

HOLIDAY (1938) OR HOW LIVE TO WORK AND MAKE MONEY CANNOT BUY HAPPINESS

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Abstract

In 1938 was released the second big screen version of Philip Barry's play "Holiday: a comedy in three acts", written in 1928, about money and happiness only a year before the crash of 1929. Ten years later, Donald Ogden Stewart, Philip Barry's partner at Yale and the inspiration for the Professor Nick Potter character, wrote the script to take the play brought to the big screen by George Cukor.

Two years before filming the movie, in 1936, Ogden became Chairman of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, considered during the 1947 HUAC's hearings as a fellow traveler. At the script Professor Nick (Edward Everett Horton) at the end of the story is forced to travel to Europe in a hurry for no apparent reason.

Holiday (1938) becomes a story about power, money and ideals, where young Johnny Case (Cary Grant) must choose between happiness and accumulate great wealth, offering a critical insight about the idea of "to live to work", and questioning the need to accumulate assets and wealth when there's no time to enjoy and spend.

KEY WORDS: Ideology, money, wealth, power, happiness.

Resumen

En 1938 se estrenó la segunda versión para la gran pantalla de la obra teatral de Philip Barry, "Holiday: a comedy in three acts", escrita en 1928, sobre el dinero y la felicidad tan solo un año antes del crack de 1929. Diez años más tarde, Donald Ogden Stewart, compañero de Philip Barry en Yale e inspiración del personaje del Professor Nick Potter, escribió la adaptación cinematográfica que fue llevada a la gran pantalla por George Cukor.

Dos años antes del rodaje de la película, en 1936, Ogden se convirtió en Presidente de la Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, considerada durante las

audiciones de la HUAC de 1947 como “compañero de viaje”. En el guion el Professor Nick (Edward Everett Horton) al final de la historia, se ve forzado a viajar a Europa sin razón aparente.

Holiday (1938) se convierte en una historia sobre el poder, el dinero y los ideales, donde el joven Johnny Case (Cary Grant) debe elegir entre ser feliz o acumular riqueza, ofreciendo una crítica a la idea del “vivir para trabajar”, y cuestionando la necesidad de acumular bienes y riqueza cuando no existe el tiempo de disfrutarlo y gastarlo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Ideología, dinero, riqueza, poder, felicidad



Linda Seton (Katherine Hepburn) and Johnny Case (Cary Grant) at the playroom in *Holiday*.

“Few such plays examine the sweep of economic history directly, but instead trace its impact on individual lives, on relationships, family affairs, the daily struggle for survival, and the dreams of security and freedom central to such plays, and particularly evident in Money and Holiday.”

FISHER, James. “Money is our god here”. The comedy of capital in Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s money and Philip Barry’s Holiday.

Introduction

In 1947 the House on Un-American Activities hearings used the analysis conducted by the FBI in the Report; "Communist Political Influence and Activities in the Motion Picture Business in Hollywood," in this document some premises were given to analyze movies in search of communist propaganda. Among the films that were being contemplated as threatening or subversive,

was Frank Capra's classic **It's a Wonderful Life** (1946), which was said: "... the film represented a rather obvious attempt to discredit bankers by casting Lionel Barrymore as a "scrooge-type". So that would be the most hated man in the picture. This, according to these sources, is a common trick used by communists... ""In addition (...), this picture deliberately maligned the upper class, attempting to show the people who had money were mean and despicable characters" (FBI, 1958: COMPIC IX, 160).

In this report, the films analyzed by the FBI were mostly from previous years to hearings. But the associations or leagues defined as communist fronts mostly had been consolidated in the late 1930s. For this reason, we decided to analyze films of this period, in which authors involved, were later included in the blacklist or named during the 1947 to 1952 House on Un-American Activities hearings to Hollywood.

Holiday (1938) is a George Cukor's classic comedy, and employs the same team as in the famous **The Philadelphia Story** (1940). Released in 1938 with George Cukor as director and Sidney Buchman¹ and Donald Ogden Stewart as screenwriters, **Holiday** was the second adaptation of the play under the same title by Philip Barry, also author of **The Philadelphia Story** play.

We decided to analyze this film because of its background. In these reports conducted by the FBI, there was a section dedicated to the writers, actors and directors, mostly related to the Communist Party, the profile of Donald Ogden Stewart was as follows: "*Donald Ogden Stewart, writer, member of the League of American Writers and former president of that organization. A member of the Hollywood Anti -Nazi League, very active member of the American Peace Mobilization, and a member of the Communist Party*" (FBI, 1958: COMPIC IX, 160). Sidney Buchman was also named as a Communist in 1947 hearings by Roy M. Brewer and in 1951-1952 by Karl Tunberg and Edward G. Robinson and Donald Ogden Stewart was named in 1947 by Samuel Grosvenor Wood, John Charles Moffit, James K. McGuiness, Morrie Riskind, Fred Niblo Jr. and Richard McCauly, and in 1951-52 hearings by Martin Berkeley and Edward G. Robinson. Altogether, Sidney Buchman was named 3 times, and Donald Ogden Stewart 8 (ESPINOSA, 2012: 107-113).

Holiday (1938) is a controversial film by the way the rich are presented. Cukor said in an interview, referring to the 1938 version of **Holiday**, "" (...) when the

¹ Sidney Buchman just like Donald Ogden Stewart was named on several occasions by fellow professionals (friendly witnesses) in the hearings in 1947 and 1951 to Hollywood.

play premiered in 1928 was very real, the characters were rich, played the stock market and no one was concerned about the world situation." But ten years later, the Great Depression had beaten the lives of the citizens of the country, was about to explode a war in Europe and "and the reality was quite sinister. In a totally different context, the film seemed to say to hell with the rich."" (TORRES, 1992)

Whether called attention the way Capra presented Lyonel Barrymore's character, Henry F. Potter in **It's a wonderful life** as a "scrooge-type". The presentation of the patriarch of the Seton Family in **Holiday** is not an exception, in the article "Money is our God here" James Fisher, described him as "(...) Holiday's Edward Seton, the patriarch of a wealthy family and a far less likeable exemplar of "Big Business", a man inclined to measure all things by their cash value or the currency of social position" (FISHER, 2011: 28).

Screwball Comedy, Capitalism Critique, or both?

During the 1930s and within the framework of the Great Depression in the US, the film played a crucial role as the formula for citizens who had been affected by the crisis to escape. Coinciding with the crisis and the arrival of the talkies, allowed the appearance of new, more realistic themes for movies, *"What made these films so "realistic" was that they collapsed the boundaries between popular drama and the stories of chaos and disruption that permeated the newspapers"* (MAY, 2002: 136).

In addition to social issues; unions, gangs, immigration... *"Even by the late 1920s, Hollywood movies did not present a monolithic view of class relations. Like labor-capital films, a number of cross-class fantasies contained a biting anti-authoritarian edge that poked fun at the values and aspirations of various classes"* (ROSS, 2002: 85). Another genre that won presence between 1930s and 1940s was the Screwball Comedy. Scholars like Shumway and Curtas analyze Screwball genre through Stanley Cavell studies on marriage and remarriage comedies. Both criticize the closed Cavell's style analyzing the movies, sometimes not including titles in the genre of understatement when it comes to identifying possible meanings in some scenes and not admitting the three-dimensionality of some scripts ... *"the major cultural work of this films is not the stimulation of thought about marriage, but the affirmation of marriage in the face of the threat of a growing divorce rate and liberalized divorce laws"* (SHUMWAY, 1991: 7).

Holiday is a complex film, is a romantic comedy in which the main character, Johnny Case, has to choose between two women. *“Holiday is a filmic meditation on the trope of self-reliance and the perennial American tension between lofty Romantic longings and the cold pragmatics of wealth.”* (CURTAS, 2011: 1). These women represent two opposite worlds of society despite being sisters. On the one hand Julia, Johnny’s fiancée, belongs to the former and archaic New York aristocracy, symbolizing capitalism, ostentation and appearance. Furthermore Linda, who is introduced to Johnny at the beginning of the story, is presented as a clear opposite to Julia; Linda is restless, artistic, has dreams and illusions, and don’t care about money. Shumway, Curtas and Ruiz consider this duplicity of situations, the reason to allow include *Holiday* into the Screwball genre. *“Romance emerges in these comedies as a playful negotiation, often approaching the status of warfare, in which desire and defeat, togetherness and separation, postponement and fulfilment are the ultimate rules. The future partners are established as a couple only after they have shared some experiences and have built a common ground, which they mostly do through experiment and play”* (RUIZ PARDOS, 2000: 156)



Johnny Case, Ned Seton at the Seton House hall.



Johnny Case and Linda Seton at the playroom.

The film. The play.

Philip Barry's work premiered in 1928, a year later, US sank into a long crisis. Philip Barry knew their characters, had been raised between them, as the Seton family, he also belongs to the Yankee Aristocracy and **Holiday** belongs to a theatrical genre known as High Comedy. Steve Vineberg in his essay *“Philip Barry and the Yankee Aristocracy”* provides 8 points that considers the pillars of High Comedy, with which can analyze the different plays. Point number 7 describes one of the most important points on **Holiday** and without which Linda and Johnny could not achieve its objectives, and the reason is, that is very easy to get what one aims in life, when you have money and economic security.

*"In traditional high comedies—like *The School for Scandal* or *The Game of Love and Chance* or *The Importance of Being Earnest*—the characters are wealthy enough to be able to do what they want (always providing they don't cross class boundaries). Their lives are charmed; they are fated to move towards a happy ending. And since comedy of manners is conventionally about the manners of aristocrats, by tradition its attitude is complacent and conservative. Twentieth-century comedy of manners is more complicated, however—partly by the variety of aristocracies to which the characters can belong, not all of which guarantee wealth and some of which (like the bohemian clique that claims the three protagonists of Coward's *Design for Living*) embrace fairly radical ideas; and partly by the omnipresence of what Noel Coward referred to in one of his lyrics as "those twentieth-century blues." (VINEBERG, 2001: 163).*

At the beginning of the film, Johnny Case played by Cary Grant returns from a holiday in which has fallen in love and engaged to a girl he barely knows at all. The first stop after the trip is the home of his friends Professor Potter and his wife Susan, the relationship with these two characters looks like a son-parents relationship type. During this first meeting his friends seem concerned about the origins of this girl. In a comic way and ridiculing the reaction of a wealthy family with a possible pretender, start to questioning:

"Susan.- Who is this girl? What does she do?"

Johnny.- I don't know. What do most girls do?"

Susan.- Don't tell me you didn't find out anything about her?"

Johnny.- Sure. She wants me, the life I want, the home I want, the fun I want."

Susan.- What about her family?"²

Donald Ogden Stewart, changed the Potter's marriage characters. At the play they were frivolous wealthy people such as the Seton Family, actually they belonged to the same social level. At the movie, the Potters are a university professor and his wife, poor but happy, with a high intellectual level, and something to hide.

After this first introduction to the social class to which Johnny and friends belong, we moved to a large mansion, the picture of the building façade intended to be intimidating. Johnny decides to enter through the back door,

² All dialog quoted belongs to the film script **Holiday** (1938).

thinking that the woman he has fall in love should be a house worker or a secretary, and not as it turns out, live in it.

Art director Stephen Gooson managed to transmit the sensations of Johnny Case through the set, so that the public could also feel the same sensations, thus, after crossing the normal sized kitchen, got a large oversized room that helps explain the wealth of the family living in it. The reaction that provokes the space to Johnny lets him only answer one thing: "Judas". Although this set is far from the decadent luxury measurements shown in **Citizen Kane** (1941) the scene of the last mansion with a monstrous fireplace dimensions and showing the public there's no end in that great hall. Likewise the measures, Holiday's Great Hall compared to the Play Room and the kitchen is equally impressive.



Stage in **Holiday** (1938)



Stage in **Citizen Kane** (1941)

"Johnny.- Julia, seriously, what is all this?"

Julia.- I told you, where I live. I wrote it down on the back of an envelope for you.

Johnny.- But it's enormous. I'm overcome. It's the Grand Central Station."

From this first meeting, Julia shows the need to change some aspects of Johnny, his discussion of whether or not should be left an old and crooked bowtie he's wearing, appears repeatedly during the first part of the film. Through this external element show Julia's intentions to change Johnny, turn him into a Seton. *"While Julia attempts to mold Johnny into a docile capitalist archetype, Johnny undergoes a series of existential affirmations that concretize his radical desire. Johnny is assisted in these affirmations by the black-sheep sister of the Seton family (Katherine Hepburn as Linda Seton), the affably soused brother-in-law-to-be (Lew Ayres as Ned*

Seton), and his long-time intellectual friends (Edward Everett Horton and Jean Dixon as Professor Nick Potter and Susan Potter)." (CURTAS, 2011: 2)

Like any new welcome a family, gradually appear Julia's brother and sister, to give their views on the history of the family, his credo "the reverence for riches" according to Linda, "money is our God here" according to Ned. Also try the best way to help Johnny with his first visit to the father of these:

"Linda.-Know any prominent people? Drop names.

Ned.-Just casually, you know.

Linda.-At Mrs. Onderkonk's cockfight last Tuesday, whom should I see but Mrs. Marble."

The way they prepare Johnny to ask Julia's hand and the introduction to Linda Seton's character are held in the Playroom . She is the only character that has its own place in this home, a safe place, the Playroom , where she talks about her relationship with her mother, about fear having his sister run married to a man like her father and she suffer the same fate of her mother, "dead in life". She talks about his attempts to escape the house, her flirtation with the art world, theater or even when she tried to let him take a course in nurse, "and I almost got arrested trying to help some strikers over in Jersey. How was I to know that father was on the board of directors of the company?" Also this place offers the opportunity for Johnny to come clean and explain his future plans. The scenery throughout the film forms a crucial part of the story, the Playroom with fireplace and human action, full of playgrounds not only is a refuge for Linda Seton, becomes throughout the film a refuge for the Potters and also Ned and Johnny. "(...) therefore the heroes of Barry's plays are restless, uncomfortable with their aristocratic status or with the demands it places on their behavior, or else nonaristocrats who have somehow been passed into the club and feel compelled to comment on its strangeness" (VINEBERG, 164, 2001).

The introduction of Johnny Edward Seton, the patriarch, happens in comic key, anticipating every question Edward want to make to Johnny, he answers making it clear from the beginning that he comes from a humble place, and that he is a self-made man.

In the Playroom Ned despite continued drinking seems more lucid, Linda is happy, Johnny gets strength to explain his plans to both his fiancée Julia and

her father, even the Potters when arrive to the engagement announcement party seek refuge in this space and do not want to leave it. *“to the Seton standards for how to conduct your life, are carefully distinguished from Johnny, Linda, and their common friends the Potters, who are educated and witty and wise (but by no means rich). What Barry does here is very unusual. He sets up a conventional aristocracy at the beginning, tricks us into thinking that he wants Johnny to gain entrance to it, and then creates a second aristocracy that is identified not by money, but by wit, intelligence, education, culture, playfulness, liberality, flexibility and discrimination (in the best sense).”* (VINEBERG, 2001: 166)

Johnny Case-Linda Seton vs Julia Seton-Edward Seton

“Holiday is an artistic object of an all-too-familiar America that allows its audience to reflect on questions of wealth, identity, and recognition; it is a film that takes these questions seriously and whose answers represent competing inheritances of the American intellectual tradition. In its diegetic struggle for the meaning of America, Holiday presents a dialectic: Johnny/Linda and Julia/Father. Johnny and Linda represent a Romantic America, the America of self-discovery, of transcendentalism, of declaring independence and living out your ideals. Julia and Father represent the America of the market, the America of untitled aristocracy and the stagnation of a settled self” (CURTAS, 2011: 7). Curtas is right, the story can be divided into sections by the characters, starting by the opposing couples, Johnny-Linda against Julia / Father, thus facing the two Americas. When Johnny finally gathers the courage to talk to Julia’s father and tell him what his true plans are: do not continue working and kneading money, he wants to spend what he earned so far traveling and having new experiences even while still young. Receives two responses, one that he can imagine is the negative of Linda’s father, who watches over her and the family fortune; the other answer is Linda’s, the answer removes his blindfold and makes him realize that she will never accept a ruined Johnny Case, he has to choose between being free or with her.

“Father.- If I’m not much mistaken there’ll be a desk waiting for you at the bank.

Johnny.-That’s very kind of you, sir but the success of the Seaboard deal makes possible a certain plan of my own.

Julia.-But, Johnny....

Father.- A plan? Yes?

Johnny.- I'm afraid I'm not quite as anxious as I might be for the things most people work towards. I don't want too much money.

Father.- Too much money?

Johnny.-Well, more than I need to live by. It's been my idea to make a few thousands early in the game and then quit for as long as it lasts and try to find out who I am and what goes on now, while I'm young and feel good all the time. I'm sure Julia understands what I'm getting at, don't you, Julia?

Julia.- I'm not sure I do, Johnny."

Professor Nick Potter –Donald Ogden Stewart.

Ogden and Barry were colleagues at Yale, the character of Professor Nick Potter despite the differences between the play and the film script, was inspired by Ogden. In fact Ogden himself participated as an actor in the first theatrical performance of the play playing Nick Potter. It is logical that, in the film version change a little bit the character to make it more realistic that might have been at the play.

Nick Potter's character in the film is a poor but happy university professor, married to a woman that once belonged to the social caste of the Seton, and left all the wealth behind because of her relationship with Potter.

Sometimes matches can be odious, Potter and his wife at first in the movie explain that they will go on a trip and have very little time to do it, they will go to work in France and are leaving the country hastily. Just a decade after Ogden wrote the **Holiday** script, after being named on numerous occasions during the hearings, went into exile to England.



Johnny Case, Professor Nick Potter and Susan.

Ned Seton-New York Aristocracy

Every family has one, at least every rich family should have one, he is self-destructive, with certain arrogance and completely resigned. Ned's character is not exactly a black sheep, that is Linda's role, Ned has been forced to work in the family business against his wishes (to become a musician) therefore, no longer left him another option and without the courage to reveal against his father, has chosen a slow and tedious suicide by alcoholism. Alcohol allows Ned move between the two worlds as a ghost, and not receive a reprisal by his father. Ned continues to be a stereotype, which in this script works precisely for ease of connection between the two worlds.

"Ned.- ...Well, to begin with, it brings you to life. And after a while, you begin to know all about it. You feel...I don't know...important. (Linda: "That must be good.") It is. And then pretty soon, the game starts...A swell game. A terribly exciting game. You see, you think clear and crystal, but every move, every sentence is a problem. That gets pretty interesting.

Linda.-You get beaten though, don't you?

Ned.-Sure, but that's good, too. Then you don't mind anything, not anything at all. Then you sleep. A long while, as long as you last...

Linda.- Where do you end up?

Ned.- Where does anybody end up? You die. And that's all right, too.."



Ned and Linda Seton.

Conclusions

Holiday is a film in which the values of comfort and wealth are criticized and rethought. But even with this critical point of view of wealth, wealth were Philip Barry and Donald Ogden Stewart come from, they were from wealthy families and were friends. During the first performances in the theater Donald Ogden Stewart participated as an actor along with other upper class young as they felt that was better without professional actors.

Fisher refers to the vision of this company in the original play this way: "(...) Certainly the "gaming" of the system is what a man like Edward Seton, the "Big Business" exemplar of Holiday, lives for, but Barry is more concerned with the ways in which money distorts values and destroys individuals, relationships, and families. He assumes his audience understands that Seton is, if not corrupt, at least espousing corrupt values. He uses his family name, position in society, and even his children to maintain his winning position in the economic game (...)"

Although it is true that money distorts the ideals, the only reason Johnny Case can consider the possibility of withdrawing at thirty and then "you'll see", is because he has won a large sum of money, just as Linda Seton can play to be independent and rebellious leaving his father's house, knowing she cannot run out of money.

This rebellious view that says "money is not important" is the thinking from a privileged economic security class, which doesn't damage the final message of the play and the film itself, but it does, if we try to extrapolate this situation to the real life. The next question would be if it is worthwhile:

In a situation where you have to choose to work to eat and live or choose your ideals and living on the street, what is more worthy?

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Filmography

Holiday. Director: George Cukor. Script: Donald Ogden Stewart and Sidney Buchman. Cast: Katherine Hepburn, Cary Grant, Doris Nolan. Production: Columbia Pictures Co., 1938.

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