

Chapter Three

Plays

A play is a form of literature written by a playwright, usually consisting of scripted dialogue between characters, intended for theatrical performance rather than just reading.

Plays are performed at a variety of levels, from London's [West End](#) and [Broadway](#) in New York City – which are the highest level of commercial theatre in the English-speaking world – to [regional theatre](#), to [community theatre](#), as well as university or school productions. There are rare dramatists, notably [George Bernard Shaw](#), who have had little preference as to whether their plays were performed or read. The term "play" can refer to both the written texts of playwrights and to their complete theatrical performance.

Plays Genres

Comedy

Comedies are plays which are designed to be humorous. Comedies are often filled with witty remarks, unusual characters, and strange circumstances. Certain comedies are geared toward different age groups. Comedies were one of the two original play types of Ancient Greece, along with tragedies. An example of a comedy would be William Shakespeare's play "A Midsummer Night's Dream," or for a more modern example the skits from "Saturday Night Live."

Tragedy

These plays contain darker themes such as death and disaster. Often the protagonist of the play has a tragic flaw, a trait which leads to their downfall. Tragic plays convey all emotions and have very dramatic conflicts. Tragedy was one of the two original play types of Ancient Greece. Some examples of tragedies include William Shakespeare's "Hamlet," and also John Webster's play "The Duchess of Malfi."

Satirical

A satire play takes a comic look at current events, while at the same time attempting to make a political or social statement, for example pointing out corruption. An example of a satire would be Nikolai Gogol's "The Government Inspector" and Aristophanes' "Lysistrata." Satire plays are generally one of the most popular forms of comedy, and often considered to be their own genre entirely.

Historical

These plays focus on actual historical events. They can be tragedies or comedies, but are often neither of these. History as a separate genre was popularized by William Shakespeare. Examples of historical plays include Friedrich Schiller's "Demetrius" and Shakespeare's "King John."

Musical

"Ballad opera," a popular theatre style at the time, was the first style of musical to be performed in the American colonies. The first musical of American origin was premiered in Philadelphia in 1767, and was called "The Disappointment", however, this play never made it to production.

Modern Western musical theatre emerged in the Victorian era, with many structural elements established by the works of Gilbert and Sullivan in Britain and those of Harrigan and Hart in America. Around the 1920s, theatre styles were beginning to be defined more clearly. For musical theatre, this meant that composers gained the right to create every song in the play, and these new plays were held to more specific conventions, such as thirty-two-bar songs. When the Great Depression came, many people left Broadway for Hollywood, and the atmosphere of Broadway musicals changed significantly. A similar situation occurred during the 1960s, when composers were scarce and musicals lacked vibrancy and entertainment value.

By the 1990s, there were very few original Broadway musicals, as many were recreations of movies or novels. Musical productions have songs to help explain the story and move the ideas of the play along. They are usually accompanied by dancing. Musical can be very elaborate in settings and actor performances. Examples of musical productions include "Wicked" and "Fiddler on the Roof."



The Death Trap

Characters

Dimitri. (Reigning Prince of Kedaria)

Dr. Stronetz (The prince friend)

Col. Girnitza

Major Vontieff

Captain Shultz



Officers of the Kranitzki Regiment of Guards

Scene: An Ante-chamber in the prince's Castle at Tzern.

Time: The Present Day. The scene opens about ten o'clock in the evening.

An ante-chamber, rather sparsely furnished. Some rugs of Balkan manufacture on the walls. A narrow table in center of room, another table set with wine bottles and goblets near window, R. Some high-backed chairs set here and there round room. Tiled stove, L. Door in center.

(Girnitza, Vontieff and Shultz are talking together as curtain rises.)

Girnitza: The prince suspects something: I can see it in his manner.

Shultz: Let him suspect. He will know for certain in an half hour.

Girnitza: The moment the Andrieff Regiment has marched out of the town we are ready for him.

Shultz (drawing revolver from case and aiming it at an imaginary person): And then short shrift for your Royal Highness! I don't think many of my bullets will go astray.

Girnitza: The revolver was never a favorite weapon of mine. I shall finish the job with this (half draws his sword and sends it back into its scabbard with a click).

Vontieff: Oh, we shall do for him right enough. It's pity he's such a boy, though. I would rather we had a grown man to deal with.

Girnitza: We must take our chance when we can find it. Grown men marry and breed heirs and then one has to massacre whole family. When we have killed this boy we have killed the last of the dynasty, and laid the way clear for prince Karl. As long as there was one of this brood left our good Karl could never win the throne.

Vontieff: Oh, I know this is our great chance. Still I wish the boy could be cleared out of our path by the finger of heaven rather than by our hands.

Shultz: Hush! Here he comes.

(Enter, by door, center, prince Dimitri, in undress cavalry uniform. He comes straight into room, begins taking cigarette out of a case, and looks coldly at the three officers.)

Dimitri: You needn't wait.

(They bow and withdraw, Shultz going last and staring insolently at the prince. He seats himself at table, center. As door shuts he stares for a moment at it, then suddenly bows his head on his arms in attitude of despair ... A knock is heard at the door. Dimitri leaps to his feet. Enter Stronetz, in civilian attire.)

Dimitri (eagerly): Stronetz! My God, how glad I am to see you!
Stronetz: One wouldn't have thought so, judging by the difficulty I had in gaining admission. I had to invent a special order to see you on a matter of health. And they made me give up my revolver; they said it was some new regulation.

Dimitri (with a short laugh): they have taken away every weapon I possess, under some pretext or another. My sword has gone to be reset, my revolver is being cleaned my hunting knife has been mislaid.

Stronetz (horrified): My God, Dimitri! You don't mean ... ?

Dimitri: Yes, I do. I am trapped. Since I came to the throne three years ago as a boy of fourteen I have been watched and guarded against this moment, but it has caught me unawares.

Stronetz: But your guards!

Dimitri: Did you notice the uniforms? The Kranitzki Regiment. They are heart and soul for prince Karl; the artillery are equally disaffected. The Andrieff Regiment was the only doubtful factor in their plans, and it marches out to camp to night. The Lonyadi Regiment comes in to relieve it an hour or so later.

Stronetz: They are so loyal surely!

Dimitri: Yes, but their loyalty will arrive an hour or so too late.

Stronetz: Dimitri! You mustn't stay here to be killed! You must get out quick!

Dimitri: My dear good Stronetz, for more than a generation the Karl faction have been trying to stamp our line out of existence. I am the last of the lot; do you suppose that they are going to let me slip out of their claws now? They are so damned silly.

Stronetz: But this is awful! You sit there and talk as if it were a move in a chess game.

Dimitri (rising): Oh, Stronetz! If you knew how I hate death! I'm not a coward, but I do so want to live. Life is so horribly fascinating when one is young, and I've tasted so little of it yet. (Goes to window.) Look out of the window at that fairyland of mountains with the forest running up and down all over it. You can just see Grodvitz where I shot all last autumn, up there on the left, and far away beyond it all is Vienna. Were you ever in Vienna, Stronetz? I've only been there once, and it seemed like a magic city to me. And there are other wonderful cities in the world that I've never seen. Oh, I do so want to live. Think of it, here I am alive and talking to you, as we've talked dozens of times in this grey old room, and tomorrow a fat stupid servant will be washing up a red stain in that corner – I think it will probably be in that corner. (He points to corner near stove, L.)

Stronetz: But you mustn't be butchered in cold blood like this, Dimitri. If they have left you nothing to fight with I can give you a drug from my case that will bring you a speedy death before they can tough you.

Dimitri: Thanks, no old chap. You had better leave before it begins; they won't touch you. But I won't drug myself. I've never seen anyone killed before, and I shan't get another opportunity.

Stronetz: Then I won't leave you; you can see two men killed while you are about it.

(A band is heard in distance playing a march.)

Dimitri: The Andrieff Regiment marching out! Now they won't waste much time! (He draws himself up tense in corner by stove.) Hush, they are coming!

Stronetz (rushing suddenly towards Dimitri): Quick! An idea! Tear open your tunic! (He unfastens Dimitri's tunic and appears to be testing his heart. The door swings open and the three officers enter. Stronetz waves a hand commanding silence, and continues his testing. The officers stare at him.)

Girnitza: Dr. Stronetz, will you have the goodness to leave the room? We have some business with His Royal Highness. Urgent business, Dr. Stronetz.

Stronetz (facing round): Gentlemen, I fear that my business is more grave. I have the saddest of duties to perform. I know you would all gladly lay down your lives for your prince, but there are some perils which even your courage cannot avert.

Girnitza (puzzled): What are talking of, sir?

Stronetz: The prince sent for me to prescribe for some disquieting symptoms that have declared themselves. I have made my examination. My duty is a cruel one ... I cannot give him six days to live!

(Dimitri sinks into chair near table in pretended collapse. The officers turn to each other, nonplussed.)

Girnitza: You are certain? It is a grave thing you are saying. You are not making any mistake?

Stronetz: (laying his hand on Dimitri's shoulder): Would to God I were!

(The officers again turn, whispering to each other.)

Girnitza: It seems our business can wait.

Vontieff (to Dimitri): Sire, this is the finger of Heaven.

Dimitri (brokenly): Leave me.

(They salute and slowly withdraw. Dimitri slowly raises his head, then springs to his feet, rushes to door and listens, then turns round jubilantly to Stronetz.)

Dimitri: Spoofed them! Ye gods, that was an idea, Stronetz!

Stronetz (who stands quietly looking at Dimitri): It was not altogether an inspiration, Dimitri. A look in your eyes suggested it. I had seen men who were stricken with a moral disease look like that.

Dimitri: Never mind what suggested it, you have saved me. The Lonyadi Regiment will be here at any moment and Girnitza's gang daren't risk anything then. You've fooled them, Stronetz, you've fooled them.

Stronetz (sadly): Boy, I haven't fooled them ...

(Dimitri stares at him for a long moment.)

It was a real examination I made while those brutes were waiting there to kill you. It was a real report I made; the malady is there.

Dimitri (slowly): Was it all true, what you told them?

Stronetz: It was all true. You have not six days to live.

Dimitri (bitterly): Death has come twice to me in one evening. I'm he must be in earnest; (Passionately.) Why didn't you let them kill me? That would have been better than this "to be left till called for" business. (Paces across to window, R., and looks out. Turns suddenly.) Stronetz! You offered me a way of escape from a cruel death just now. Let me escape now from a crueller one.

I'm a monarch. I won't be kept waiting by death. Give me that little bottle.

(Stronetz hesitates, then draws out a small case, extracts bottle and gives it to him.)

Stronetz: Four or five drops will do what you ask for.

Dimitri: Thank you. And now, old friend, goodbye. Go quickly. You've seen me just a little brave I may not keep it up. I want you to remember me as being brave. Good bye, best of friends, go.

(Stronetz wrings his hand and rushes from the room with his face hidden in his arm. The door shuts. Dimitri looks for a moment after his friend. Then he goes quickly over to side table and uncorks wine bottle. He is about to pour some wine into a goblet when he pauses as if struck by a new idea. He goes to door, throws it open and listens, then calls, "Girnitza, Vontieff, Shultz!" Daring back to the table he pours the entire phial of poison into the wine bottle, and thrusts phial into his pocket. Enter the three officers.)

Dimitri (pouring the wine into four goblets): The prince is dead – long live the prince! (He seats himself.) The old feud must be healed now, there is no one left of my family to keep it on, prince Karl must succeed. Long life to prince Karl! Gentlemen of the Kranitzki Guard, drink to your future sovereign.

(The three officers drink after glancing at each other.)

Girnitza: Sire, we shall never serve a more gallant prince than your Royal Highness.

Dimitri: That is true, because you will never serve another prince. Observe, I drink fair! (Drains goblet.)

Girnitza: What do you mean, never serve another prince?

Dimitri (rises): I mean that I am going to march into the next world at the head of my Kranitzki Guards. You came in here tonight to kill me. You found that death had forestalled you. I thought it a pity that the evening should be wasted, so I've killed you, that's all!

Shultz: The wine! He's poisoned us!

(Vontieff seizes the bottle, and examines it. Shultz smells his empty goblet.)

Girnitza: Ah! Poisoned! (He draws his sword and makes a step towards Dimitri, who is sitting on the edge of the center table.)

Dimitri: Oh, certainly, if you wish it. I'm due to die of disease in a few days and of poison in a minute or two, but if you like to take a little extra trouble about my end, please yourself. (Girnitza reels and drops sword on table and falls back into chair groaning. Shultz falls across table and Vontieff staggers against wall. At that moment a lively march is heard approaching. Dimitri seizes the sword and waves it.)

Dimitri: Aha! The Lonyadi Regiment marching in! My good loyal Kranitzki Guards shall keep me company into the next world. God save the prince! (Laughs wildly.) colonel Girnitza, I never thought death .. could be ... so amusing.

(He falls dying to the ground.)

Curtain

Summary

The one act play “The Death Trap” revolves around the conspiracy against the reigning prince of Kedaria, prince Dimitri, who turns the table on his assassins at the end of the play. Prince Dimitri, the young ruler of Kedaria, has enmity with Prince Karl, who desired to capture the political power of Kedaria by murdering the reigning prince. So, Dimitri’s enemies hatch a plan to assassinate him and they are waiting for the right moment to execute it.

Three Military Regiments (Andrieff Regiment, Lonyadi Regiment and Kranitzki Regiment) guard the Prince Dimitri, the reigning Prince of Kedaria. Dr. Stronetz, a faithful physician, is also very loyal to the prince Dimitri. The Kranitzki Regiment is being loyal to the enemy and the three officers of this Regiment, Colonel Giritza, Major Vontieff and Captain Shultz are all set to murder Prince Dimitri as soon as the loyal Andrieff Regiment leaves from its duty. These officers of Kranitzki Regiment are disloyal to prince Dimitri but very loyal to Prince Karl, who is willing to kill prince Dimitri and want to become the king of Kedaria.

When the play “The Death Trap” opens where three guards of Kranitzki Regiment are seen plotting the assassination of Prince Dimitri so that Prince Karl can ascend the throne. The conversation among the three disloyal guards reveals that they are openly conspire to murder the prince. They are very aware that the Prince Dimitri is already suspecting them. Yet, they go ahead with murder plan because they are being backed by the political support of Prince Karl.

Following the conversation between the Prince Dimitri and his loyal physician Dr. Stronetz, we get to know that Prince Dimitri came to power at his very young age when he did not know anything about the rules of governance or responsibility. This shows his helplessness, which is now an advantage to his enemies.

Prince Dimitri is well aware that he is “trapped” and that his own guards are plotting to kill him. This is a painful realization for him. He also knows very well that he would be killed at any moment as soon as his loyal Andrieff Regiment leaves. He has no weapons to defend himself. No one is allowed to see him except his friend and personal physician Dr. Stronetz. Out of kindness and loyalty Dr. Stronetz devises a clever plan as a physician. Instantly, he asks the Prince to remove his robes for a fake of physical examination, which will help him to fool the officers of the disloyal Kranitzki Regiment. His efforts are only temporarily delay the murder of the Prince. But this delay helps the Prince to take revenge on disloyal officers.

However, the hard truth behind the physical examination of the Prince reveals that he is really suffering from an incurable heart disease. This is another shocking realization to the Prince. He decides to commit suicide instead of being killed in the hands of his disloyal guards. He requests Dr. Stronetz to provide him a phial of poison, which can kill him so that he can invite his death as a ruler without being killed. Dr. Stronetz gives him a phial of poison. But as final act of revenge, when death is inevitable to him, the Prince Dimitri wants to die only after punishing his enemies. So he mixes the entire phial of poison in a bottle of wine and invites the three officers for a final drink. He shares the poisoned wine after drinking it himself. It is a sight of pity for the Prince but at the same time he shows a clever act of revenge. The Prince thus overcomes his helplessness by his intelligence even though he cannot avoid his own death.

Study Guides on The Death Trap

1- Comment on the following lines:

"I wish the boy could be cleared out of our path by the finger of Heaven rather than y our hands."

What is the difference between Saki's two works: "The Open Window" and "The Death Trap"?

2- "The Death Trap" is a twisted trap. Discuss

- 3- Describe the character of Prince Dimitri.
- 4- The title of the play “The Death Trap” projects how the Prince and his helplessness becomes the ‘death trap’ to the officers of Kranitzki Regiment. Discuss this statement.
- 5- Do you think that “The Death Trap” is a play of conspiracy or trapping?