport;
then grasp'd the board, and left his airy court. [190]
With radiant feet he pierc'd the clouds; nor stay'd,
till in the woods he saw the beauteous maid:
Tir'd with the chase the damsel sat reclin'd,
her girdle loose, her bosom unconfin'd.
He took the figure of a wanton Faun,
and stood before her on the flowery lawn;
Then show'd his tablet: pleas'd, the nymph survey'd
the lifeless troops, in glittering ranks display'd;
she ask'd the wily sylvan to explain
the various motions of the splendid train; [200]
with eager heart she caught the winning lore,
and thought ev'n Mars less hateful than before:
«What spell,» said she, «deceiv'd my careless mind?
The god was fair, and I was most unkind.»
She spoke, and saw the changing Faun assume
a milder aspect, and a fairer bloom;
his wreathing horns, that from his temples grew,
flow'd down in curls of bright celestial hue;
the dappled hairs, that veil'd his loveless face,
blaz'd into beams, and show'd a heavenly grace; [210]
the shaggy hide, that mantled o'er his breast,
was soften'd to a smooth transparent vest,
that through its folds his vigorous bosom show'd,
and nervous limbs, where youthful ardour glow'd;
(Had Venus view'd him in those blooming charms,
not Vulcan's net had forc'd her from his arms.)
with goatlike feet no more he mark'd the ground,
but braided flowers his silken sandals bound.
The Dryad blush'd; and, as he press'd her, smil'd,
whilst all his cares one tender glance beguil'd.» [220]

He ends; «To arms,» the maids and striplings cry;
«To arms,» the groves and sounding vales reply.
Sirena led to war the swarthy crew,
and Delia those that bore the lilly's hue.
Who first, O muse, began the bold attack;

the white refulgent, or the mournful black?
 Fair Delia first, as favouring lots ordain,
 moves her pale legions tow'rd the sable train:
 From thought to thought her lively fancy flies,
 whil'st o'er the board she darts her sparkling eyes. [230]
 At length the warrior moves with haughty strides;
 who from the plain the snowy king divides:
 With equal haste his swarthy rival bounds;
 his quiver rattles, and his buckler sounds:
 Ah! hapless youths, with fatal warmth you burn;
 laws, ever fix'd, forbid you to return.
 Then from the wing a short-liv'd spearman flies,
 unsafely bold, and see! he dies, he dies:
 The dark-brow'd hero, with one vengeful blow
 of life and place deprives his ivory foe. [240]
 Now rush both armies o'er the burnish'd field,
 hurl the swift dart, and rend the bursting shield.
 Here furious knights on fiery coursers prance,
 here archers spring, and lofty towers advance.
 But see! the white-rob'd Amazon beholds
 where the dark host its opening van unfolds:
 Soon as her eye discerns the hostile maid,
 by ebon shield, and ebon helm betray'd;
 seven squares she passed with majestic mien,
 and stands triumphant o'er the falling queen. [250]
 Perplex'd, and sorrowing at his consort's fate,
 the monarch burn'd with rage, despair, and hate:
 Swift from his zone th' avenging blade he drew,
 and, mad with ire, the proud virago slew.
 Meanwhile sweet-smiling Delia's wary king
 retir'd from fight behind the circling wing.

Long time the war in equal balance hung;
 till, unforeseen, an ivory courser sprung,
 and, wildly prancing in an evil hour,
 attack'd at once the monarch and the tower: [260]
 Sirena blush'd; for, as the rules requir'd,
 her injur'd sovereign to his tent retir'd;
 whilst her lost castle leaves his threat'ning height,
 and adds new glory to th' exulting knight.

At this, pale fear oppress'd the drooping maid,
 and on her cheek the rose began to fade:
 A crystal tear, that stood prepar'd to fall,
 she wip'd in silence, and conceal'd from all;
 from all but Daphnis: he remark'd her pain,
 and saw the weakness of her ebon train; [270]
 then gently spoke: «Let me your loss supply,
 and either nobly win, or nobly die;
 me oft has fortune crown'd with fair success,
 and led to triumph in the fields of Chess.»
 He said: the willing nymph her place resign'd,
 and sat at distance on the bank reclin'd.
 Thus, when Minerva call'd her chief to arms,
 and Troy's high turret shook with dire alarms,
 the Cyprian goddess, wounded, left the plain,
 and Mars engag'd a mightier force in vain. [280]

Strait Daphnis leads his squadron to the field;
 (To Delia's arms 'tis ev'n a joy to yield.)
 each guileful snare, and subtle art he tries,

but finds his art less powerful than her eyes:
 Wisdom and strength superior charms obey;
 and beauty, beauty, wins the long-fought day.
 By this, – a hoary chief, on slaughter bent,
 approach'd the gloomy king's unguarded tent;
 where, late, his consort spread dismay around,
 now her dark corse lies bleeding on the ground. [290]
 Hail, happy youth! thy glories not unsung
 shall live eternal on the poet's tongue;
 for thou shalt soon receive a splendid change,
 and o'er the plain with nobler fury range.
 The swarthy leaders saw the storm impend,
 and strove in vain their sovereign to defend:
 Th' invader wav'd his silver lance in air,
 and flew like lightning to the fatal square;
 his limbs, dilated, in a moment grew
 to stately height, and widen'd to the view; [300]
 more fierce his look, more lion-like his mien,
 sublime he mov'd, and seem'd a warrior queen.
 As when the sage on some unfolding plant
 has caught a wandering fly, or frugal ant,
 his hand the microscopic frame applies,
 and lo! a bright-hair'd monster meets his eyes:
 He sees new plumes in slender cases roll'd;
 here stain'd with azure, there bedropp'd with gold;
 thus, on the alter'd chief both armies gaze,
 and both the kings are fix'd with deep amaze. [310]
 The sword, which arm'd the snow-white maid before,
 he now assumes, and hurls the spear no more;
 then springs indignant on the dark-rob'd band,
 and knights and archers feel his deadly hand.
 Now flies the monarch of the sable shield,
 his legions vanquish'd, o'er the lonely field;
 so when the morn, by rosy coursers drawn,
 with pearls and rubies sows the verdant lawn,
 whilst each pale star from Heav'n's blue vault retires,
 still Venus gleams, and last of all expires. [320]
 He hears, where'er he moves, the dreadful sound;
 «Check» the deep vales, and «Check» the woods rebound: –
 No place remains: he sees the certain fate,
 and yields his throne to ruin, and Checkmate.

A brighter blush o'erspreads the damsel's cheeks,
 and mildly thus the conquer'd stripling speaks:
 «A double triumph, Delia, hast thou won,
 by Mars protected, and by Venus' son;
 the first with conquest crowns thy matchless art,
 the second points those eyes at Daphnis' heart.» [330]
 She smil'd; the nymphs and amorous youths arise,
 and own, that beauty gain'd the nobler prize.

Low in their chest the mimic troops were lay'd,
 and peaceful slept the sable hero's shade.

From: "The / Works / of the / English Poets, / From Chaucer to
 Cowper; / ... /With / Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, / by
 Dr. Samuel Johnson: / ... / 1810", page 450*

Quotation and capitalization at the line's beginning changed.
 The apostrophe substitutes mostly "e", at times "a" (tow'rd), or
 "v" (e'er, o'er).

Jones' notes on imitations

- 1 Vida: *Ludimus effigiem belli, simulataque veris praelia* ...
7 Lucretius: *Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divumque* ...
55 Vida: *Sexaginta insunt et quattuor ordine sedes* ...
62 Vida: *Agmina bina pari numeroque, et viribus aequis* ...
95 Marino: *Il cavallo leggier, per dritta lista come gli* ...
117 Vida: *Quae quondam sub aquis gaudent spectacula* ...
167 Marino: *Ecco d'astuto ingegno, e pronta mano* ...
317 Vida: *Medio rex aequore inermis constitit* ...
334 Homer / Alexander Pope: *and peaceful slept the mighty Hector's shade*.

Editor's notes

The *Advertisement* was written by Jones himself. (Thanks to Dr Rudolf Beck, Augsburg.)

- 6 *Pindus*: Pindos, mountain range in northern Greece and southern Albania. One of the mountains is sacred to the Muses. • *Pieria*: Region in Greece near Mount Olympus, original home of the Muses. • *Pierian rill*: The Pierian Spring is the metaphorical source of knowledge of art and science. It was popularized by Alexander Pope's poem "An Essay on Criticism". • *Rill*: Brook, creek.
8 *Venus*: Goddess of love etc.
11 *Pair* + 12 *Divinely fair*: April 1st, festival day of Fortuna Virilis and Venus Verticordia.
13 *Cool stream*: Lousios, a cold stream in Arcadia on the peninsula of Peloponnese, in which Zeus has been washed after his birth.
17 *Nymph*: Female nature spirit, associated with a location or landform.
19 *Delia* (from the Island of Delos): Greek female name, byname of Artemis.
20 *Sirena*: Female name.
27 *Agatis*: Male name.
28 *Thyrsis*: Male name, singer in the first Idyll by Theokritos.
29 *Sylvia*: Female name.
30 *Daphnis*: Greek male name, Sicilian shepherd, son of Hermes and a nymph.
52 *Love*: Eros or Amor. • *Tuneful Nine*: The nine muses; Calliope, Clio, Euterpe, Thalia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Erato, Polyhymnia and Urania.
57 *Target by the tortoise born*: Tortoise's / turtle's (testudo hermanni) shield.
58 *Spotted panther*: Leopard.
65 *Jove*: Jupiter, king of the gods, god of sky and thunder. • *Nought*: Nothing, none.
79 *Camilla*: Amazonian warrior. She ran so quickly, she could run over a field without breaking the tops of the plants or across the sea without wetting her sole.
89 *Archer*: Bishop in chess.
93 *Knight*: Knight in chess.
101 *Elephant*: Rook in chess. (Unhistoric; the Persian elephant "Alfil" is the bishop.)
102 *Ponderous tower*: Small tower, positioned on an elephant's back.
105 *Soldiers*: Pawns.
111 The speech ends in line 220.
113 *Oberon*: King of fairies in medieval and Renaissance literature, also character in William Shakespeare's "A Mid-

summer Night's Dream". • *Mab*: Queen Mab is a fairy referred to in Shakespeare's play "Romeo and Juliet".

- 114 *Daisied*: Full of daisies.
118 *Thame*: River Thame, enters at Dorchester the River Thames. Edmund Spenser used the River Thame in his epic poem "The Faerie Queene".
119 *Colin*: Colin Clout is the protagonist in Edmund Spenser's allegorical pastoral "Colin Clouts Come Home Againe". Jones used the name Colin, as well as the River Thame, also in his poem "Arcadia".
121 *Dryad*: Oak tree nymph. • *Thracian*: Thrace is a region on the east Balkans (Bulgaria and eastern Greece). • *Wild*: Wilderness.
124 *Hymen*: God of marriage ceremonies, inspiring feasts and song. • *Cyprian boy*: Eros, god of love, son of Ares and Aphrodite (Lady of Cyprus).
126 *Caïssa*: Female name, Jones' invention.
127 *Mars*: God of war.
129 *Child of Venus*: Amor, god of love, son of Mars and Venus.
139 *Car*: Chariot.
143 *Naiad*: Female nature spirit, a type of water nymph.
166 *Paphian queen*: Paphos is the birthplace of Aphrodite.
167 *Love's brother* + 168 *Euphron* + *Sport*: God of games, Jones' invention. (Sport doesn't mean the physical activity but game from the Old French "desport", meaning leisure.) "The name is derived from the Greek word for mirth." Rudolf Beck, Augsburg 2009.
186 *Cassa*: Unknown meaning.
187 *Albion*: The oldest known name of the Island of Great Britain.
195 *Faun*: Rustic forest god.
199 *Sylvan*: Sylvan god, Faun.
216 *Vulcan*: God of fire.
224 *Lilly*: Lily.
231 *Warrior*: Pawn, e2-e4.
233 *Rival*: Pawn, e7-e5.
237 *Spearman*: Pawn, f2-f4 (?).
238 *Dies*: e5xf4 (?).
243 *Courser*: Warhorse, knight in chess.
244 *Archer*: Bishop in chess. • *Tower*: Rook in chess.
246 *Van*: Vanguard.
250 *Falling queen*: Qd1xQd8 (?).
254 *Virago*: Heroine, Ke8xQd8 (?).
256 *Behind the circling wing*: The white king castles.
260 *Attack'd at once*: Knight fork. • *Tower*: Rook in chess.
263 *Castle*: Rook in chess.
277 *Minerva* (Athena): Goddess of wisdom, sponsor of arts, trade, and strategy.
279 *Cyprian goddess*: Aphrodite, goddess of love (Lady of Cyprus).
289 *Consort*: Queen in chess; compare to line 250.
290 *Corse*: Corpse.
299 *His limbs, dilated, in a moment grew*: Promotion.
306 *Lo!*: See!
317 *Courser*: Warhorse, knight in chess.
320 *Venus*: Morning star.
328 *Venus' son*: Amor.

Beo, 2015-10-21 / 2019-04-19