

DANCES OF LIFE

and **DEATH**

Text and Book By:

E. Thomalen
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Music by:

Dedicated to all those who have tried to escape the plague of violence, war and disorder and been turned back by fences, walls and blockaded gates.

E. Thomalen

Dances of Life – and Death is adapted from Edgar Allan Poe’s *Masque of the Red Death*. Poe wrote the *Masque* as a sort of horror story and it is written entirely in the third person as told by a narrator, no background and no dialogue. This *play* frames the story as a morality play, set in the time of the Plagues and the Renaissance. Though set in the past it is, also, about the present. Camus, in his great novel *La Peste*, wrote about a fictional plague in Oran in the 1940’s. He used “plague” as a *metaphor* for War, and life in occupied France during WW II. Similarly, the plague here is a metaphor for life in Syria, Iraq, Columbia, Guatemala, Nigeria and Somalia, etc. leading desperate refugees to flee from violence and war. But the reaction of those in safer countries is to withdraw, close their borders and their eyes, to keep out the “plague” of feared death and disorder. But such human afflictions can never be enduringly locked out.

This play is an allegory and a morality tale, not a fairy tale, nor is it somehow a commedia dell’arte rendering of stock characters derisively satirized.

Comments

“Best Original Play”

NYC Thespis Festival 2015

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“While your work did not advance to the next round, we wanted to let you know that our readers expressed great admiration for *Dances of Life – and Death*. Thank you for sharing such quality work with us.”

Eugene O’Neill Theater Center 2016

DANCES OF LIFE AND DEATH

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CHARACTERS in order of appearance

Poet – starving, mid 30’s, brown corduroy suit, long hair

Traveler – mid 30’s, pale blue garment

Priest – mid 50’s, brown or black garment

Counselor – mid 60’s, grey garment

Courtesan – mid 40’s, full scarlet dress

Belle – mid 20’s, full orange dress

Coquette 1 – late teens, full yellow dress

Coquette 2 – late teens, full pale green dress

Princess – mid 30’s, full purple dress

Jester - mid 40’s, garment with red and orange diamond pattern

Prince – mid 40’s, gold garment with purple trimming

Servant 1 – age indeterminate, dark garment

Servant 2 - age indeterminate, dark garment

Death - age indeterminate, black hooded, robed figure.

There should be a choreographed dance sequences as suggested in the stage directions.

MUSIC

Act One

1. Overture
2. Maypole dances
3. Shepherds death ballet
4. Death in the home
5. Church funeral service
6. Parishioners beseeching God
7. A celebration

Act Two

The Ballrooms

Track	Composer	Work
Masquerade begins		
1.	Tylman Susato	La Mourisque from the Danserye
Blue - Morning		
2.	Johann Pachelbel	Canon in D
Orange- Midday		
3.	W. A. Mozart/Bach	Fugue in F Sharp minor XIV
Yellow – Spring		
4.	C.P.E. Bach	Concerto in A Major (1 st movement) Allegro Wq 168
Purple – Fall		
5.	W.A. Mozart	Serenata notturna in D Major, K 239 1 st movement Marcia
White – Winter		
6.	Serge Prokofiev Andantino	Violin Concerto No. 1 in D Major, Op 19 1 st movement.
Green – Summer		
7.	Giorgio Mainerio	Tedescha from Il primo libro de balli
Black - Death		
8.	J.S. Bach movement Allegro	Concert for Harpsichord and Strings in D minor 1 st
9. CODA		

DANCES OF LIFE - AND DEATH

(OVERTURE)

ACT I

(The play opens with the Poet seated down stage left at a small table writing by candle light. There is a grandfather clock down stage right. It is evening and the light is on him. He relates the story he is writing (or dreaming) and as he does the action of the play unfolds. He continues to provide commentary from time to time. Music and dance are integral to relating this tale.)

POET

In the olden days of yore,
In a *book* of ancient lore,
Writ once in the *long* ago
By the *flick'ring* candle's glow
In a trembling, shaking hand,

(the cast appears one after the other)

TRAVELLER

Mentions... of "a *green* and pleasant land"

PRIEST

Where there dwelt a *clement* prince

COUNSELOR

Whose like we've not seen since.

COURTESAN

And his *gardens*, and his palace,
Were most *fair* of form, and faultless.

BELLE

From the turrets, from the towers

FIRST COQUETTE

Sunlit *pennants* streamed o'er *golden* hours,

SECOND COQUETTE

Past the windows, through the doors

BELLE

Flowed sweet *harmonies*, and their encores.

SECOND COQUETTE

The good *spirits* that within abided

By those *harmonies* were guided.

PRINCESS

His subjects, all, sang his praises,

COUNSELOR

In *rich*, rare and fulsome phrases,

PRINCESS

Even family and his friends

Echoed such sweet favors without ends.

JESTER

He did *travel* forth quite freely

JESTER (CONT'D)

Making such long trips quite gaily,
To *obscure* outposts of his dominions
To inform his good opinions.

(MAY DAY DANCES)

POET

Thus he passed his days,
In peace, and *pleasant* ways,
Until there came into his land a woe
And, *once* it came, it would not go.

TRAVELER

Sire, I have some news
Had I, but a choice, I would not choose
To *think* of it, nor e,er speak it aloud.
But by such restraint, I *cannot* now be bowed.

PRINCE

Tell me good man *where* you have been;
Tell me Traveler what you've seen.

TRAVELER

Sire, I have been to the far frontier,
Hunting in the mountains for some deer,
When I came upon a *flock* of sheep,

TRAVELER (CONT'D)

Lost, and *wandering* from their keep.
And could catch no shepherd in my sight
And thought the *sheep* had taken flight.
But, as I *searched* all around,
I found the poor *shepherd* on the ground,
There a soft *breeze* moved the air about,
But from his lips did *none* come out.

(BALLET OF THE SHEPHERD'S DEATH)

PRINCE

Maybe he *fell*, hard, upon a rock,
While he tended to his flock.

TRAVELER

No, Sire, I do not think that's so;
He did not *receive* such a blow.
I have not *before*, seen the same,
And, so, cannot give it any name.
Blood came out of every pore,
From his mouth, and nose, came more.
His face wore a death's head grin;
He was wasted *not*, and was not thin.
My companions and I *buried* him.

PRINCE

Then, perhaps this *strange* new thing
Having left its mark, will *now* take wing.

POET

Past such encounter's chance,
Left him with great confidence.
But by year's end, much had changed.
Fewer royal visits were arranged.

(BALLET OF DEATH AT HOME)

COUNSELOR

My Lord, I advise *against* a tour,
Until there has been a cure!
That you should tempt fate,
To appear, ...and consecrate...
A death, ...or cemetery,
Is *not* necessary!

PRINCE

My *friend*, and wise counselor,
The deaths now come *fast*, and faster;
They all follow the *same* path,
Whether in the *field*, ...or by the hearth:
Well and fit on *one* day,
The next: *sick and bleeding*, at death's doorway.

PRINCE (CONT'D)

When will this cruel, bitter plague depart,
And *restore* our joyful, resolute heart?

COUNSELOR

But , instead, it travels toward the capital,
Steadily, without remittal.

PRINCE

We have *seen* such things before,
That *passed*. We will this ignore.
But I will my trips out defer,
Not go forth among the cocklebur,
That grows in my most *distant* lands,
All resistant to more cultivated hands.

POET

But the *new* Death did not pass
And, instead, *pressed* on. Alas!

(BALLET OF A CHURCH FUNERAL SERVICE)

(Enter the Princess)

PRINCESS

My Lord, though I am your wife,
To live like *this* is no life.
Baptisms and weddings are all cancelled,
Funerals, alone, are hymnal-ed.

PRINCESS (CONT'D)

And the *music*, and the dances,
Take place, now, but in our trances.
The *dead* have more peace than we,
Death, *alone*, has company!

PRINCE

Oh, wife, what you say is true,
But I do not *see* what to do?

POET

Weighted down by endless woe,
The Prince gradually did show
Changes of heart and attitude,
And *withdrew* from the weary multitude.

PRINCESS

The music and the laughter have gone away
Only *despair* now has come to stay.
It will make us all quite mad
To, in *funeral* garb, be always clad.
To make the slow... the *solemn* walk...
And, but with the *dead*, to talk.

(BALLET OF PARISHIONERS BESEECHING GOD)

POET

Yet each day the plague got worse;

POET (CONT'D)

Nothing done could its advance reverse.
He sought *Priests* for heaven's guidance,
'Gainst this evil, *hoping* to find a balance.

PRINCE

Tell me, my good shepherd, if you can,
How *this* can be God's Plan?
And *what* a wise ruler more must do,
To align himself with God's Plan, too.

PRIEST

Some say evils are the devil's work,
And such *plagues* are but his smirk,
To try to *drive* good men
From Lord God's *great* dominion.
Others say it is God's punishment
For a *sin*, or a miscreant.
But it is *not* God's way,
For us to know *His* Plan in our day.
There is *nothing* we can do until,
God takes us to *His* Holy Citadel.

POET

Finally the Prince turned to the Jester,
That he might, his grief, sequester.

PRINCE

Jester, can you *please* restore our laughter?
Can you give us back some *joy*, hereafter,
As you did before this woe,
As you did only the *briefest* while ago?

JESTER

Now are *all* my rhymes and riddles,
But so many *empty* fiddles.
Mirth has gone from *out* this hall,
And *I* cannot summons it, when I call.

PRINCE

What can be done to bring it back?
What do *you* advise, to change this lack?

JESTER

Sire, *perhaps*, you should *assemble* all
Who are friends, *within* this wall.
Only those who welcome Joy!
But *none* in Death's new employ.

PRINCE

Sometimes it does take a Fool,
To provide our *reason*, with a better tool.

JESTER

A Fool's a fool in his ways,

JESTER (CONT'D)

But not a fool for what he says.

POET

So the Prince, then, *assembled* all his court,

And told them of his plan to thwart

The *dreaded* plague causing such grief,

That stole their joy like a *greedy* thief.

PRINCE

Lords, and Ladies, *thank* you, all,

For gathering here despite this pall

That o'er lays our land,

And *bows* us down when ere we stand.

COMPANY

Heavy is this *weight* when we stand.

PRINCE

But I hope to make you glad,

And hope you will not think me mad,

As a *plan* to you I now unfold,

That may the *balance* in our mind uphold.

COMPANY

Please, my lord, let it be *bold*!

PRINCE

Plague, that *started* with one or two,

PRINCE (CONT'D)

Has killed *many*, and is not through.

Steadily, it marches toward us here,

And, with *open gates*, it is quite clear,

It will not *stop* 'til all have been stricken,

Not 'til *each* of us does die, or sicken!

COMPANY

My lord, let a *plan* be spoken!

PRINCE

I propose these *gates* to seal,

Thus to allow ourselves to heal.

For our people, we've done all we could,

And *tried* to help, and do what's good.

But such grief, that *now* is ours,

Our will, and our *judgment*, overpowers.

COMPANY

Tell us, Sire, the "whys" and "wherefores".

PRINCE

We must soon bright *laughter* here restore,

Lest this grief, becomes our Minotaur.

We shall fill spare bins with grain,

Cisterns are brimful from the rain,

We shall stack *cellars* high with wine,

PRINCE (CONT'D)

Sheds with cattle, chickens, and with swine.

The fruited trees are quite *heavy* laden,

'Tis fair as *Eden* in this garden.

Bees have stored sweet *honey* away,

For us to enjoy, another day.

Every *worldly* wish will here be met,

All the sorrows from outside we'll soon forget.

(DANCE CELEBRATION OF THE COURTIERS)

PRIEST

My Lord, did you forget the *soul*?

PRINCE

To *preserve* it, cleric, is our *goal*!

We will spend our days pursuing arts,

And, through *beauty* try to heal our hearts.

We will *not* forget the mind,

Rather *dwell* upon the *Good*, and Fair, and Kind.

Only hymns of *joy* in church we'll sing,

Funeral bells, for us, will no longer ring.

We will no more cower as a wraith,

But, instead, *affirm* our faith

And when we reach the end of *this* year,

Then we'll *celebrate* our victory over fear.

PRINCE (CONT'D)

In the great hall we will hold a masquerade.

And invite all those within the barricade.

POET

When he finished *all* applauded,

Each, the Prince's wisdom lauded.

The Prince, so encouraged, did hasten,

To *command* a heavy-muscled mason,

To *seal* every gate and passage way,

That might give some stranger entrée.

Nor could *any*, now, get out,

Should they *later* entertain a doubt.

When the *year* rolled round to its end,

He urged everyone to attend

The *Masked Ball* he had planned;

Certain to be a celebration quite grand.

PRINCESS

What will you wear husband, dear?

In what will you at the ball appear?

PRINCE

Having fashioned our delivery

I'll wear tokens of reason on my livery,.

Like the figures of geometry.

PRINCE (CONT'D)

Look for one with a costume,
Wearing such things in the ballroom.
But Wife, what will you wear,
Something from a fantasy, or... nightmare?

PRINCESS

I shall don a peasant's dress,
Out of envy for their humbleness;
Out of kinship with their helpless state;
Out of sorrow for their hapless fate.
So look for me in a billowing smock,
I will wear no fancy frock!

POET

So did, likewise, all the Court confer,
With those whom they trusted from before.
Thus, the Courtesan shared with the Jester,
Those deep wounds, which deeply fester.

JESTER

Favored lady of the night,
How will you, the men, delight?

COURTESAN

I would rather play the fool,
Than be some rich man's jewel;

COURTESAN (CONT'D)

I would rather be the preening man,
Than be the, cajoling, courtesan.
So, I will, in boyish costume, go
And let a dagger by my side hang low.
Those that find me pleasing,
I will be, but teasing.
Now, please say, how you will there present,
At this fanciful, event.

JESTER.

I will go as the sceptered ruler,
Rather than my usual part, the ribald fooler.
But which one *is* really me?
The “me” I know, or the one *you* see!

POET

And so, too, did Counselor and Priest,
Talk about the coming feast;
How they would masquerade,
To amuse, let drop a truth in trade.

PRIEST

Good friend, tell me what mask
You will wear. Or should I not ask?
Costumes that do not convince,

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Will not please our wise Prince.

COUNSELOR

As Counselor, I try to appear wise;

But for this fete I will surprise!

My mask will have the ears of an ass.

Do you think that low class?

But, good Father, you are not excused,

The Prince will not be at all amused

If you do not find some way to hide

From the vows, to which your life is tied.

PRIEST

I have given it much thought,

And, with my scruples, bravely fought.

I shall come as Osman, the Turkish sultan

And a mussulman.

It is said he is successor to the prophet

I have nothing grand to my credit.

POET

Likewise, others had their secret-self betrayed,

If there might be, something grander, gained in trade!

BELLE

Ah, "Monsieur Le Voyageur", have you a wife?

BELLE (CONT'D)

Tell me of your, past, *extramural* life.

TRAVELER

No. Before the plague I was not wed.

Had I been, that soul would *now* be dead.

While away -- all from my village perished,

So, too, all those I *especially* cherished.

I would often organize a hunt,

When not carrying diplomatic pouches to the front.

And I represented the state interest of the Prince,

But now none go out from this Province.

BELLE

Do you like to dance?

Are you coming to the masked ball, perchance?

TRAVELER

I shall be there as required.

If it pleases you, tell me how you'll be attired.

BELLE

Look for a fine lady, who's in-waiting,

My old seamstress is the dress creating.

I will have a beauty mark on my cheek,

When you go to play "hide and seek".

But what fine masque will you wear,

BELLE (CONT'D)

To hide yourself from others there?

TRAVELER

I shall wear a mask of woodsman's green,

And through a veil of leaves be seen.

Of much better days are they a talisman;

A reminder from before these times began.

POET

For the young the days passed slowly,

Though they passed more safely.

Lacking all distractions from without,

They dwelt on how life's goals might yet come about.

FIRST COQUETTE

At the Prince's Ball I hope to find,

Some man, who is handsome, and is kind.

All know, beauty is a bloom that fades,

Rosy-cheeked girls soon become old maids.

SECOND COQUETTE

That is also my intent.

I am tired of noble argument,

And of much discussion of the "Good",

And of always doing what we should!

I hope that I will, tonight,

SECOND COQUETTE (CONT'D)

Find someone I can delight;
Who will take me as I am,
Not want someone who's a sham.

FIRST COQUETTE

This masked ball requires a shrewd disguise,
Something to fool a sweet lover's eyes.

SECOND COQUETTE

That is never very hard,
If you're saucy and stay on guard.
But to fool a lover's heart,
That is, yet, the more *tricky* part!

FIRST COQUETTE

What you have said is all true;
To achieve it what will you do?

SECOND COQUETTE

I'll appear as myself, but with a mask,
My brash lover's fancy, will do all I ask.

FIRST COQUETTE

How too-clever, always, you are.
Cagey lovers cannot avoid your repertoire.
Help find a costume for me,
One through which *my* lover can see.

ACT II

POET

As the *hour* of the ball drew near,
On the *last day* of the year,
The Prince spoke to his assembled servants,
Spoke about his *planned* observance;
His high *hopes* for the occasion,
His designs, and preparation.

PRINCE

Please, make every guest feel *gladly* welcome,
Find no fault with *any* costume,
It is meant to be a night *most* merry,
A night, *for us*, our deep fears to bury.
But at this *door*, play the sentry.
Let no one, without *disguise*, gain entry.
And be careful with the platters,
Remember that plates, and glass, shatters.
If you see a guest alone,
Take him to where *others* are known.
Bring to the *lips* of all a smile,
And, in meeting their *wants*, be you versatile.
Each hour, bring forth a *different* wine,
And a *different course*, on which to dine.

PRINCE (CONT'D)

Fill each plate to the rim,

Fill each cup to the brim.

At *midnight*, bring out dessert,

For *accompaniment*, serve Champagne, and *sweet* port.

Now, unless you have another question,

Take you, *each*, to his own station.

POET

He turned then to the musicians,

To instruct them on their dance progressions.

PRINCE

Gentlemen and players all,

Thank you for performing at our ball.

I would make this small request of you,

That I hope you will not misconstrue.

If it please you, start each passing hour,

With the slow quadrille of a summer's hour,

As the minutes, then, fly by,

Lift the music's tempo high.

Let the palace fill with dance,

Swelling music, food, and sweet romance.

It will help us turn back present fears,

And, here, we'll dry all our recent tears!

PRINCE (CONT'D)

Now I, and my wife, shall happily greet,

Each new guest that we meet.

POET

So the Ball, with *festive* plan,

And *much* anticipation thus began.

But I have not *spoken* yet,

Of the *decorations* that were set

In the chambers of the host;

Nor of the one that was *furthermost*.

In the lavish Prince's palace.

Each *gallery* had panes of glass,

That were *stained* all of one hue.

In the *first* one the tint was Blue,

And in the next the *complimentary* shade,

Vivid Orange, was there inlaid.

The salon after had a *Yellow* sheen;

After that were *Purple* windows seen;

Then White, and Green, and Red.

The last was the color of *blood*, some said.

In each foyer the décor matched;

For example, the wide *tapestry* attached,

Was all of the same shade and color.

POET (CONT'D)

The exception was the *last* chamber.
There the walls were black as night,
Black as the *dark*, without a light.
And, *across* that room, spilled garishly,
A blood *red* light...nightmarishly.
Dusk, did not cause the panes to lose effect,
As, one might *otherwise* expect,
For *outside* the arched window,
Flickered a tripod torch of tallow.
In the enclosure, all wreathed in black,
There stood an ebony *clock* at the back.
When the wall was sealed, as *safety* measure,
Strangely did its *chime* acquire a fracture.
Such that tolling...*now*...the passing hour,
A *dissonant* peal was produced, fixing all in its power.
But I get ahead of myself here,
And I must return to when the guests did, first, appear.

(THE MUSICIANS ENTER PLAYING A MARCH)

PRINCE

Thank you, good and *loyal* friends,
For appearing at this ball, whose *pleasure* mends
The grief and *sorrows* of this year,

PRINCE (CONT'D)

And, instead, through *revels*, brings us cheer.
By inhabiting your *mask*, and mantle,
Set free those *leashed* desires, that are not cruel.
So long as it harms no other guest;
Welcome coy *flirtation*, any jest!
Let us all, this *eve*, make merry;
Salute the *New Year*, bid the Old *not* tarry.

COUNSELOR

I ask you, *one and all*, to toast our Prince!
I think there are *none* that I still must convince,
For while the plague rages, wildly without,
In here we have the plague *locked* out!
It does, I know, cause you surprise
That *I* should offer such a toast in *this* disguise.

(Laughter among the guests, Jester waves a scepter.)

JESTER

I *accept* your gracious toast.

(more laughter).

It is not in *my* character to boast,
Yet, as your ruler, I must take credit
For anything, that does others benefit.
But, if something cause them harm,

JESTER (CONT'D)

Why, it is *beyond* the reach of my arm!

(More laughter)

PRINCE

I see you have taken me at my word,

And *I* am the first one skewered.

Others will not easily escape *that* fate,

Now drain your glass, and lade your plate!

Find a *partner* here, exchange a glance,

Join the *revels*, join the dance.

POET

So did the *Great Ball* now begin!

And the dancers, all, went on to whirl and spin,

As the notes swelled, and raced,

So these phantasms writhed, and chased.

And the *window*, that lit the room,

Lent its *color* to the inventor's loom.

(The white walls and costumes are bathed in a [soft blue](#)
[light](#))

TRAVELER

In this chamber of *azure* hue,

Is suggested a, *soft* morning, view;

When birds *sing* with such sweet skill,

TRAVELER (CONT'D)

When plants push out each new tendril,
Where the quiet waves lap at the shore...

PRINCE

Far away from the storms *mad* roar.

PRINCESS

Mists lift slowly from the lake,
Retreating to the *woods* at daybreak.
Then *all* in the world is fresh.

PRIEST

And the *soul* is rested, and the flesh.

PRINCE

Nothing has yet gone awry.

TRAVELER

Everyone's *still* a wise ally.
By *dews* are all dangers, *now*, dissolved,
And all problems can be solved.

BELLE

So the dancers moves are sprightly,
And they skip to this made-music lightly.

**(GUESTS DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF MORNING
LIGHT)**

COURTESAN

I do find these dances rather boring,
I would fancy something more *risqué*...and roaring.

FIRST COQUETTE

I prefer this *light*...and decoration,
And enjoy the *airy* orchestration.

SECOND COQUETTE

Buoyant, *blithe*, unsullied morn,
'Tis a span to which I'm drawn.
I like this *stage* of day, and life,
Time before a woman *banns*, becomes a wife.

COURTESAN

Don't enjoy it *over* much
Or you'll *soon* be in a husband's clutch.

(When the Poet speaks the music stops but the dancers
continue to dance until the chime tolls the hour.)

POET

But when the *hour* next was struck,
All souls were, alike, dumbstruck!

(The clock strikes seven, the performers freeze and Death
comes from behind the clock, walks unseen among them,
then disappears behind the clock.)

After which, there was a low laughter,

POET (CONT'D)

Firm pledges not to stop, again, hereafter.

JESTER

To halt our pleasure like this, is quite foolish!

COURTESAN

The sound of those chimes, is ghoulish!

BELLE

The *next* time it circles round to happen,

We will not, our dances, slacken!

SECOND COQUETTE

Let the next hour, and the next, return

It will not cause *our* heads to turn!

PRIEST

The chimes of that clock are in a *minor* key,

And it chimes most *ominously*.

PRINCE

Its *strike* is both brash, and bold,

But its *discordant* tone leaves a listener cold.

COUNSELOR

Let us take the clock as our cue,

And *move* from this room of azure hue.

TRAVELER

From this space of morning light,

TRAVELER (CONT'D)

We will follow the *sun* in its *midday* flight.

And, thereby, through our set travels,

We'll continue these, our *costumed*, revels.

(The light now changes to **Orange**, which bathes the walls,
and costumes.)

PRINCESS

This is more to my leisured liking,

For in *midday*, who pays heed to a clock striking.

TRAVELER

In the midday sun, the *work* is long

'Til the worker sings his *homecoming* song.

COUNSELOR

In the midday sun, the *craft* is hard.

And by the *clay*, is the clay pot, marred.

JESTER

In the midday sun, the *stubborn* mule,

Will not rouse to *any* rule.

FIRST COQUETTE

In the midday sun, the *children* cry.

SECOND COQUETTE

And they always... *always*... wonder "why?"

PRIEST

In the midday sun, the world does teach...

COUNSELOR

What's *beyond* the preacher's reach!

The midday sun sees the *scholar* doze.

PRIEST

And upon his chest the *book* doth close.

BELLE

In the midday sun, the *lover's* cool,

COURTESAN

As he sits upon his *workbench* stool.

PRINCE

In the midday sun, the *dreamer's* wan.

When all of his dreams are *flown*...and gone.

COURTESAN

I prefer the midday rhapsodies

To those made-up, *morning*, melodies.

How sweet is *love* in the afternoon,

Sweeter, more, than under the moon.

(GUESTS DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF THE

MIDDAY But when the POET speaks the music stops

although the dancers do not.)

POET

But the midday, too, passed swiftly on,
In the minute hand's brief revolution, the peace was gone.
As, anew, the clock tolled the hour,
And all passed beneath its spell and power.

(The clock strikes 8 PM and the events previously are repeated: the performers freeze and Death walks among them, returning at the end to disappear behind the clock.)

PRIEST

This doleful lack of *faith* won't do,
It is not the *passage* of time we should rue,
But if we *use it* for good or ill.

PRINCE

That should give us joy, or offer peril.
Yet *I* too feel the chimes gloomy, glower;
As though it had some *baleful* power.

BELLE

Into this room it casts a curse,

JESTER

Staying, will only make it worse.

COUNSELOR

I say that it is *past* time to go,
Ere its *power* does bring us low.

TRAVELER

Where is it that we should *next* try,
To help us through this night, get by?

SECOND COQUETTE

The sun, at its *zenith*, could not turn away
Our fears, nor hold them, long, at bay!

COUNSELOR

Let us probe *further* this great mystery.
Trace out, in full, its strange trajectory;
Let us see what *later* rooms may bring;
And refrain from more complaining.

(They move on and the light changes to **Yellow**).

SECOND COQUETTE

Yellow is the color of the *spring* of the year,
When *trust* is high, and there's little to fear.

FIRST COQUETTE

When the *daffodil* does raise its golden trumpet;
And *forsythia* shows itself, just like a strumpet.

BELLE

It is a time of *love*, and a time of laughter,
It's a time of *promises*, of a sweet life hereafter,
It's a time of *dancing*, and belonging,
It's a time of *music*, and a time of longing,

BELLE (CONT'D)

I would we could spend our evening here,

In a time of *hope*, so very dear.

JESTER

It's a time of *foolish* pranks,

It's a time of *fools*, and cranks.

It's a time of easy frights,

It's a time of *slights*, and fights.

We, who are no longer young,

And stand no more on that rung,

Put our *faith* in different things,

Than what this "*mad*" season brings.

PRINCE

You do strip away the world's disguise,

Reveal *truth*, naked to our eyes.

But 'tis *hope* that keeps us all alive...

PRIEST

And without it we would, *none*, survive!

'Tis *hope* gives us all belief

And with that comes relief

From the *misfortunes* of this world;

The *dreams* of paradise unfurled.

SECOND COQUETTE

I do trust the dance of life,

I trust it more than the after life.

FIRST COQUETTE

It is here, that I'm glad I'm me,

It is here, that I *most* want to be!

(GUESTS DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF SPRING.

Once again when the POET begins to speak the music
stops, although the dancers do not.)

POET

In due time, again, the gears and pulley,

Brought around the clock's hand, fully,

To its scheduled somber summit,

And, once more, all conversation stopped at that moment.

(The clock strikes 9 PM and the events previously are
repeated: the performers freeze and Death walks among
them, returning at the end to disappear behind the clock.)

TRAVELER

I think *we* should, once more, move on,

Neither *skepticism, nor faith*, has won.

We still *shiver*, like leaves on a tree,

When the *bronze* stroke signals the hand's apogee.

PRINCESS

I would most *like* to stay here,
For these are the days I hold *most* dear.
Still, I will proceed to where you like,
But I *hate* to serve the clock's stern strike.

(The Princess hesitates, then moves on with the party
into the room with the **PURPLE** light)

COUNSELOR

This is a room that I prefer,
Where light of the *Fall's* realm does occur.
All the *cruelty* of youth has ended,
We can live as we intended.

PRINCE

Foolish things we once did crave,
Are *now* but the baubles of a slave.

COUNSELOR

All those *slights* we could not, then, outlive,
All of them, we now forgive.
And ask others in their wisdom, too,
To *forgive us*, as we, now, forgive you.

PRIEST

'Tis in the autumn of our life,
After the *storms* and all the strife,

PRIEST (CONT'D)

After the *dances*, after the song,
After the *great terror* of Right and Wrong,
On the Fortunate, a *peace* descends,
And the *weary* soul, at last, mends.
No more does he run from every specter,
But now, *trusts* in God, as the Protector.

JESTER

The *jokes* on you my *saintly* friend,
That could *never* be my end.
The Lord doth not take care of the Jester,
But, deformed at birth, his *soul* doth fester.
He will *never* have a place of honor,
Merely a *stool* in the ruler's corner.
That is why *I* came as my lord...
Others, can *my* deeds, record.
I, quite *like* this room of royal hue;
It *suits* my apparel, and robed, regal, view.
Only in this role, can I be secure.
For me, there can be no paramour,
To tell me *things* I want to believe,
That can, the *torments* of my soul, relieve.
My faith is found in patronage, and power,

JESTER (CONT'D)

As *I*, here, approach the *New Year's* hour.

BELLE

Into this room, I feel a most *gentle* prod,

As though... given a *permitted, private* nod,

That I might *learn* the sweet music of it,

That in the dance, *I* might find the secret,

That *I* might whirl ever faster,

That I might, *somehow*, escape disaster.

(THE GUESTS DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF THE

**FALL. But when the POET speaks, the music stops though
not the dancers.)**

POET

But, yet, punctually, after sixty minutes passed,

When three thousand, six hundred, seconds were surpassed,

The chime caught the company in its reverberating undertow

And the rafters were wrapped round, in its rude, receding, echo...

(The chimes sound 10 PM and the previous scene is
enacted)

FIRST COQUETTE

Oh how *foolish* this is, really,

That we *shiver* each hour, is silly.

SECOND COQUETTE

There is nothing here to fear,
But that dissonant, dread music in our ear.

FIRST COQUETTE

Yet we quake, as though a demon's loose,
And, like children, hold our breath, to hide, and slip the noose.

COUNSELOR

Let us enter the next chamber,
To see what "surprise" awaits us there.

PRINCE

Everything has been quite carefully planned,
And you have, not all of it, yet, scanned.

JESTER

I will *bask* in this room of royal hue,
And will go, *no further*, on with you.
This is the room in which I desire,
To see the *old year* decline...expire.

TRAVELER

I will come along with you.
Prince, on this *special* night, it's best to hew,
Close to good *friends*, each to the other,
As, like to a sister, or a brother.

(The Jester stays behind as the party moves on into a room
where scenery and costumes are bathed in a white light)

COUNSELOR

Ah, here we are, in *winter's* light,
All wrought objects, *lustrous* in white.

PRINCESS

In the *sameness*, there is peace,
From gross garish, dissonance, release.

COUNSELOR

Tis a season *too late* to sow, or reap,
'Tis a time of *death*...and sleep.
Whatever plans we might have *once* proposed,
Have been, *long ago*, disposed.

TRAVELER

Like *ghosts*, the guests do whirl, and spin,
And on their *face*, a gaunt, ghastly, grin.
The musicians, *ably*, all attack their strings,
Yet their *bow*, from them, no sound brings.

COUNSELOR

And the *silence* of the room,
Is like the *stillness*, of the tomb.

(The musicians all play furiously on their instruments, but
only the sound of one musician's instrument (a violin) is

heard. A single dancer dances to that sound. The others
follow beats and rhythms not heard by the lone dancer or
the audience. **THE MUSIC IS THAT OF WINTER**)

FIRST COQUETTE

Oh *no*, I think it all is *quite* merry!

I do *not* find it so very scary,

'Tis a time of *joy*, and frolic,

Not in the *least* mad...or melancholic.

SECOND COQUETTE

Into the *bare* blankness, we do *beckon* our dreams,

And they *bring* their own mute, *music*, schemes.

For we *hear* them in our heads;

Even while *asleep* in our beds.

FIRST COQUETTE

We *love* this *sane* season, and its spell;

For *us*, it foretells no *funeral* knell.

We play in the soft, and *yielding*, snow;

And then *grieve* to see the season go.

SECOND COQUETTE

For the *spring* brings on eternal sadness,

The disruption of our *solitary* music...*madness*.

COUNSELOR

How *strange* it is, that you love the Winter,
I do not care for *that* pallid Tinter.
How *strange* is the vision of the young,
And what does come, *tripping*, off their tongue.

BELLE

I will *stay* here for the hour,
Live, *awhile*, with winter's dower
I no longer *hear* the music in my head,
But rely on rhymed, *musician's* rounds, instead.

(The music stops again when the POET speaks and the
events unfold.)

POET

When the *hour* was marked, *once* more,
By the *tolling* that aroused the rancor,
When the mute musicians, *paused* their bows,
And the *frenzied* dancer's froze,
Then: the *awed*, relieved, ...“Amen”;
After... the embarrassed laughter...*yet* again.
Thereupon did all the company, anew, debate,
What was, *here*, the better, collective fate:
To stay in this room of spotless white,
Or, to *elsewhere*, find a different light.

COUNSELOR

Shall we, in this *ghostly* room, remain?

Or, shall we move *further* on, again?

To me, this space is like a glum graveyard,

So restrained, that life is barred.

SECOND COQUETTE

Though I find a *pleasure* in it;

Still, the time has come to recommit,

To exploring *all* our strange surroundings, here.

Each room has a most *inventive* atmosphere.

TRAVELER

It seems to take the grim *clock's* dire warning,

To *move* us all forward, out of morning,

Out of each scrolled season, as it appears,

To *loose* us from our *hopes*, and *fears*.

COUNSELOR

I say we should now continue forward,

And see what we have, not yet, discovered.

BELLE

I begin to *shudder* at our clip,

And prefer to have a *firmer* grip,

Here, upon the space where we have landed,

Ere we leave...as seems demanded.

TRAVELER

Ah, my *beauty*, the coarse clock is *but* a marker,
For a *truth* that's stark... and darker.
Oh that we could but *extend* our stay,
And ever keep our *sorrows* at bay.

POET

They moved from the *blankness*, of arctic sheen,
To a hall of *lush*, rain-forest, green,
Where the strings whirred, and pulsed,
And the dancers *whirled*, waved, and convulsed.
There the partners were *nubile* and ripe,
And the *dress* was of a more, lascivious type.

(The party enters a room bathed in a topical green light.)

FIRST COQUETTE

These *wild*, fast, and frenzied dances,
Go beyond the *smiles*, and glances,
With which *I* am more familiar.
They are *not* at all much similar.

SECOND COQUETTE

It seems to *awaken* in me some desire;
And, yet, strangely, does against *myself* conspire.

TRAVELER

Water quenches not this *thirst* of mine,

TRAVELER (CONT'D)

I am not desirous of water, but *sweeter* wine.

Something that takes away this gravity

And permits, instead, a *present* liberty.

PRINCE

The apple tree lowers down its *blushing* fruit,

And, for its *favor*, receives man's tribute.

The honey of the flower *delights* the humming birds

But the *delight* of the lover is in their sweet words.

PRINCESS

Man looks now to fulfill his desires,

And *woman* looks for that which she requires.

COUNSELOR

This is a place in life, *I* remember,

In me a *spark* is left, like an ember.

I can still feel the pull of the dances,

But, now, see more facets, *painful*, nuances:

Risks of those, unplanned, entanglements;

And their *long*, aching, sad, repentants.

COURTESAN

In this light I see the color: envy;

Envy of two, where there is three.

COURTESAN (CONT'D)

Man envies woman and woman envies man,
Those who can't envy those who can,
In the *color* of the cat's eye,
All the *human* vices lie!

PRIEST

Of all the *dark*, deadly, sins,
Envy is most oft where their beck, begins.
All the *costumes* at this ball,
Do *betray* that trait, however small.

(GUESTS DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF SUMMER

PASSIONS. One of the dancers grabs the Second
Coquette's arm and takes her with him. The whole
company is swept away with the giddy dance. But again the
music stops, though the dance does not, when the POET
speaks.)

POET

At a moment, just *before* the clock's out-crying;
A signal of the old year dying,
At that *very* moment, entered a fell figure,
Strange to see in his investiture.
For he wore a *black robe* from head to toe,
And did *cradle* a scythe at the elbow.

POET (CONT'D)

The met *servants*, who first stood in his path,
Had *no* stomach to test his wrath,
And they stepped *aside*, to let him go,
Nor asked *from where* came this ex nihilo.

(DEATH enters from the rear and comes down the aisle.

The music abruptly changes to that of **ANXIETY AND GRIEF**. When DEATH reaches the stage the SERVANTS reluctantly greet him as another guest.)

(To read the complete version of this unpublished play please contact Mr. Thomalen at ethomalen@gmail.com. Thank you.)