DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY
A Comedy in Three Acts

By
Alberto Casella
Rewritten for the American Stage
By
Walter Ferris

A Production Thesis Presented for
the Degree of Master of Arts
By
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Approved by
Prefatory Remarks

The production-thesis, *Death Takes a Holiday*, includes the following:

(I) presentation of the play in the Studio Theatre on July 26, 1946.

(II) a stage model.

(III) a production book.

The model and book are on file in the library of the Department of Speech. The portion of the book containing the literary and theatrical analysis of the play is on file with the Graduate School.
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SECTION I

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I

INTRODUCTION

In approaching the style of direction and the problems involved in the production of Death Takes a Holiday, this paper has endeavored to present a comprehensive discussion of all the phases of direction through which a director must necessarily move before his play is ready for an audience. It must be kept in mind that plays, like other works of art, assume varied forms which have to be considered in determining the style of the production. A director must use a different touch with different styles, although in principal the fundamental technique of direction for all plays is the same.

The first and most important consideration of the director, after he has selected a play, is a determination of the style of the play. A study of the historical background of the play (if it is an old play), a serious study of the author's intentions in order to apprehend the meaning of the play, and an analysis of its tone, mood, and characters should be completed before the director makes any attempt at interpretation. In the consideration of style, the director must look into the fundamental elements of direction, namely: composition, picturization, movement, rhythm and tempo, and business or pantomimic dramatization. He should decide exactly what personalities he wishes to embody in his characters, what physical characteristics they should have, and what qualities of
of voice should be desired.

After the director has made his deductions as to style, he is then ready to select his characters. During the tedious procedure of tryouts, he has an opportunity to observe very carefully the reading, interpretation, personality, appearance and voice of various aspirants.

The director must decide what directional controls to use to bring out the style which he has determined. Certain phases of the fundamental elements of play direction must be emphasized. Parts of all these elements must be used, of course, but it remains for the director to determine which should be emphasized for his particular style.

In discussing the direction of *Death Takes a Holiday*, I have made specific exemplifications using the director's script as a source for these. Plots of actions, revisions, and general moods are pointed out to explain certain controls used in direction.

Included in this thesis production are all the detailed plans of construction of various units of the set, a water color sketch showing the color scheme of the setting, a more detailed painter's elevation plan, a light plot with a description of all the lighting effects used, a plan showing the sight lines, a costume plot and costume plates, property plot, sound effects with selections used for background music, material used in the process of
tryouts, examples of advertising and publicity, a play
program, various materials of research, a rehearsal
schedule, and a detailed director's script which includes
directional changes.
II.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Death Takes a Holiday is an adaptation of La Morte in Vacanze by the Italian playwright, Alberto Cassella.\footnote{Cassella Alberto, commediografo, n. a Prato il 1\textsuperscript{0} - XI - 1891 da Donnino e da Giuseppina De Nicotti. Rocchetta di Cairo Montenotte (Savona).

Ha dato al teatro Qualcunno che passa, La bocca chiusa, La morte in vacanze, Prometeo, Le ombre del cuore, La sera nel capo, Parentesi chiusa, e collabora a giorn. e riv. con nov., note di viaggio, art. pol."

"Alberto Casella, playwright, born in Prato, November 1, 1891. Father, Donnino Casella; mother nee (born) Giuseppina De Nicotti. (Residence): Rocchetta di Cairo Montenotte (Savona), Villa Josee.

Has written the following plays: Someone Who Passes, The Closed Mouth, Death on Vacation, Prometheus, Shadows of the Heart, The Ax in the Block, Parenthesis Closed.

Collaborator of periodicals and reviews contributing short stories, travel notes, political articles."

Chi E ? Dizionario Degli Italiani D' Oggi (III Edizione), A. F. Formiggini Editore in Roma, 1936 - XIV}
by Walter Ferris and directed by Lemist Esler for a performance by the Little Theatre Group of Stoney Creek, Connecticut, near New Haven. Also, there was a stock company in Cincinnati which produced the play. After each tryout the script underwent revision.

The play in its present form, opened in Washington D. C., Monday, November 18, 1929, where it "was greeted with considerable ill-suppressed excitement." The play was performed there by the Professional Players with Philip Merivale, James Dale, Ann Orr, and others in the cast. John J. Daly of The Washington Post commented that he saw traces of Aristotelian thought in this play in which the Grim Reaper on a furlough is impersonated by Philip Merivale.

After a stand in Washington the drama was played in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, with particular success in the latter city.

The play was next taken to the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York, where on December 26, 1929, it had

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2 Walter Ferris, an educator and a playwright, wrote The First Stone which was produced by Eva Le Gallienne at the Civic Repertory Theatre in 1927.


4 Professional Players, a subscription group which had been organized for the purpose of promoting a better class of production.
its first Broadway performance. Although the reception was friendly, no great enthusiasm was displayed. Gradually, however, the public became more interested until the play was finally listed with the popular successes of the season. In all, Death Takes a Holiday ran for 180 performances.

When first played in New York, it was produced by Lee Shubert and directed by Lawrence Marston, with settings designed by Rollo Wayne.

The cast was as follows:

Cora. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Florence Golden
Fedele. . . . . . . . . . . . . . Thomas Bate
Duke Lambert. . . . . . . . . James Dale
Alda. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Ann Orr
Duchess Stephanie. . . . . . . Olga Birkbeck
Princess of San Luca. . . . . Viva Birkett
Baron Cesarea. . . . . . . . . Wallace Erskine
Rhoda Fenton. . . . . . . . . . Lenore Sorsby
Eric Fenton. . . . . . . . . . Roland Bottomley
Corrado. . . . . . . . . . . . . Martin Burton
Grazia. . . . . . . . . . . . . . Rose Hobart

His Serene Highness, Prince Sirki, of Vitalba Alexandri. . . . Philip Merivale
Major Whitread. . . . . . . . . . Frank Greene

The critics were not unanimous in their opinions of Death Takes a Holiday. Many praised it highly while
others pointed out that much could have been done to improve it. In any respect it was noted that this fantastic play was impressive enough to quiet the customary chorus of winter coughs in the audience, especially when Death himself enters.

When first introduced to this country, the play was a mirth-provoking comedy. Since the play was originally intended for the pleasure of Italian playgoers, it may readily be understood why the effect was comic. The Italians are much more likely to find comedy in the character of Death, "the gaunt and cadaverous fellow who rattles bones about." With much revision, however, the emphasis in the play was changed. However, the critics continued to doubt.

John Hutchens comments, "How great a loss of significance and finish Casella's Death Takes a Holiday may have suffered in translation, it is difficult to say. Much of the general effect has been removed."6

Mr. Hutchens further states in the same article,

What was missing, however (and it is important), was all that warmth of life that might have made the play quick and alive, and then wistful for its sudden transitions. It has a series of terror struck attitudes of a mystery play, heavy with that

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obviousness which afflicts certain types of subtle plays. There is a traditional kind of production for them that is freighted with arrows that point the way, always resolutely assuming that an audience must shake hands with a ghost to believe in one.

John Mason Brown of the New York Evening Post found that the play ran into a blind alley. He states,

It turned out to be the ingenuous but well-meaning kind of play which gives away all its secrets in its first act, and spends the next two in repeating them in illustrative action, just as though no one had ever hinted at them before.7

J. Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times8 suggests that the play has a theme "of limitless possibilities."

Enough of them are suggested in the course of the three acts to hold your attention.

In regard to the writing and the direction he remarks,

But the rather pedestrian writing of the play and the stiffness of the direction are content with stating the situations and the emotion. It is finger-tips workmanship on a theme of great scope. There is a grisliness when Death first stalks in, and almost a certain exaltation when, at the conclusion he takes away without destroying. But in the writing and in most of the acting, there is no more than a bare suggestion of what this theme contains.

He forgives the play's shortcomings by saying,

An exotic tale which may not be completely fulfilled in either the writing or the staging, but which travels an unfamiliar land and touches the imagination royally.

7 Literary Digest, (January 18, 1930), V. 104, p. 18
Of the actors he states,

As Death in mortal masquerade he (Philip Merivale) plays with a tact and reticence that have been qualities in his acting from the first. It is acting that hardly flows; it is severe and almost brittle. For all that, it commands this play and looks deeper into this maelstrom than the playwright. In Rose Hobart's acting as Grazia, there is a petal-like tenderness and a fragrance of the fields. James Dale as the Duke, who unwillingly plays host to the lethal princeling, acts with an authority that keeps an unreal situation in balance. The others as dukes, duchesses, barons and princesses make you skeptical of royalty.

Philip Lockridge of the New York Sun writes,9

Two paths lay open to Alberto Casella, the Italian writer of the play and greatly anglicized by Walter Ferris. Casella must decide whether Death would consider the effect of his holiday on the world or upon Death himself. He chose the latter. He chose to write of Death and his efforts at adjustment on a mundane plane.

The play is a fantasy through which runs always the electric current of the imaginative. The current ebbs and flows, but never fails.

Not mechanically perfect. Living things very seldom are. And this is a play very certainly alive.

Not all the comments of the drama are so critical, the majority by far praising the play as being "one of the few outstanding things of a flattish season."10

In contrast to Mr. Atkinson's critical remarks in the Times concerning the play and actors, the following

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9 Literary Digest, (January 18, 1930), V. 104, p. 18
10 Stark Young, The New Republic, (January 29, 1930), LXI, pp. 275-6
statement was written in the *Theatre Magazine.*

The dramatist has breathed over his scene a deep loveliness which is never destroyed. The cast has been carefully directed to hold the quality. Philip Merivale is superb. Rose Hobart lends to the Princess Grazia, the fragility of a pure glass petal. Wallace Erskine as the Baron should be mentioned for an excellent characterization of an old diplomat with a perennially youthful heart.

In most every instance the critics have agreed on the superb performance of both Mr. Merivale and Miss Hobart. Other members of the cast are praised also for their fine supporting roles in this fantastic drama.

A different conception of a religious nature is presented in the *Catholic World.*

That the young, when spiritually prepared, have always regarded death without fear and even as an episode of life, a link to greater vitalities than earth affords, is a commonplace in the history of the saints - a commonplace to which the play of Alberto Casella gives exquisite and original embodiment.

The dramatic atmosphere becomes surcharged with expectation, though the deathbed is only symbolized in the ecstasies of a girl who knows already that 'life at the best is brief' and wealth and titles are like the little bright brown leaves coming down in an autumnal garden.

In regard to the play's beautiful scenes and breathless loveliness the *Catholic World* exclaims,

The nostalgia of the infinite is in it and a rare loveliness like the twilights of Vinci. Perhaps only

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11 *Theatre Magazine*, "The Editor Goes to the Play," (February, 1930), LI, pp. 49 and 63

12 *The Catholic World*, (March, 1930), Vol. 130, pp. 725-6
an Italian could have written it for through the Ages
they have understood things concerning mortality, one
instance above being the great tomb of the Cardinal
Rassellino in San Miniato above Florence. What is
written there is written also in this play - the
mystical triumph over 'the dishonors of the grave.'

Richard Dana Skinner\(^{13}\) observes that,

The conspicuous missing link in this chain of fan-
tasy is, of course, the absence of all concept of God
in reference to eternal life.

If the audience could have seen him (Death) as
Grazia must have seen him, then the author's idea
would have reached full maturity and one would have
felt almost ready to pity the other characters on the
stage to whom Death still remained a symbol of horror.

Among all the recent plays which attempt to toy with
the supernatural, both in possibilities of the script
and in their realization. A little more courage and
it might have assumed genuine proportions as a modern
successor to the older morality plays.

Much commendation was given to Rollo Wayne's
beautiful setting with its great hall and the garden flooded
with moonlight. It was generally agreed among all the
critics that the scenic background did much to create a
realistic mood for this fantastic romance.

As a whole I found the criticism very favorable and
understandable. Never were the comments harsh. Whenever
there was an adverse criticism given any phase of the
script, direction, or acting, this was always counter-
balanced by some praiseworthy remarks directed along other
lines.

\(^{13}\) Commonweal, "The Play," (January 29, 1930),
Vol. 11, p. 389
III.

STYLE

The directional treatment which is to be given any play must be determined by the director's interpretation of that play. The director must make a very careful study of the script, analyzing it from the standpoint of mood, composition, picturization, movement, rhythm and tempo, and business. He must determine, by studying the play, what type of characterization he wishes; what various qualities of personality, body, and voice would be desirable for each member of the cast.

If the play has a mood or a series or combination of mood movements, the director must determine how to secure this mood or moods.

It is important to learn with what class of play he is dealing, comedy, tragedy, etc., or whether there are a variety of elements presented. He must know how much emphasis should be placed on the serious scenes and he should decide how to handle the comic situations. He should determine how to harmonize certain attributes which are entirely or relatively opposed to each other.

The director must decide whether he is to use all available areas or confine the movements within a few. He should determine whether the movements should be broad and flourishing, or whether they should be restricted and
stilted. He must ascertain whether the atmosphere should be pictorial, or whether it should be drab and unpleasant.

When the director has given much thought and consideration to the study of the above factors and many more, he is then prepared to determine the style of the play, and consequently, the manner in which the play should be treated as to direction.

The style of a play is the degree and kind of reality which has been created by the playwright. There are very few modern plays which have a pure style, such as classic, realistic, romantic, etc. Most modern plays have a combination of various classifications, and sometimes it is very difficult to determine the predominate style.

Using the preceding suggestions as a guide, I proceeded to study the play, *Death Takes a Holiday*, which is the basis for this production-thesis.

First of all, I thought about the meaning of this play. I analyzed each scene and character to determine what relationship each had to the play as a whole.

It is my conviction that the author had in mind only the matter of creating a picture, an illusion, depicting a beautiful and romantic love story. He has given us an unusual story by his treatment of a character of the abstract world. This character has been given human form with all the characteristics of a mortal. His senses are as acute, his emotional qualities are as deeply seated as
any ordinary individual one might meet on the street.

If there is a didactic principal suggested in this drama it could very easily be kept in the background by other features which play on the imagination. I don't believe that the author had any serious intentions in this respect. Therefore, I shall ignore this concept.

_Death Takes a Holiday_ has a style which is definitely romantic. The playwright in this fantastic tale has presented an impressive and sentimental story. Through the power of his great imagination he has molded his characters into a dream world. He has succeeded in writing a play which stimulates emotional sympathy and excitement within the hearts of the spectators. An atmosphere of lyrical beauty and glamour has been created.

The drama is based on the poetic conception of Death suspending all activities for three days during which period he falls in love with a beautiful girl, and through her realizes why mortals fear him. The general mood of the play is that of love, a mood which is established amid exciting scenes. A perfect background is thus created for a love-story that is as simple as it is appealing.

The two most imaginative characters in the play are the "Shadow" and Grazia. As a whole the story is more exciting and much more adventurous than one would generally find in real life. The play actually takes liberties with the laws of life since the action revolves around an
abstraction.

During the love scenes between the "Shadow" and Grazia, a kind of ethereal and aesthetic beauty of love must be demonstrated. The thought that such a love is beyond perhaps the ordinary conception or experience should not be permitted to exist in the minds of the audience. They should be entirely carried away into a world of fantasy and beauty that is always just out of reach. The playwright has helped to establish this atmosphere by the poetic manner in which he has treated his dialogue. In the love scenes an appeal to reason is disregarded and instead an appeal to the senses is made.

To give the characters of the play, all of which taken separately could easily be the basis for highly romantic stories, the proper environment, an extremely romantic setting has been provided. What could be more appropriate for the necessary atmosphere than an old European castle with its great stone walls and beautiful gardens. It makes a proper setting for such an abstract personification as Death to make his appearance as a guest. The stories and legends that have originated within the great halls of ancient castles have opened the doors of fantasy to both young and old.

Among the characters of the drama we find a Prince, a Princess, a Duke, and a Baron. Titles always appeal to the romanticist. Royalty has a fascinating quality which
has prevailed throughout the period of man's civilized state.

There is adventure here, too, and mystery. Many exciting scenes are created which place the characters as well as the spectators in suspense.
IV.
DIRECTION

Now that the style of the play has been determined, it is necessary to show some of the directional controls which were used to sustain this style in the production. The five fundamental elements of direction, i.e. composition, movement, picturization, rhythm, and pantomimic dramatization must be applied in varying combinations and degrees of emphasis. These elements as applied to direction are discussed in the following pages. In presenting this material I have endeavored to illustrate from the script to what extent I have emphasized the various aspects of this play in directing it for production.

Since the style has been determined as romantic, the play must be treated so as to bring out qualities of prettiness and decorativeness. It must be pictorial, suggested by the use of depth on the stage. Certain phases of the play must be distant, beyond reality so as to emphasize imaginative qualities. It must be fantastic and beautiful. Movements and gestures should be graceful, courtly, and sweeping with a broad emphasis.

Voices, personalities and appearances of the actors are important. The voices of the leading characters, especially, should be low pitched with wide ranges for good inflection. Great power in volume also must be considered. In the case of Grazia, the voice should have a
musical quality. The Shadow's voice must be firm and forceful with good control

Expressiveness and not verisimilarities must be emphasized in this play. Such elements as the aside and the soliloquy, non-illusionistic elements present, should be executed as speeches from within, a display of the character's inner feeling and thought. They are to be used freely and are not to be addressed directly to the audience.

(a) Pictorial Composition

In the way of composition, a pretty picture must be established throughout the play at all times to bring out the romantic qualities. These pictures were accomplished in one way by attractive costuming. The Shadow appears in two different forms of gay military attire, while the Major dresses in the flashy uniform of the French Foreign Legion. The Shadow, in contrast to his two bright uniforms, appears in the first act in a very drab, black but flowing cloak which can be used to good advantage in making sweeping movements and flourishing gestures. In connection with the uniforms worn by the Shadow, he also employs a monocle. This device is very helpful, providing it is handled properly, in aiding the Shadow to emphasize his personality and character.

Other members of the cast were in formal dress
during the second and third acts. Nothing presents a prettier picture than ladies in beautiful evening gowns and men dressed in the dashing formal attire of dinner jackets and tails. All this in the setting of a magnificent old castle, provides very distinctive and colorful pictures.

In addition to certain decorativeness in costumes, the setting helped greatly in producing a romantic quality. Although the old castle setting was very beautiful, it had to be simplified as much as possible so as not to be a distraction. The original background coloring of the walls was buff. This was toned down with brown spatterings to get the proper shadings and to reduce the gayness in the color.

The furnishing gave the necessary suggestion of ornateness and elaborateness without exaggeration. They were constructed as simply as possible. In all, there were five pieces of furniture on stage. A divan down stage right, a small table and two chairs up stage left, and a small liquor cabinet up extreme right. There was a telephone stand, but it was hidden in the alcove.

The play required pictorial qualities. To accomplish these the sense of distance was given many of the scenes by playing a number of the characters up-stage much of the time.14 This particular technique also

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helped to eliminate the straight line.\textsuperscript{15} All available areas of the stage were used.

(b) Rhythm

The rhythm of the play followed the rhythmic beat of waltz time. Although not always steady in tempo because of the change in moods,\textsuperscript{16} the waltz beat, nevertheless, had to be continuous throughout the progressive action of the drama. Smooth, sweeping, and graceful movements were executed to maintain this rhythmic beat of the easy glide of the waltz.

Occasionally rhythm was heightened by the introduction of waltz background music.\textsuperscript{17} Shortly after the opening scene, a waltz was played which helped to convey the mood and the atmosphere of the gaiety of the scene. At this point the tempo was faster. During the love scenes

\textsuperscript{15} The straight line is a position of characters that should be eliminated, except perhaps, in the case of two-some or three-some scenes. As soon as the scene involves more than three characters the form, in developing by compositional arrangement the mood of the subject, should be carefully considered. The various forms that may be used are symmetrical, irregular, shallow, deep, compact or diffused. All of these forms were used to some degree in \textit{Death Takes a Holiday}.

\textsuperscript{16} See Script, Act I, pp. 12, 19, 23, 25, 27, 34, 39, 52 and 58.

\textsuperscript{17} See Script, Act I, pp. 17 - \textit{Emperor Waltz}. Act II, pp. 101 and 119 - \textit{Claire de Lune}. 
the tempo was much slower, so in accordance with this, slower waltz tempo was used for the background music.

At the opening of Act II, when the Baron and the Prince are conversing, the waltz music is again used. In this instance, instead of being slow and dreamy as it was during the love scenes, it had a faster beat, the characteristics of the music being dignified, pompous, and more elaborate.

For most of the scenes requiring background music, the Strauss Waltzes, The Blue Danube and the Emperor Waltz, served the purpose very nicely. Other numbers were Gold and Silver Waltz, The Merry Widow Waltz, and the Luxemburg Waltz. For the love scenes between Prince Sirki and Grazia, Claire De Lune was played. All the records were familiar popular symphonic orchestrations.

(c) Lighting

In order to create the proper mood at the play's beginning and prepare the audience for the scenes that follow, much can be done in the way of lighting effects. This was sensed by the author, who suggested at the rise of the first act curtain, a dimly lighted stage, a moonlit garden, and the passing of the dark shadow crossing the garden. Before a line is spoken the impression should be made that there is something mysterious occurring that
must be explained later. 18

To create a more romantic and, at the same time, realistic illusion at the curtain rise, the moonlight was so arranged as to shine in through the double arch which was purposely set at an angle instead of parallel with the proscenium. The moonlight thus formed a beautiful silhouette of the arch on the right wall of the stage. This in turn caused the shadow effect to be more emphatic, and, consequently, more effective. A faint glimmer of light was seen above the stairway and through the left arch.

Not a word is spoken for several moments. When the maid, Cora, enters and mentions the shadow to Fedele, the mystery is again emphasized. 19

The Duke and Alda on their first entrance again press this point. The Duke mentions the shadow during his opening speeches. 20 Both Alda and the Duke must show a startling reaction which is finally checked by Alda's reference to the shadow as being a product of the imagination.

During the scenes that follow much reference is given to shadows, but a new fact is presented to the

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18 See directions in Script, p. 3
19 Read dialogue and directions in script, pp. 3 and 4.
20 Read dialogue and directions in script, p. 5.
audience. Corrado and Grazia have just escaped a serious accident. It is then brought to light that the Duke and Alde also had a narrow escape.

The mysteries begin to pile up. Grazia's scream, her near collapse because of seeing a huge shadow in the garden, and the shot in the garden by Eric who saw a shadow, are all part of the method in the approach to the entrance of the "Shadow."

This element of mystery must be built up strongly throughout the course of the scenes before the appearance of the Shadow. A combination of setting, lighting, speech and voice, tone and mood must be used to get the desired results. The audience must be kept in suspense until the desired moment. Upon the entrance of the Shadow, for a few moments a new mystery is created. When the Shadow reveals himself as Death, the next impression to be given the audience is a query as to what is going to happen when he returns as Prince Sirkí.

To provide a more effective background for the mysterious circumstances of the drama, the lights were dimmed during many scenes. The moonlight was also dimmed as the Shadow approached, at the same time the green light

21 The various scenes emphasizing this mystery are found in the script on pp. 3, 4, 5, 10, 19, 24, 27, 34, 35 and 38.

22 The entrance of the Shadow. See script, p. 38.

23 See script, Act I, pp. 3 and 4.
which produced eerie shadows was brought up. The Lamp of Illusion, the lamp which gave the Shadow his human appearance, was brought up when he entered as a guest, and it dimmed when he was about to return to his realm of shades.

During the love scenes the lights are dimmed, with the brilliant moonlight from the garden impressing a beautiful silhouette of the double arch on the right wall. The light here also helps to set the mood.

(d) Areas for Emphasis

Since the Shadow is the center about which the entire play revolves, it becomes necessary to make his first appearance as emphatic and as impressive as possible.

To perfect this emphasis strong body positions were used, primarily, in downstage areas. Movements from center to left stage and from center to right stage were crested.

Great strength in the voice and forcefulness of manner had to be displayed, while, on the other hand, the Duke must be gripped with fear and show vocal weakness from the shock of meeting Death. Later when the Shadow enters as Prince Siriki the audience is fully aware of his

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24 See script, Act I, pp. 38 and 52.

25 See script, Act I, p. 58.

26 See script, Act II, pp. 96, 101 and 119.
power and importance. They must see him as human yet remembering all his characteristics as Death.

From this point on, the Shadow can play much up stage and still retain his hold over the audience. Regardless of where he plays from now on he will be the center of activity.

At the moment of Prince Sirki's appearance in the first act, all eyes must focus on him, and this emphasis must continue until the final picture and curtain. On this entrance, he does not come down stage, but remains upstage where he acknowledges the introductions to Stephanie, Alda, Rhoda and the Baron. He must come down stage and move right in front of the divan after he is introduced to Corrado. 27

Another scene played upstage and one which follows the introductory scene is the wine scene. 28 Prince Sirki is asked by his host if he care for a glass of wine. The positions of the Duke and the Shadow are upstage center, slightly to the left of the divan.

In the final and impressive picture of Act I, the Prince was placed completely upstage. 29 Too add more


28 This scene is discussed under (e) Tempo of Section IV. See script, p. 62 for reference to directions and diagrams.

29 The action and movement is described in the script, p. 63.
strength to the scene he is placed on the steps where he
towers over everyone.

After the Princess and Grazia are introduced to
Sirki near the close of Act I, Sirki's and Grazia's move-
ments were directed so that they must cross each other
upstage right. The Prince mounts the steps and slowly
turns, gazing down on Grazia with a covetous look. At
the same time that Sirki has reached his position on the
stairs, Grazia has reached her position upstage center and
simultaneous with the Prince's turn she turns back facing
him and presenting a look of deep interest. This picture
is held for a few seconds. The Prince finally breaks
it by turning slowly and mounting the stairs as the
curtain comes down to end Act I.

This final scene must be treated in a very roman-
tic fashion. All the grace, courtly manner, and sophisti-
cation which is usually associated with royalty must be
in evidence to create the illusion. Bows and curtseys
should be graceful in movement and flawless in technique.

In order to create a more realistic picture in the
various scenes, the upstage areas were used whenever
possible. Many members of the cast insisted on using
down stage areas for all important lines. As the scene
became more effective, the characters would invariable
work down stage too far.

30 See script for diagram of movement, p. 63.
The man who played the part of the Shadow, had this tendency of working down front especially when his lines were significantly strong. As he was a forceful actor with a resonant voice, his action was blocked to include much upstage playing. He could be just as strong upstage as he was in a forward area.

This direction helped to eliminate what is termed flat playing, and added a three-dimensional quality to the stage pictures. In general, the same principal was applied to all the characters. Whenever it was possible they were directed to play upstage. By forming irregular groups during scenes when many characters were on the set, (with a cast of 13 characters this creates a problem, especially when a small stage is being used), by making use of steps and levels, and moving leading characters more upstage, a more lifelike picture was presented.

The problem of actors forming a straight line, which is most objectionable, was corrected by using upstage areas to give a three-dimensional effect. In life, scenes, objects, etc., are thought of in terms of three dimensions. If this quality is given stage groupings, then the scene will appear more real to life than if there were only one plane in common between them. The use of the third dimension with a variety of planes will prevent monotony, suggest more realistic illusion, and enrich the pictorial quality of the production.
To provide a greater area in which to work, the amount of stage furniture was reduced to a minimum. This provided extra space to allow the actor to move into various planes both upstage and down stage. Thus, in ensemble scenes, actors were able to form better composition of groups and present a more lifelike picture.

(e) Tempo

There were several scenes wherein drinking occurred during the course of the play. In writing these scenes the author seemingly gave no thought to the timing. If they had been played as written, the tempo would have dropped to a slower pace, thus hindering the rhythmic pattern which had been created up to this point.

In the first drinking scene during the first act, eight characters were involved. Upon the suggestion of Corrado that he needed a drink, Eric and the Baron spoke in respective order that they needed one also. In the meantime, Corrado has moved to the cabinet to pour the drinks. As he is pouring the drinks, Corrado has two other short speeches of about four words each. In between these two speeches Rhoda accepts the invitation for a drink with a short line. In all Corrado has to pour five drinks including his own. From the beginning of rehearsals it was

31 See the script, p. 14, for dialogue and directions as revised.
evident that something must be done to hurry up this pouring business.

The scene as given in the script before it was revised is as follows:

Corrado: I think I need a drink.

Eric: So do I. (He crosses to buffet).

Baron: (rising and going to buffet) I could do with a little stimulant myself.

Corrado: How about you, Rhoda?

Rhoda: Yes, I'll have a spot.

Corrado: Princess? You Mother? (The Princess shakes her head).

Stephanie: No thanks.

Eric: Well, happy days. (He lifts his glass).

Baron: And a beautiful woman to love.

Corrado: And a beautiful woman to love us. It's not much good without that. (Pause. He comes down). You know, I'm wondering...

...if our cart driver had broken his neck -- I mean, what do you suppose comes after? Where could he be now?

Several things were done to increase the tempo of this scene. First, Corrado's movement to the cabinet made from down stage is such that he maintains his back to the audience during the pouring. Second, Corrado's last speech, "Princess? You Mother?" was broken by an added
statement by the Princess with, "No thank you, Corrado."
The original directions called for the Princess to merely
shake her head in response to Corrado. Third, Corrado was
instructed not to pour very much liquid. Fourth, Eric,
who has moved over from upstage left to the cabinet which
is upstage right, was instructed to begin his toast immedia-
tely upon his return to his former position. Eric has re-
ceived his drink first from the hands of Corrado. Since
he passes by Rhoda on his return he also takes a drink to
her. After Eric begins his toast of, "Well, happy days,
Corrado still has a moment longer, if he has not finished
pouring for the Duke or himself, as the Baron adds to Eric's
toast with, "And a beautiful woman to love." Corrado has
the next speech which follows the original version from
here on.

By following the above procedure the tempo was
maintained and the dead pause, which would have been
created otherwise, was eliminated.

One other drinking scene during the first act also
had to be increased in pace. This is the scene in which
the Prince is offered a glass of wine by his host, Duke
Lambert.

In order to enable Corrado, who again is the pourer,
time to pour the wine and take it to Sirki, it was necessary
to rearrange the sequence of lines.

The scene as written is as follows:
Duke: Will your Highness have a little refreshment?

Shadow: Refreshment? (The word is evidently strange. He accustoms his mind to it).

Duke: A glass of wine.

Shadow: (Doubtfully) Of yes, a glass of wine.

Duke: Corrado . . . . . . (Corrado brings a glass of wine. The Shadow considers it smilingly).

Shadow: I have never tasted wine . . . of your country. May I drink to this delightful household, etc.

To prevent the pause which would occur because of the manner in which these lines were written, the sequence of action and dialogue was changed. After the Shadow's "Oh yes" the Duke breaks in with "Corrado." The Shadow then continues with the remainder of his speech. "A glass of wine." He then adds the first part of his next speech, "I have never tasted wine . . . of your country." By this time Corrado is able to take the wine to the Shadow, who after receiving it, continues with his speech, "May I drink."

In rearranging the sequence of speeches the tempo was maintained and the scene lost none of its color.

Another difficulty encountered in the continuance of tempo was created by the episodic second act. This act
is divided into many little scenes which break suddenly and begin suddenly.

In all, there are 17 distinct scenes during Act II, with each scene blatantly separated from the others.

To cope with this situation a sense of timing had to be created in the minds of the characters as they moved on and off stage. In coordination with their lines and action this sense of timing had to be worked out to such an extent as to make them move on and off between each scene properly to avoid dead pauses.

The only solution possible in such cases was to create movement and action on lines which would draw the characters on and off stage in timely order and thus sustain the necessary tempo of the Act.

As an example, when the Baron makes his exit during the first part of Act II, he has a speech which is sufficiently long enough to allow him to move on parts of it. The Baron is upstage slightly right and has just followed the Shadow who has made an exit by way of the stairs. The Baron is looking after him. Corrado has moved to the cabinet to return the wine glasses which the Baron and Shadow have used. Corrado starts to mix himself a drink. The Baron speaks, looking at the Shadow,

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See script, p. 76, for dialogue and action as rearranged.
"With pleasure, Your Highness." (The Shadow turns abruptly and goes up the stairs. The Baron looks after him) "What a magnificent man! What a princely manner!" (He stands listening to the music) (To Corrado) "Ah, my boy, it's the flavor of the old days for me." At this point the Baron was instructed to turn slowly left and begin his exit. This was not indicated in the script. His speech continues, "You don't know how the dead leaves are stirring in me . . . . how life is stirring beneath them." As the Baron exits on these lines, Eric enters and, quickly sizing up the situation (seeing Corrado mixing a drink), presents his lines at once, "No value in that Corrado."

This same idea of movement and action on lines helped to save these scenes which would have otherwise presented the audience with a series of episodes abrupt in ending and beginning.

(f) Movement

In the final scenes of Act III, the Shadow still must be a dominant character. There are several movements which he must make from down to upstage areas. In order to strengthen these upstage movements, he was directed to turn on one instance and face the audience full front when he spoke his lines. 33 At another time he moved to the upstage area and used a strong hand gesture. 34 (This was

33 See script, pp. 144 and 147.

34 See script, p. 145.
for the purpose of bringing Grazia in from the garden).

There are several other instances of strong upstage movements. At the end of the scene between the Shadow and Alda during Act II, and just before Alda makes her exit, the Shadow has a long soliloquy. 35 He moves upstage and plucks a rose from a vase located at the foot of the double arch right. He immediately moves to left stage, and as he moves he forcefully continues his lines. His ultimate destination is the fireplace which he faces with his head in his hands. He is strong until he comes down to this position, when he portrays one of his few periods of weakness in the play.

During the final act when the Shadow first appears, he angrily faces the Duke and his guests. 36 The Duke has given away the secret of his identity at the close of Act II. During this reproach of the Duke, the Shadow plays upstage of the Duke, but he is forceful in speech and manner. He is turned almost full front toward the audience.

Later when he moves down stage and sinks in the chair right of the table, he again shows a weakness. This is emphasized by having him move slowly toward the chair and make a slow sitting movement.

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35 See script, pp. 100-101.

36 See script, p. 136.
(g) Pantomime and Business

The use of the bow and the curtsy in this play helps to promote its romantic aspects. The bow and curtsy are symbols of a romantic era which are all but lost to our more modern times. To omit these devices in *Death Takes a Holiday* would cause the play to lose greatly in charm, grace, and dignity.

On the first entrance of Prince Sirkì, when the introductions are made, the romantic appeal is emphasized with the dignity of the bow and the charm of the curtsy.

Some difficulty was encountered in making the curtsy and bow uniform. In the case of the curtsy, the women were stiff and did not want to bend their knees. They were inclined to bend too much from the waist and drop the head too low. The men did not bend stiffly enough from the waist and put enough snap into the movement. Much individual practice was needed to perfect these two actions.

Hand kissing is also associated with romance. This business was done in connection with the curtsy in helping to carry on the illusion.

The more detailed business with properties and other movements, gestures or reactions with and without dialogue have been emphasized and noted in the script. Certain business was necessary to establish a lifelike quality, but with the play presented in a romantic style,
the amount and kind of business had to be selected to sustain the illusion.

Some of the items of detailed business are as follows: use of the light switch by various characters; Duke offering a cigarette to Alda; Duke lighting Alda's cigarette and his own; Alda and Duke smoking; Duke using telephone; drinking of liquor, etc.; handling of cloak by Shadow; handling of guns by Duke, Corrado and Eric; use of the cane by Baron; fondling a glass by Eric; smelling and handling a wrap by the Baron and bringing a wrap in by Cora; reaction to shots by characters on stage; reaction to the Duke's announcement that the guest is Death; suspense scenes; reaction to Grazia's scream; Grazia's fainting; Corrado carrying Grazia to divan; use of brandy glass and smelling salts by Princess, etc.; reactions of characters during the fainting scene; the Shadow's plucking a rose from vase; the gestures used by the Shadow in bringing Grazia from the garden; the use of handkerchiefs by Princess and Stephanie in final scenes; and the handling of the wrap which Corrado takes from the Princess to give to Grazia.

(n) Characterization

All characters in Death Takes a Holiday must be presented as highly sophisticated types, worldly, gracious, with elegant manners and graceful movements. Yet, they
should not be presented in such a way as to make their characterizations too artificial and unbelievable. They must keep within the realm of romantic style. As a whole, the dialogue in the play is realistic. It must be treated with a dash of artificiality in order to create an artistic impression. The two most romantic of all the characters, Sirki and Grazia, have many speeches which have a poetic quality. This poetic quality permits these two characters to speak with great effectiveness and, at the same time, retain the atmosphere of reality.

I have mentioned the theme of the play, a theme which is the very essence of one romantic. A man and a girl fall in love, only in this particular case the man happens to be an abstraction called Death, and the girl is a dreamer who sees things beyond the minds of an ordinary individual.

It is very unlikely that an ordinary individual would fall in love with Death. It is just as unlikely for Death to take the form of man and become the lover of a lovely young girl. But these two characters are not ordinary. Both, especially Death, are products of the author's imagination, a fact which makes them romantic.

When the love scenes between Grazia and the Shadow are played, the fact that Sirki is really Death in disguise must be forgotten by the audience. To make them
accomplish this, the scenes must be done in as romantic a manner as possible. The love scenes must be presented with such effectiveness as to cause the audience to forget for the moment that they are looking upon a supernatural power, the taker of all life, making passionate love to gentle and dreamy-eyed Grazia.

Another factor to be considered and stressed, and involving all the actors, is the element of comedy which is present in this play. The comedy is primarily subtle, a fact that makes it necessary for the director to be certain that the characters have the correct interpretations. The actors must carefully stress these comic elements so that they may be presented understandably, to permit the audience an opportunity to enjoy them. Particularly is it important for such characters as the Shadow, the Baron and the Major to be well adjusted in their timing during these comic scenes.37

The Shadow

The most dominant character in this drama is the Shadow, or as he appears in human form, Prince Sirki. Since he is the outstanding character, he must be portrayed as an extremely strong individual mentally. He should be tall and present a distinguished appearance. His

37 See the script for various scenes of subtle comedy, pp. 38-51, 58-75, 91-97, 105-109, and 112.
voice must be pleasantly modulated. By adding a very slight accent (European) to his speech, a more romantic twist is given to his character.

As to his gestures and movements, both must be extremely strong, performed with great ease and grace. Strong sweeping movements and gestures during the Shadow's first entrance help to strengthen his character even though the scene is under subdued lighting. His voice must be especially strong during this first scene with emphasis on range.

During his love scenes with Grazia he must be very tender. His speeches must have a tone of reality, but they must be executed in a romantic fashion.

Facial expression must be unusually good so that his various moods may be understood and appreciated to the fullest extent.

The Shadow's general personality must be pleasant and domineering, always contagious, since he must set the mood for all scenes in which he appears. His personality must penetrate through to the scenes in which he does not appear.

There is much subtle humor presented in the dialogue of this play, most of which is included in the speeches of the Shadow. To develop these correctly the individual in the role of the Shadow must have a good sense of timing. The pause, a quick pick-up of cue, cutting in on other
speeches, inflection, voice modulation, movement and gesture, and facial expression, must all be observed with regard to proper timing. After all, *Death Takes a Holiday* is classified as a comedy. The comedy is there, but much of the humor is subtle.

**Grazia**

Grazia's importance in the play is brought out first of all by the dialogue concerning her during the first part of Act I before she appears on stage. This is emphasized when she appears by having her become the center of attention. All characters must show great concern for Grazia's welfare and future happiness. True, the lines definitely point toward her, but all characters must show a genuineness and sincerity of purpose in their attention toward her.

This character must be played as a beautiful young teen-age girl full of universal understanding, sweet, gentle, and a romantic dreamer. Her voice must have a romantic quality, low, soft, and musical, with a wide range for inflections. She must move in a charming and grace-ful manner. Her expressions must mirror her thought to a great extent. She must give the impression that she is always seeking something that is just beyond her reach, beyond reality. (As mentioned in the script, "Just beyond the reach of sight and sound.")

Grazia is not to be played as a weak character. She
must show strength and a definiteness of purpose. Grazia presented as a weak character would destroy the illusion created.

Duke Lambert

The Duke should give the appearance of a man approximately forty-five years of age, with an air of good health and good breeding.

He should be the strongest of the mortal characters, with perhaps the exception of the Major. He must always manage to carry himself with great dignity, even during the moments when despair and fear are demonstrated. His bearing and manner should be that of a man who is highly respected and trusted by his friends and family. There must be an inner and outer strength displayed at all times.

Baron Cesarea

The Baron must be a bluff and red-cheeked, old man of seventy-five with a merry twinkle in his eye. He should have an understanding and sympathetic nature. His quick wit and good humor are qualities which must be emphasized. There must be about him the air of a man who was once a great power. In spite of his age he still has a romantic outlook on life, but reminiscences are the primary means for keeping this alive. He must catch the
sympathy of the audience with his first appearance and maintain that sympathy throughout the performance.

Corrado

Corrado should be played as a young, beautifully mannered man of twenty-two. His dependency on others should be emphasized, as well as his weakness of will power. There is very little depth to his character, the usual shallowness of youth being one of his most outstanding characteristics. In appearance he should be dark and handsome.

Alda

Alda is the blase type of individual. She should have a manner suggestive of restrained restlessness and hunger. In giving the impression that she is one who is insensible to worldly pleasures, she must not fail to demonstrate an unsatisfied emotion which plays within her, an emotion which makes a brave attempt to break forth during her love scene with Sirki. She has "drained sensation." Physically, she should be tall, dark, slender, and beautiful, about twenty-eight years of age.

Rhoda

Rhoda is a handsome, straightforward English girl of twenty-four. She must not be too strong a character, but must show a sensitiveness toward that which is beyond reality.
In contrast to Grazia, who is in tune with the supernatural element existent in the play, Rhoda must show fear and dread. She should be a blonde and give the appearance of one who has extremely good health.

**Eric**

Eric must have the characteristics of an ordinary tall, intelligent-looking Englishman, probably in his late twenties. There should not be anything spectacular about him although he should have good manners and a sophisticated air. He should be a blond type.

**Major Whitread**

The Major should appear as a lean, tanned distinguished soldier with a military abruptness in his manner. However, he must show the politeness and courtesy of an individual who is as accustomed to the drawing room associations of high society as to the mingling with soldiers from all other walks of life. There must also be a demonstration of inner strength.

**Duchess Stephanie**

Stephanie should be a dark, rather mysterious looking woman of forty, with a rich husky voice. She must have a sympathetic nature and demonstrate much concern for those about her. Since she is on stage during long periods, but has very few speeches, she must show much reaction to the dialogue through the use of pantomime
and facial expression.

Princess of San Luca

She must be a fair and sweet woman, maternal and extremely solicitous. The princess also must make much use of pantomime and facial gestures, because there are long periods during which she has no lines.
References


4. Literary Digest, (January 18, 1930), Volume 104


6. The New Republic, "Review" by Stark Young, (January 29, 1929), Volume LXI.

