THE DRAMATIC WORK OF GEORGE S. KAUFMAN

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Bachelor of Arts

Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College

Stillwater, Oklahoma

1940

Submitted to the Department of English

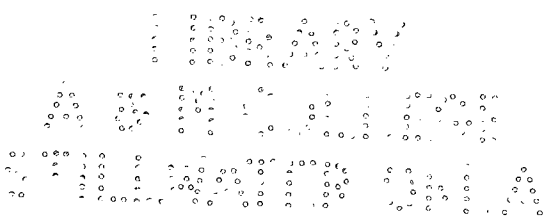
Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

1941



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PREFACE

There has been no complete study made (as far as the author can determine) of the work of George S. Kaufman, who is one of the leading figures in the contemporary theatrical world. This thesis is an attempt to compile the facts that are known about him and to examine his plays to determine his style, subject matter, and any other characteristics which may or may not establish him as a leading dramatic personage in the years to come. Does he have the qualities that are characteristic of a really great dramatist? If not, what qualities does he possess? Why are his plays increasingly popular with modern audiences? These are just a few of the questions that a study of this kind should try to answer.

This thesis is to be divided into four chapters: "Kaufman, the Man," "Kaufman, the Collaborator," "Kaufman, the Playwright," and "Conclusion." The first is based on biographical material. Not very many facts are known about Kaufman regardless of his contemporary status, and a search has had to be made through magazine articles, chapters in books, and so on, to find out just what is definitely known about him. Very few of his philosophical ideas (if he has any definitely formulated ones) or of other key factors which have influenced his life are known. A few general trends can be observed from material in his plays, but even here one cannot always be sure that this is the real

Kaufman because he follows no especially consistent view in the manner in which he attacks his material. A basis for the second chapter is the fact that Kaufman has written only three plays alone, and this fact that he has worked mainly with other writers must be taken into consideration in any study of his work. The third chapter and the fourth chapter contain material that is obvious from their titles.

The sources used in writing this thesis are many, most of them being articles in either periodicals or newspapers. However, several chapters in books on contemporary drama were consulted, and works like Who's Who in America and so on played an important part in the reference work done on the collaborators especially. Critical reviews of the plays in both magazines and newspapers also furnished a large fund of information. Most of the material, however, is taken directly from the plays themselves. A great many reviews were read in connection with this thesis that were not actually used as sources for the material used. This critical material is listed in a check list in the appendix so that it may readily be found by any interested reader.

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CHAPTER I

KAUFMAN, THE MAN

If the length of a play's run on Broadway and the amount of money it makes for its author were a dependable measure of the worth of a dramatist, George S. Kaufman would stand foremost in the ranks of the playwrights in the contemporary American theater. But, because he is a contemporary figure, very little is known regarding the factors which have influenced his life or even regarding the ordinary details of his biography. This first chapter is an attempt to gather together the few points that are known and to present them in a compact whole. There were two main sources for this study, but many of the details were found in critical reviews and other articles regarding his work.

George S. Kaufman was born in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, on November 14, 1889. His parents, Joseph Kaufman and Nettie Myers Kaufman, were a middle-class Jewish family which "managed to get in on every business as it was finishing, and made a total of $4 among them." [1] He attended the public schools of Pittsburg and graduated from Pittsburg High School. There he began the study of law, for it seemed to him a rather good way to put off working for another three or four years, but he soon gave up the idea

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[1] "Past Master," Time, Vol. 34 (November 20, 1939), p. 67, col. 1.

of a career in the legal profession because he found the law itself impossible to understand. Then came a series of various jobs in rapid succession that finally put him in New York City. First, he carried a chain in a surveying corps for a time, but he soon shifted to the position of a window clerk in the county tax office. Again he was not at all satisfied, and, after learning shorthand and typing, he became the secretary to the comptroller of a Pittsburg coal company. When he took the place he said he had no idea just what a comptroller was, but that he soon found that he was a "man who began dictating at 5:30 P. M."[2] He was employed here for only a short time but soon secured another position as a traveling salesman for a leather concern. The itinerant nature of the work and the fact that his family had moved to Paterson, New Jersey, a town within commuting distance of New York City, made it possible for him to spend most of his time in the metropolis. But he soon gave up traveling salesmanship and found another job as a worker in a hat-band factory. At this time he also began contributing humorous bits to Franklin P. Adams' column which was then running in the New York Evening Mail. Adams later obtained employment for him on the Washington Times which he managed to keep for a short time (1912-1913).

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[2] John Chapman, "The Gloomy Dean," Saturday Evening Post, Vol. 210 (January 1, 1938), p. 33, col. 3.

After he was fired in Washington, he returned to New York City, where Adams was able to secure another position for him, this time writing drama notes for the New York Tribune on whose staff Heywood Broun held the post of dramatic critic. Time magazine says of his job there that "Broun--who wanted to work at something else--in a 'burst of bad judgment' lent his job to Kaufman. After reading Kaufman's reviews, Broun took the job back."[3]

Kaufman next moved to the conservative New York Times where he remained as dramatic editor at a very unimportant salary for the next thirteen years. Even after he became a successful playwright, he kept his position on the Times, first, because it gave him a feeling of security, and, secondly, because it gave him a good excuse for leaving parties when he was tired or bored with people. He could always say that he had to get back to the office to do some work. For years, Kaufman's Sunday theater gossip was almost the only light hearted feature of this paper. The light touch used in his column has now become almost standard in writing this type of copy. The following story is told by his associates about one of Kaufman's underlings who became very ponderous and introduced all

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[3] "Past Master," op. cit., p. 68, col. 2.

sorts of footnotes into his copy that were referred to by asterisks, daggers, and signs of the zodiac. Kaufman searched the printing room and found a sign that the underling had not used as yet. Then, in a review which he wrote himself about Eugene O'Neill's Strange Interlude, Kaufman used the symbol to refer to the footnote, "Does not carry dining car." After this, the copy was written as he wanted it to be. [4]

During his early days on the Times, he wrote his first play, a farce about check raising called Going Up. Kaufman re-wrote and re-wrote this play until he finally ceased writing after the completion of the thirty-fifth version. About this time the Stern Brokerage was formed, and Kaufman was recommended to the brokerage by Burns Mantle. This company was designed to aid young playwrights who were trying to get a start by taking their plays about to producers. If the plays were sold, the brokerage would receive a small part of the royalties. The brokerage accepted Kaufman's play but was unable to sell it. The play is important, though, for the effect it had on Kaufman's later success as a playwright. George C. Tyler [5] read the play and remembered the snappiness of its dialogue. Later, when he was looking for someone to help spruce up a comedy by Larry

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[4] "Past Master," op. cit., p. 34, col. 1.

[5] George Crouse Tyler (1867-), producing manager; produced Someone in the House, Dulcy, To the Ladies, Merton of the Movies, and The Deep Tangled Wildwood.

Evans called Someone in the House, he thought of Kaufman and called him in to take over this job. When the play was produced, it lasted for only thirty-seven performances, perhaps because the flu epidemic of 1918 was raging and people were shunning crowds, and perhaps because it just was not a good play. John Chapman writes of it: "In vain Kaufman tried to persuade Tyler to advertise, 'Avoid Crowds. See Someone in the House at the Knickerbocker Theater.'" [6] This play was also the motivating force behind the writing of Kaufman's first successful play, Dulcy, written in collaboration with Marc Connelly in 1921. Thus Kaufman gained his first public notice in the play-writing business as a collaborator, and he has worked in that capacity ever since, having collaborated with some nine different people.[7]

As an author Kaufman is a perfectionist. He must have every word, every line, exactly right before he will go on to something else. Even after the rehearsals begin he still works on the script until he is absolutely satisfied with it. This same desire for perfection led Kaufman into the position as director for the first time in 1925, on the only play he has written by himself, The Butter and Egg Man. He lacked confidence in himself and did not complete

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[6] John Chapman, op. cit., p. 33-34, cols. 4, 1.

[7] For a complete discussion of his collaborations, see Chapter II, "Kaufman, the Collaborator."

the directing of this play or even of the next two or three, but since these first attempts he has directed almost all of his own plays. He pays the strictest attention to even the smallest detail and often rehearses a seemingly unimportant piece of stage business over and over until it is exactly as he wants it. He often rehearses a play by not looking at the stage but by listening only to the dialogue. He has an infallible ear for the rhythm of conversation, and no player has ever been able to ad-lib even a syllable without his spotting it. George M. Cohan [8] is the only actor who has ever been able to ad-lib a line and make it stick as part of the text.

In 1930, in the production of Once in a Lifetime, Kaufman did the first and only acting of his career. He played the part of Lawrence Vail, a famous author who, having been hired to write scripts and then utterly forgotten, had been left to wait interminably in the reception room of the great Hollywood director, Herman Glogauer. Kaufman must have been very good in the part, for Heywood Broun wrote in his review of it, "George Kaufman makes his debut as an actor, and--this is no log-rolling--he is just swell." [9]

Shortly after Kaufman had arrived in New York City in

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[8] George M. Cohan (1878-), actor, dramatic author, composer, and manager; appeared in 1937 as the President of the United States in I'd Rather Be Right.

[9] Nation, Vol. 131, p. 386.

about 1914, he became a member of what was designated the "Algonquin Round Table," a so-called club in which he associated with Connelly, Broun, Woollcott, Robert Benchley, Dorothy Parker, Franklin P. Adams, and others. Here Kaufman became famous as one of the wits of that period in New York City.

Kaufman has a passion for poker derived partly from his associations in Washington and partly from the "Thanatopsis Literary and Inside Straight Club," which was an extension of the "Algonquin Round Table." He has told his friends that "whatever qualities of fortitude, courage, or persistence he may have he owes to the ten-handed stud game that ran twenty-four hours a day at the National Press Club." [10]

Kaufman finds it impossible to keep away from the theater when one of his plays is being produced. He lounges in the lobby talking to the porter or ticket-taker or anyone else who is there or prowls about back stage. He likes to slip into the theater when the actors do not know he is there to see whether there is a let-down in the performance or any player is taking liberties with the script. If he finds anything wrong, he sends a telegram to the offender. John Chapman relates two examples of this practice.

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[10] John Chapman, op. cit., p. 34, col. 1.

> Well along in the run of a certain musical comedy, Kaufman returned from a month's absence from New York, slipped into the standing-room section and listened for a few moments. The male star's performance had deteriorated badly. Quietly, Kaufman retreated to the telegraph office in the Hotel Astor, and there filed a message to the actor, care of the stage door. "Dear _____," it said: "I am watching your performance from last row. Wish you were here. George." Another visit to a play in which the star had effected some changes in the script, as stars will, resulted in this wire: "Dear _____: Your performance magnificent and improving every day. Sorry I can't say same about lines." [11]

In his personal appearance, according to popular superstition at least, Kaufman is described as being rangy and carelessly dressed, wearing no hat, and as having "a bushy pompadour and rimless glasses, heavy black eyebrows arched in a manner of plaintive inquiry, and a look of utter mournfulness."[12] He is hard to know, always blunt, often brusque,[13] and occasionally brutal. He is afraid of growing old and losing his hair. He forms friendships slowly and has few friends. He is unsociable and prefers his own company to that of others. He talks to himself and makes strange faces.

In 1917 he married Beatrice Bakrow who is just about his opposite in temperament. She is gay and sociable and is a playwright herself, having had at least two successes on

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[11] John Chapman, op. cit., p. 16, col. 1.

[12] Ibid., p. 16, col. 1.

[13] In reply to a letter from the author asking for some information to be used in this thesis, Kaufman replied: "Sorry to be unappreciative, but it's really too much trouble. Take Chaucer."

Broadway. Both of hers have, like her husband's successes, been collaborations. Divided by Three was written in 1934 with Margaret Leech, and The White-Haired Boy, written with Charles Martin, is now being produced in New York City. Mrs. Kaufman has also had several years of experience in newspaper and magazine work, having been head of the editorial department of Boni and Liveright from 1920 to 1925, on the staff of the Viking Press in 1932, and the fiction editor of Harper's Bazaar since 1934. She also has been the eastern story editor for Samuel Goldwyn since 1936.

As has already been mentioned, Kaufman's first play on Broadway that met with critical approval was Dulcy in 1921. For several years following he wrote only with Marc Connelly, and together they wrote six plays. After his association with Connelly was dissolved, Kaufman wrote with several different people, but from 1936 (You Can't Take It with you) to the present time, 1941, he has written with no one except Moss Hart. Their last play is George Washington Slept Here, now being produced in New York City.

In 1937, after the Pulitzer Prize was awarded to Kaufman and Hart's You Can't Take It with You, Kaufman resigned his position as dramatic critic of the New York Times, a position he has held for thirteen years. He seemed to believe that there was no longer any necessity of keeping the job as a means of livelihood; his success as a dramatist seemed assured.

As a playwright Kaufman has been unusually successful. He has the enviable record of having had at least one play on Broadway every year since 1921. He has written thirty-four plays in all, over half of which have been successful on the basis of an accepted commercial valuation of a hit on Broadway being a run of at least one hundred performances. I'd Rather Be Right was the twenty-third Kaufman play to pass this mark; fifteen of the plays have even run close to two hundred performances or better. You Can't Take It with You had a record run of eight hundred and thirty-seven performances, being the fifth longest run in the history of Broadway. [14] Burns Mantle has included fifteen of his plays in his various annual volumes of the Best Plays. Twenty of his scripts have been sold to the moving pictures for a total of over $1,500,000. He has also had the honor of winning the Pulitzer Prize twice, in 1931 for Of Thee I Sing, and in 1936 for You Can't Take It with You. The extraordinary success that has been attained by Kaufman and the feeling the public has towards him is illustrated well by the suit that was brought against him by Isadore Polisuk in 1938. Mr. Polisuk had seen a play in Greenwich Village that he thought could be made into a good play. He bought the rights to it and hired Kaufman to re-write it. Eldorado,

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[14] Tobacco Road, 5,000 (still running); Abie's Irish Rose, 2,532; Lightnin', 1,291; The Bat, 867; and You Can't Take It with You, 837.

as it was called, was a flop in the tryout performance. Polisuk sued Kaufman because it was not a success. The fact that anyone would sue Kaufman because a play he wrote was not a hit is indeed a great tribute to the man.

CHAPTER II

KAUFMAN, THE COLLABORATOR

The fact that Kaufman has gained most of his fame in the theater as a collaborator does not mark him as an especially unusual figure in the world of the drama. Anyone acquainted with the history of the theater can think of several other examples of collaborations which have been very successful, among these being the Elizabethan team of Beaumont and Fletcher, the Victorians Gilbert and Sullivan, and the contemporary partners Hecht and McArthur.[1] The exceptional feature in Kaufman's case is that he has been able to produce successfully with both his major collaborators, Marc Connelly and Moss Hart, as well as with several more minor figures.

His collaborators have been a widely varying group of people with very different backgrounds. One must know a little about each of these people in order to understand more fully the work that they have done with Kaufman. It is rather interesting to note that his collaborators are either important in their own right or have become so after their association with Kaufman. Connelly is a successful independent dramatist. Miss Ferber is even more famous for

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[1] Ben Hecht (1894-) and Charles McArthur (1895-) have written together several plays including The Front Page, 1928; Twentieth Century, 1932; Jumbo, 1935; and Ladies and Gentlemen, 1939.

her work in the field of the novel than in that of the drama. Mankiewicz and Ryskind have good positions as scenario writers in Hollywood. Ring Lardner was well known for his short stories. Woollcott is perhaps better known for his radio work than for his dramatic attempts. Hart has been an effective dramatist by himself. Dietz has achieved success as a writer for both the theater and the moving pictures, and Miss Dayton is a proficient magazine writer. Four of Kaufman's collaborators have formed writing partnerships among themselves. In 1927, Morrie Ryskind and Howard Dietz wrote Merry-Go-Round together, and, in the same year, Marc Connelly and Herman Mankiewicz produced the The Wild Man of Borneo.

In the interim between Kaufman and Connelly's dissolution of their partnership in 1924 and the comparatively recent group of plays (beginning in 1936) written with Moss Hart, Kaufman did not remain with any one playwright for more than one play at a time. However, occasionally he did return to some of his former collaborators, especially Edna Ferber and Morrie Ryskind.

A question that naturally arises in the mind of the reader is "Why does Kaufman always collaborate with someone?" The answer to this seems to be that he is aware that his plays have a better chance of being successful if he works with someone else. Of the three plays he has written by himself, one was a success (The Cocoanuts), one was moderately successful (The Butter and Egg Man), and one was a failure (If Men Played Cards as Women Do). When one com-

pares this record with the long list of really good plays that Kaufman has helped write and remembers that he has won the Pulitzer Prize twice in collaboration with someone else, one realizes that Kaufman is probably very wise to work as he does. Burns Mantle calls Kaufman the "Great Collaborateur of his time" and writes that "he frankly confesses that he works best and most happily when he, so to speak, furnishes the steel for another's flint, or the flint for another's steel."[2]

Kaufman tries to make each collaboration an evenly shared job which means that both of the writers must write all of the dialogue together. Regardless of the time required, everything in the play must be absolutely right before they pass on to something new. Kaufman may spend several hours working over a single line or may require a whole day to decide on an exit. Because of these rather strenuous working habits, Moss Hart nicknamed their first job together, "The Days of the Terror." When Kaufman is working, he cannot sit still but prowls about poking into everything. Alexander Woollcott said that "in the throes of composition he seems to crawl up the walls of the apartment in the manner of the late count Dracula."[3] Edna Ferber likes to tell of an experience she had with Kaufman when they were working on Dinner at Eight. Kaufman's habit of walking about and looking into things gave her the opportunity to play a joke on him. She wrote something on a

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[2] Burns Mantle, Contemporary American Playwrights, New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1938, p. 8.

[3] "Post Master," loc. cit., p. 66, col. 2.

telegram blank and placed it face down among some personal papers on her desk, knowing that sooner or later Kaufman would see it and pick it up. He did. On the blank was written, "George Kaufman is an old snoop."[4]

The rest of this second chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the different dramatists with whom Kaufman has been associated and of the work that they have done together. Because all of his plays may not be available to the reader for further study, summaries of the plots of the plays are given to enable the reader to see to some extent the general type of work done by Kaufman with each of his collaborators. The plot summaries are based, when the plays themselves have not been accessible to the writer, on critical reviews and on discussions found in the various annual editions of Burns Mantle's Best Plays.

As I have already mentioned in the preceding chapter, Kaufman's first appearance as a playwright in New York City was in 1918 as joint author of Someone in the House with Larry Evans. The play itself was not a success and is important only because it was the beginning of Kaufman's long run of plays in New York and because it led to the writing of Dulcy with Marc Connelly in 1921. In Someone in the House, Lynn Fontanne played the part of a rather "dumb" young girl who had nothing very intelligent to say, but who said what she did say delightfully. Kaufman and Connelly decided that

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[4] John Chapman, op. cit., p. 34, col. 3.

a whole play could be written around this type of character, and Dulcy, their first dramatic success, was the result. They based their character also on a figure in Franklin P. Adam's column, Dulcinea. Dulcy is the story of an unintelligent but well-meaning young wife who tries to help her husband in his business affairs much to his sorrow. She invites a strangely assorted group of people, including her husband's employer and his family, to their home for the week-end. Thinking that she is helping everyone to be happy, she stirs everything into a terrible mess, almost promoting the marriage of the employer's daughter and a scenario writer, almost ruining her husband's business prospects, and almost causing a divorce between the employer and his wife. Finally and actually as a result of her silly actions, none of these things happen.

As men and playwrights, Kaufman and Connelly have at least three characteristics in common: they were both born in Pennsylvania, both were newspapermen, and both have been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the drama. Connelly, who was a reporter for some time on the Pittsburg Sun. During this time he also contributed verse and articles to Life, Everybody's and other magazines. He then turned to the field of the drama, and his first play to achieve any popular appeal, The Amber Empress, was produced in 1916. In 1921, as we have seen, he and Kaufman formed a writing partnership that was a very happy one for both of the men, and it lasted for several years. The year after Dulcy was produced, they wrote three plays, the first being the unsuccessful comedy, To the Ladies, the story of

Leonard and Elsie Beebe and Leonard's attempts to advance in the firm of John Kincaid's Sons, piano manufacturers. Leonard is not a clever person, and his final rise to a responsible position in the firm is entirely due to the efforts of his wife. Following was the equally unenthusiastically received modernistic revue, The '49ers, which ran for only sixteen performances in New York City. This play has never been published in any form. The third play written in this year, however, secured the approval of the public. Instead of writing more modern revues, they returned to the simpler and more humorous style of Dulcy and wrote Merton of the Movies, a dramatization of a story of the same name by Henry Leon Wilson. This play about the attempts of a rather unintelligent and untalented former country-store clerk to make a career for himself in the early days of the moving-picture industry ran for two hundred and forty-eight performances in New York City and later was made into a moving picture. In the next year, 1923, Kaufman and Connelly wrote two plays, one well-received and one a failure. The former, a musical comedy called Helen of Troy, New York, ran for one hundred and ninety-one performances in spite of a rather weak story. This is again the story of rather simple people. Helen McGuffey, who is the stenographer to the president in a Troy collar factory, loses her job because her boss objects when his son falls in love with her. She later invents the semi-soft style of collar which causes, among other things, a rival factory to rise, a merger to be effected,

and Helen to win the manufacturer's son after all. The failure of 1923 was a comedy called The Deep Tangled Wildwood that ran for only sixteen performances. It has the distinction, however, of being one of the first treatments of Broadway in a play by Kaufman. The plot is the story of a Broadway playwright, James Parks Leland. The failure of his newest drama makes him believe there is something wrong with him, that he has become too hard and sophisticated, too cynical and blase, and that he needs to go back home where people are real and earnest. But Millersville is a disappointment to him for he finds the country people have become citified and taken to drinking, dancing, and smoking. The only real person he can find is another New Yorker, Mary Ellen. They fall in love and go back to Broadway for their honeymoon.

In 1924, the last year of Kaufman and Connelly's partnership, they repeated their record of the year before, producing one success and one failure. The first of these, Beggar on Horseback, (one hundred and forty-one performances) was also revived for a short run during the next season (1924) and was produced in London in 1925. The story behind the writing of this play is interesting. In 1923 Winthrop Ames bought the American rights to a satirical German play, Hans Sonnenstosser's Hollenfahrt (Johnny Sunstormer's Trip to Hell) by Paul Apel. This concerns a composer who dreams himself married into a family of Philistines, having been tempted by the prospect of an easy life in which to compose

his music free from worry about money.[5] Ames, having asked Kaufman and Connelly to write the American version of the play, told them the story of the original German one, which these two dramatists did not read. They rearranged the episodes in the play and inserted the pantomime, "A Kiss in Xanadu," in the second part. In their version so much emphasis is placed on a satire of America and Americans that it seems hardly to be a derivative of a German original. Alexander Woollcott says that Beggar on Horseback represents "the distaste that can be inspired by the viewpoint, the complacency, and the very idiom of Rotarian America. It is a small and facetious disturbance in the rear of the Church of the Gospel of Success."[6] Another reviewer writes that "the pitiful barrenness of big business has been attacked before with the weapons of cruel realism, but never has it been dealt such a blow as by this dream-play with its expressionistic sort of fancy. The hideous nightmare of bad taste, conceit, and subservience to wealth visited by the god of trade upon his worshippers has been recognized for its true self."[7] The last play written together by these two is a disappointment after this one. Be Yourself, a musical

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[5] Carl Carmer, "George S. Kaufman, Playmaker to Broadway," Theatre Arts Monthly, Vol. 16 (October 1932), p. 819.

[6] Burns Mantle, The Best Plays of 1923-1924, New York,

[7] Carl Carmer, op. cit., p. 811.

comedy with only ninety-three performances to its credit, is the story of a dancer, Matt McLean, who while traveling south through the Brennan country, discovers that there had been a Brennan-McLean feud some years before and that he is far from popular in the region even now. With the help of a chorus girl, Tony Robinson, however, he manages to sing and dance his way out of trouble. Although Be Yourself marked the end of the partnership of Kaufman and Connelly, it did not mean that either man was quitting the theater. Kaufman, of course, has written many more plays, and Connelly, although he has not been so prolific a writer, has still had several plays produced on Broadway, among them being The Green Pastures, which won the Pulitzer Prize for him in 1930.

Twenty-one days after the premier of Be Yourself, Minick, the first play by the new collaboration, Kaufman and Edna Ferber, opened in New York City. Born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 1887, and educated in Appleton, Wisconsin, Miss Ferber began reporting for the Appleton Daily Crescent at the age of seventeen. She later served as a reporter on the Milwaukee Journal and the Chicago Tribune. The author of several short stories and many novels, Miss Ferber received the Pulitzer Prize in 1924 for her novel, So Big. Her first dramatic attempt was the play, Our Mrs. McChesney (1915) based on her novel, Emma McChesney and Company. She wrote two plays, The Eldest, and $1,200 a Year (with Newman Levy) before she joined Kaufman in 1924 to write Minick, based on her short story, Old Man Minick. The plot concerns the adjustments that have to be made by an upper-middle-class couple, Fred and Nettie Minick,

when Fred's father comes to live with them. Finally, the elder Minick realizes that it is impossible for the two generations to live together harmoniously, and he goes to a home for old men where he can be with people of his own kind. This play was not an outstanding success but lasted for one hundred and forty-one performances in New York City and for about the same time in Chicago. The next collaboration of Miss Ferber and Kaufman was not until 1927 when they wrote The Royal Family about the life of an imaginary stage family, the Cavendishes, who resemble to some extent the Barrymores. However, in spite of the critic's insistence to the contrary, the Cavendishes are not a picturization of the Barrymores, and, indeed, a study of the play shows very little similarity in the actual deeds of the two groups. Fanny Cavendish, who represents the oldest generation, has been ill but is planning a comeback. Julie, her daughter, is seeing again a prosperous business man whom she had almost married many years ago. Julie's brother, a moving picture star, has become involved in a rather shady affair in Hollywood and is fleeing from the country. Gwen, Julie's daughter, gets married but finds that she cannot leave the theater. Julie wants to marry her business man, but in the end she decides that the theater is her whole existence. Fanny dies peacefully, secure in the knowledge that the family tradition will be carried on by the younger members of the family. This play had a run of one hundred and ninety-six performances in New York City.

The other two plays in this group were also written several years apart, Dinner at Eight being produced in 1932 and Stage Door in 1936. Both of these plays were very successful, the former having played for two hundred and thirty-two performances and the latter for one hundred and sixty-ninge. Dinner at Eight is an episodic drama showing how the lives and fortunes of the people who are to attend a dinner given by Oliver and Millicent Jordon are all interwoven. It contains among other things minor blackmail, death by heart failure, one seduction, one adultery, one bigamous marriage, one suicide by gas, one financial ruin, and one duel. Stage Door is the story of a group of stage-struck girls living together in a theatrical boardinghouse. They are hopeful of great success when they are working and are brave, but threadbare and pathetic, when they are not. It is also a story of Broadway versus Hollywood in which the former wins.

After the production of Minick with Miss Ferber in 1924, Kaufman wrote two plays[8] alone before associating with another dramatist. His next partner, for a single play, Herman Jacob Mankiewicz, is now a successful scenarist in Hollywood. After graduating from Columbia University with a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors in 1916, he became a flying cadet in the United States Army and was a member of the American Expeditionary Force from 1917 to 1919. He stayed in Europe

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[8] The Butter and Egg Man, 1925; The Cocoanuts, 1925.

as a foreign correspondent from 1920 until 1922 when he became the general manager for Isidora Duncan. He remained in this capacity only a short time, however, and became successively a reporter for the New York World and for the New York Times dramatic departments (1922-1926), the dramatic critic of the New Yorker (1925-1926), and a writer and producer for Paramount Pictures in Hollywood (1926-1932). He has been a writer in the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio since 1932. The Good Fellow, the play he wrote with Kaufman, goes back to Kaufman's home state, Pennsylvania, for its locale. It is the story of Jim Helton who is the most successful back-slapper and "joiner" in the town of Wilkes-Barre. He agrees to raise ten thousand dollars so that the convention of the Grand Order of Corsicans will be held in his home town. The citizens of Wilkes-Barre and the other lodge brothers fail him, and he is forced to pawn his life insurance and hold-up his daughter's fiance to get the needed money. His attempts are exposed, but he gets a good job out of it and wins the forgiveness of his family in the end. The play was a decided failure, lasting for only seven performances.

Following the collaboration with Mankiewicz, Kaufman was allied with Morrie Ryskind. This team wrote five plays including the Pulitzer Prize winner, Of Thee I Sing. Ryskind, like Mankiewicz, was born and educated in New York City. He attended Columbia University, but was expelled six weeks before graduation because he wrote a satirical poem about the faculty. Ironically, a few years later, Columbia University,

the custodian of the Pulitzer awards, had to give the prize in the field of the drama to Of Thee I Sing of which Ryskind was co-author. He has written much humorous verse and light literature and has worked in Hollywood. Their first play, a musical comedy Animal Crackers (1928) starring the four Marx Brothers, was produced first in New York City, then Chicago and was later produced as a motion picture. Strike Up the Band (1930), their next effort, is important because it brought together the combination of George S. Kaufman, Morrie Ryskind, George Gershwin, and Ira Gershwin,[9] which next wrote Of Thee I Sing. The former play, though, was successful in its own right, running to one hundred and seventy-five performances in New York City. The plot is much like that of the more successful Of Thee I Sing, being a musical comedy satire of America's stuffed-shirt patriots. Horace J. Fletcher, who is a self-made American business man in the chocolate trade, becomes quite aroused over a protest filed by Switzerland against the duty imposed by Congress on the importing of foreign milk chocolate. After suffering a minor stroke, Horace is given a powder that makes him dream. He dreams that he is a general of an American army in Switzerland who is trying to arrange a battle or two with the Swiss. The war ends in confusion when Colonel Holmes

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[9] George Gershwin wrote the music and Ira Gershwin the lyrics for Of Thee I Sing and Let 'Em Eat Cake.

of the American forces learns to yodel and thereby gains possession of the enemy's secret calls to arms.

Of Thee I Sing (1931) has the distinction of being the first musical comedy to win the Pulitzer Prize. The plot concerns the problems met in the presidential campaign of John P. Wintergreen supported by Alexander Throttlebottom, a little man who is forgotten by everyone, running for the position of Vice-President. Deciding that the party needs a campaign with more appeal, the party leaders resolve to hold a contest at Atlantic City to select a "Miss White House" who will become Wintergreen's wife. The scheme is threatened with disaster when Wintergreen falls in love with his secretary, Mary Turner, because she can bake corn muffins. After they are married and Wintergreen has been elected, Diana Devereaux, the contest winner, and the French ambassador declare that war with France is eminent because Wintergreen did not marry Diana. But everything turns out all right when Throttlebottom takes over this part of the president's duties.

Kaufman and Ryskind's next play, Let 'Em Eat Cake, was an unsuccessful sequel to Of Thee I Sing. It is a continuation of the adventures of Wintergreen and Throttlebottom who are defeated while running for reelection. Wintergreen organizes a revolution with the help of Kruger of Union Square. The army is drawn in by being promised the war debts, and Mary does nicely as the designer and manufacturer of the blue shirts adopted by the revolutionists. In the end, the country's problems are rested on the outcome of a baseball

game between the nine justices of the Supreme Court and the nine foreign representatives of the League of Nations. Throttlebottom is the umpire and is sent to the guillotine because of a wrong decision against the home team. The play ran for only ninety performances in New York City in spite of this rather clever plot.

There follow, at intervals of several years however, four minor collaborators and one major collaborator. The first of the minor ones is Ring Lardner with whom Kaufman wrote only one play, the very successful June Moon in 1929 based on Lardner's short story, "Some Like 'Em Cold." The play had one of the longer runs in Kaufman's history, lasting for two hundred and seventy-three performances in New York City. Ring Lardner, the co-author of June Moon, was born in Niles, Michigan, in 1885. After graduating from the public schools and the Armour Institute in Chicago, he took up newspaper work, first in South Bend, Indiana, and later in Chicago. He worked on most of the Chicago papers, finishing with a considerable service on the Tribune, his last stay in the sporting department of that paper being for six years. He is the author of several volumes of short stories, including The Young Immigrunts, You Know Me, Al, and How to Write Short Stories. Lardner's first play, Elmer, the Great, was produced the season before the appearance of June Moon. He also had written The Love Nest based on another of his short stories in collaboration with Robert Emmet Sherwood. Lardner is especially noted for his character studies of the common type of American with all his vanity and stupidity.

Lardner treated these characters with a sort of humor that was cruel and often pessimistic. Heywood Broun says that Lardner was "a significant commentator who expressed the life of America in the language and from the point of view of a baseball reporter. He interpreted life shrewdly by dealing with it in terms of the individuals he knew best. In addition to ball players, Ring Lardner like song writers. Or perhaps he didn't like them. At any rate, they fascinated him."[10] This rather pessimistic and cynical idea of life finds expression in June Moon, an attack on the song writers of the years around 1929. It is the story of Fred Stevens, a former employee of the General Electric plant at Schenectady, who goes to New York City to become a song writer. On the train he meets Edna Baker, a simple, sweet, dentist's assistant, but she soon becomes secondary in Fred's affections. He sees the city, paying all the bills, with his partner, Paul Sears, a song writer rather down on his luck, Sear's wife, Lucille, and her sister Eileen, a slightly tarnished gold-digger. Since her former sweetheart has just thrown her over, Eileen seizes Fred as a new victim. Lucille becomes the mistress of an old friend of hers because Paul can no longer give her the jewels and clothes that she desires. In the end, Lucille and Eileen are shown up in their true light, and Edna is

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[10]Literary Digest, Vol. 116 (October 14, 1933), p. 19.

re-united with Fred who has written a song called June Moon that is an over-night hit.

The second of the minor ones is Alexander Woollcott with whom Kaufman wrote two rather unsuccessful plays, The Channel Road (1929) and The Dark Tower (1933). Woollcott, who is especially well known for his career as a dramatic critic and Town Crier, was born in 1887 in Phalanx, New Jersey. He was educated in Philadelphia and in Hamilton College. In 1914, he began his career as the dramatic critic on some of the New York newspapers, being on the New York Times (1914-1922), the New York Herald (1922-1925), and the New York World (1925-1928). He first appeared as an actor at the Belasco theater as Harold Sigrift in Brief Moment in 1931. He is currently (1940-41) appearing as Sheridan Whiteside in a road company of Kaufman's The Man Who Came to Dinner which is based on Woollcott's life. His only dramatic attempts are the two plays with Kaufman, but he has published several books including Mrs. Fiske--Her Views on Acting, Actors, and the Problems of the Stage, 1917; Shouts and Murmurs, 1922; Enchanted Aisles, 1924; and The Woollcott Reader, 1935. The first of the two plays, The Channel Road (sixty performances), a stage version of De Maupassant's "Boule de Suif" concerns the adventures of Madeleine Rousset, prostitute, when she and some other travellers are detained by the Prussian soldiers after the defeat of the French at Sedan in the Franco-Prussian War. The second of the two plays, The Dark Tower (fifty-seven

performances), is a melodrama about Jessica Wells, an actress, who is under the hypnotic influence of her villainous husband, Stanley Vance. Jessica is rescued from her trance when her brother Damon, disguised as a theatrical producer, stabs Stanley.

The third in this group of minor collaborators is Howard Dietz with whom Kaufman wrote the musical comedy, The Band Wagon in 1931. Dietz, a lyricist and librettist, was born in New York City in 1896. He was a student at Townsend Harris Hall from 1911 to 1913 and graduated from Columbia University in 1917. Beginning his career as a newspaper reporter and an advertising expert, he contributed to the Spectator, Jester, and the American. He served with the United States Navy during the World War, and after the War became the director of publicity for the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture Corporation. About thirteen of his plays have been produced in New York City, including June Goes Downtown, 1923; Merry-Go-Round (with Morrie Ryskind), 1927; Three's a Crowd, 1930; and The Captain's Uniform, 1939. The Band Wagon is a typical example of the modern American musical comedy, and the credit for its two hundred and sixty performances may go largely to Fred Astaire and Frank Morgan, two veteran performers who headed its cast.

The last of the minor partners is Katherine Dayton who has written more for the newspapers than for any other form

of publication. Miss Dayton was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but was only two years old when her family moved to Glen Ridge, New Jersey, a town within ferry distance from New York City. Her interest in writing is probably largely due to her father, who for fifteen years was the publisher of the New York Evening Journal. She sold her first important story to Vanity Fair and then published stories in The Saturday Evening Post. While in Washington, D. C., writing for the Consolidated Press Service, she began a series of short playlets entitled Mrs. Democratic and Mrs. Republican. The titles of some of these playlets clearly indicate their general tone and content: "Mourning becomes Electorate; or, Love conquers all." "It isn't the heat; it's the stupidity." "On the care and feeding of Congress." "Daze without end; or, Some pretty loose leaves." "What'll you have? or, You can get almost anything you want in a drugstore these days." After seeing the society of Washington, Miss Dayton thought that a good play could be written about the lives of the politicians and their families. She finally approached Kaufman with her idea, and he agreed with her. First Lady, a satire on the activities of Alice Roosevelt Longworth, was the result, being produced two hundred and thirty-eight times in New York City. The action is based on a feud between Lucy Chase Wayne, wife of the Secretary of State Stephen Wayne, and Irene Hibbard, wife of Justice of the Supreme Court Hibbard. Irene, who was formerly married to Prince

Gregoravitch of Slovania, becomes interested in a young senator from the west, Gordon Keane. Lucy is sure that Irene plans to divorce Hibbard and marry Keane, who has a chance of being selected as his party's candidate for the presidency of the United States. To forestall such an event, Lucy starts a boom for Carter Hibbard. She, of course, plans to have Stephen really selected after she has made Irene lose her interest in Keane. Her plan almost gets away from her until she discovers that as Irene is not legally married to Carter, she can start a scandal that will ruin Carter's chances of becoming president. He retires from the field, and Stephen is selected as the party's candidate. As an ironic denouement to the preceding action, Lucy finds that Keane could never have been president anyway because he was born in Canada.

The last collaborator to be discussed is Moss Hart, with whom Kaufman is working at the present time. Hart was born in New York City in 1904 and was educated in the city public schools. While he was still in high school, he began writing sketches and one-act plays, most of which were folk sketches for Jewish societies. After he graduated from high school, he began working at odd jobs but managed to keep up his writing. Finally he secured a position as an office assistant for Gus Pitou, who was a booking agent. Knowing that Mr. Pitou needed a play, Hart wrote <u>The Hold-Up Man</u> for him using a pseudonym. It lasted for five weeks in Chicago in 1925 and established Hart as a potential

dramatist. His second play, Once in a Lifetime, produced in 1930, was the first of the Kaufman-Hart partnership. In 1932 and 1933, Hart wrote two successes with Irving Berlin, the first being Face the Music and the second As Thousands Cheer. In 1934, Hart produced two more plays, Merrily We Roll Along, with Kaufman, and The Great Waltz, by himself. Jubilee was written in 1935 and was followed by a series of plays with Kaufman: You Can't Take It with You, 1936; I'd Rather Be Right, 1937; The Fabulous Invalid, 1938; The American Way, 1939; The Man Who Came to Dinner, 1939; and George Washington Slept Here, 1940. All of these plays with the exception of The Fabulous Invalid have been very successful.

Once in a Lifetime (1930), the only play in which Kaufman has appeared as an actor, followed the general scheme of the plays written by Kaufman and Connelly. This one is the story of a vaudeville team (May, George, and Jerry) who, seeing the approaching end of their type of work, decide to invade Hollywood, where the motion picture industry has just begun the production of talking pictures, and to establish there a school of voice culture. The school is a failure, and they are all fired with the exception of George, who is made the director of a film called "Gingham and Orchids." When it is finished, it turns out to be black at times because George forgot to turn on the lights, and there is a disturbance in the sound track because he cracked nuts all during the filming of the picture.

However, critical approval establishes the picture as a great success, and everything is praised including the originality of playing some scenes in the dark and using hail on the roof (the cracking of the nuts) in the same manner as Eugene O'Neill used the beating of the tom-tom in Emperor Jones. George and his friends are then re-installed in the studio, and his blundering mistakes are thought of as being the work of a genius.

Merrily We Roll Along (1934), their second play together, was something unique when it was produced, in that what would have ordinarily been the last scene came first and so on. The first scene introduces a playwright, Richard Niles, as a failure at the age of forty. His career is finished though there are many years of life ahead of him. The process of degeneration that has reduced this man to his present state is clearly shown by a series of active scenes from his life that carry him back twenty-odd years to the day he spoke as the eloquent valedictorian of his college class.

Two years later, You Can't Take It with You, a play that made them famous, winning for them the Pulitzer Prize for that year (1936) and having a record run of eight hundred and thirty-seven performances in New York City, was written. The plot is concerned with the antics of that lovable though slightly queer family of Martin Vanderhof, who does not believe in paying his income tax or in going to work any more. His daughter, Penelope, is a writer

because someone accidentally left a typewriter at their house. Her husband makes firecrackers in the basement with an iceman who came in one day and forgot to go away. Her daughter, Essie, studies dancing and makes candy in which Essie's husband, Ed, puts revolutionary messages that he prints on a small press. Her other daughter, Alice, is the only sane member of the family. The plot revolves around the love of Alice and Tony Kirby, and the trouble that arises when his aristocratic parents meet her family.

The distinguishing feature of their next play, I'd Rather Be Right, was that the characters were not given fictitious names but were actually named Roosevelt, Farley, Landon, McIntyre, the Justices of the Supreme Court, and so on. The play is really a dream of Philip Barker who cannot marry Peggy Jones until Roosevelt has balanced the budget. Roosevelt and all the government officials appear in Central Park and try to figure out some way to do this. However, all their efforts end in failure, one reason being that Landon will not tell Roosevelt how he balanced his budget in Kansas because Roosevelt was not nice to him during the campaign. Although many phases of our modern government are satirized in this play, it ends on the rather serious note that America is a great country and that we should all be proud that we are Americans.

Abandoning the field of political satire, Kaufman and Hart then used the theater as the basis for a play. The theme of The Fabulous Invalid, a sort of picture-postcard history of the theater, is that the theater, the invalid,

is frequently on the point of dying but somehow never quite does. This is really more like a pageant than a play. Some sort of continuity is supplied by the ghosts of two actors who die on the opening night of their play. As long as the theater survives they are free to wander about, but if the theater ever dies, they must cease wandering. The theater becomes first of all a motion picture house which has to resort to Screeno contests to attract a crowd. However, even giving gifts away every night cannot keep it open, and it is finally sold to a burlesque company. The burlesque show is raided by the police, and the theater is boarded up. Just when the ghosts think they are about to be forced to retire, a group of young dramatists appear to reopen the theater for the presentation of legitimate dramas.

The American Way, which followed The Fabulous Invalid, has been thought of by many as Kaufman's best play probably because it is his best attempt at a serious subject. It is a cavalcade of recent American history beginning with the arrival in America of Martin Gunther and his wife Irma at Ellis Island in 1896. Martin slowly but surely becomes a successful cabinet maker in the small mid-western town of Mapleton, Ohio. Martin sees his children grow up in America, and one of them, Karl, is killed in the World War. The play ends with a cowardly Nazi meeting in which Martin is killed while defending the country that he has come to love dearly. Brooks Atkinson says that the basic motive is propaganda for the tradition of American freedom and

that "it is the authors' conviction that the American tradition of hospitality and freedom has created an honorable way of life worth preserving and that the flag and the national anthem are not hokum but symbols of a national philosophy that grows increasingly precious in a world where freedom is sometimes described as a nuisance."[11]

The last two plays that have been written by Kaufman and Hart are still playing on the stage. This fact alone would seem to indicate that The Man Who Came to Dinner will assume a place of importance among his plays because it was first produced in 1939 and is still running (1941). The plot of this play is negligible and is merely a thread on which to hang the repartee of Sheridan Whiteside and of the other people who swarm about him. Sheridan Whiteside, based on the character of Woollcott, slips and presumably breaks his hip when going to dinner in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest W. Stanley in a small town in Ohio. He takes over complete control of the house, forcing the family to use the back stairs and to leave the downstairs completely free for his own use. While he is there, he receives messages and telephone calls from practically all of the famous people of the present day. He advises the Stanley children to act against the wishes of their parents, but when his own secretary falls in love with a local news-

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[11] New York Times, January 29, 1939, Sec. IX, p. 1, col. 1.

paper man, Bert Jefferson, he imports a glamorous actress to entice him. However, his attempts end in failure, and just as Whiteside is leaving, he slips again and really breaks his hip this time.

George Washington Slept Here, the last play to be written by this team up to the present time, concerns the adventures of a family of New Yorkers who buy an old farmhouse in Pennsylvania where George Washington was supposed to have been a guest at one time. The play has not been greeted with much enthusiasm, Brooks Atkinson saying again that it "represents nothing in particular except the annual necessity of writing a play."[12]

The collaboration of Kaufman and Hart seems to have been a most fortunate and agreeable one. The men are quite alike and are able to work rapidly and harmoniously together. Kaufman seems still to believe what he once said about Hart, "I have been smart enough as I grew older to attach to myself the most promising lad that came along in the theater."[13]

Kaufman then is not famous as an original author, but as a collaborator. He has written with at least nine different people, and most of the plays have met with at least a moderate degree of success. It should be mentioned here

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12 New York Times (October 27, 1940), IX, p. 1, col. 1.

13 "Post Master," op. cit., p. 66, col. 2.

also that Kaufman has written with more than this number of people in reality, because he has been the officiating "play-doctor" of other plays as well. Often he is hired by other writers to re-work plays, and his name is not always mentioned in connection with this work. For example, the circumstances leading up to the suit of Isadore Polisuk versus Kaufman[14] illustrate this point.

As far as the working methods that are used in the collaborations are concerned, Kaufman says that at least one-half of the work on a play is done by the other person, and that they usually work out every line step by step together regardless of the time required. Kaufman usually works faster with Moss Hart than with any of the other dramatists he has associated with, and the plays with Edna Ferber usually take the most time. The American Way was written in three weeks, while Dinner at Eight was written in eight months. Even after the play is in rehearsal, any changes that are thought to be necessary in the lines are made by the co-authors (Kaufman and whoever is his collaborator), and not by Kaufman the director. Kaufman's spirit regarding his collaborators is exemplified in a curtain speech which followed the premier performance of The American Way. He said then that Moss Hart was responsible for at least two-thirds of the dialogue of the play and for the idea behind the play.

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[14] cf. Chapter 1, p. 10, "Kaufman, the Man."

A definite statement regarding the exact contributions of Kaufman to these plays is a very difficult one to make. Nothing has been written especially about this point either by Kaufman himself or by any of his partners, and only inferences may be drawn from the plays. A more detailed discussion of a few of the characteristics of the plays that may be said to be Kaufman's own is to be found in the third chapter. In general, the brilliant repartee, the satire, and the effectiveness of the staging may be attributed to Kaufman, while the plots are usually the contributions of his collaborators. This is certainly true in the writing of the Ferber, Lardner, Dayton, and most of the Connelly collaborations and is probably true also in the Hart-Kaufman plays. It is definitely known that the idea of The Man Who Came to Dinner at least was Hart's. The play was based on an actual visit of Alexander Woollcott to Hart's country home. When Woollcott arrived at the house, he took over the management of the place in the same way as Sheridan Whiteside does the Stanleys' home in The Man Who Came to Dinner.

Why then do we speak of these plays as being Kaufman plays? Why do we not call them Connelly plays or Hart plays or so on? It is probably because one feels that Kaufman is the directing force behind the plays. Also, it is because the repartee, and the satire, and the timing in most of his plays are the important part of them. If these

three elements were deleted, there would be almost nothing left in most cases. And, as one critic stated it, "There is the controlling hand, the directive spirit in the final result, and in the unity that comes with true collaboration one feels that there is the dominant hand of Kaufman." 15

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15 "George S. Kaufman, a Satirist in the American Theater," North American Review, Vol. 237 (January 1934), p. 80.

CHAPTER III

KAUFMAN, THE PLAYWRIGHT

The personal idiosyncracies of Kaufman's working habits with his collaborators have already been pointed out in the second chapter, and it was noted there in passing how difficult it is to decide just what parts of the plays are his, and what parts are probably the work of the collaborators. However, there are a few phases of the dramas that most critics agree are his work, and these will be discussed in this chapter.

It is necessary to discuss Kaufman as a playwright, also, because no study of any phase of the writing profession or of anyone connected with it can be complete without trying in some way to distinguish one writer from other writers in his particular field or at least to discover central and characteristic features in portions in which he resembles others. Characteristic of his subject matter, types of plays, plot structure, style, and other points which are distinguishing factors of Kaufman's dramas will also be pointed out in this chapter.

Only a limited number of plays can be involved in this discussion because of the inaccessibility of much of Kaufman's work. Fortunately, however, the ones that are available are quite representative of him. Out of a possible thirty-three plays, fifteen were secured in their complete editions, and six others were found in abridged editions in the various annual volumes of Burns Mantle's Best Plays.

It is not possible to separate Kaufman from his collaborators in any discussion of the types of plays written. Kaufman and his collaborators have written both comedy and tragedy, but their work has been predominantly in the comic vein. He has used, while associating with the other collaborators of course, two main types of comedy, the satirical comedy and the farce. S. Marion Tucker writes that today instead of calling our plays comedies of manners, or comedies of character, and so on, we should call them comedies of national fads (or manias), or comedies of institutions, or comedies of conditions.[1] It is true that most of Kaufman's comedies, including all of the satirical ones, are more easily classified according to Tucker's list than they are under the older grouping.

When one begins the task of classifying these plays, one has a rather difficult task because so many of them represent elements fused from several of the types. For example, First Lady could be classified under three different heads: the comedy of manners, the comedy of character, and the satirical comedy. Therefore, it must be remembered that the classifications made here are by no means the final or only ones that are possible.

The satirical comedies can be divided into three groups: first, the satirical comedy of institutions: The Good Fellow, Of Thee I Sing, Let 'Em Eat Cake, and I'd Rather Be Right; secondly, the satirical comedy of character:

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[1] S. Marion Tucker, Modern American and British Plays New York: Harper Brothers, 1931.

First Lady and The Man Who Came to Dinner; and, lastly, comedies of art or literary comedies satirizing the moving pictures and the theater, including the satire of song writing: The Butter and Egg Man, Merton of the Movies, Once in a Lifetime, and June Moon.

The first play mentioned in this general grouping, The Good Fellow, has for its theme the various clubs and secret orders of America. This play did not last very long on Broadway, perhaps because the satire was a little too much for members of organizations of this type to take. At any rate, from the very first moment when the members of the Ancient Order of Corsicans begin to gather in the home of Jim Helton until the end of the initiation ceremony when Helton says

> Helton. Now take thou thy seat behind all others, dutifully and obediently, and observe thou the manner of conduct of a Corsican encampment. Napoleon also informs thee that uniforms befitting a Corsican may be purchased at the establishment of Citizen Rabinowitz.
> Rabinowitz (handing him a card). Twenty-two South Main Street. [2]

the whole organization is exposed in an exceedingly ridiculous light. Jim Helton is a member of practically all the fraternal organizations in the United States, but he is especially proud of being the Napoleon of the Corsicans. After attending the national convention in Atlantic City, he comes home with the news that the next convention is to be there in his home town. The business men of the town

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[2] George S. Kaufman and Herman Mankiewicz, The Good Fellow New York: Samuel French, 1926, Act II, p. 77, lines 1-9.

fail to contribute any money, and Jim has to pawn his life insurance and get the rest of the sum from his daughter's fiance. His wife, who is not at all sympathetic, finds out how he has raised the money and objects to the method. Jim is made to promise to give up his membership in the organizations, but the advertisement of a new one brings a gleam of anticipation to his eyes. In Jim are embodied the typical characteristics of all clubmen. He is willing to sacrifice everything for his order, even the well-being of his family. The satirical note is even more pointed as a result of the comments made from time to time by Jim's mother-in-law. She resents the fact that Jim can keep a room in the house full of his secret lodge materials, which she describes as being rather funny-looking red caps and coats. The climax of the play occurs when Jim's daughter Ethel rushes in and breaks up a meeting of the order. She has just found that her father has borrowed money from her sweetheart to finance the Corsican Convention, and she cannot bear the thought that her father could always impose upon him if they were married. The authors gave the play an ironic twist at the end, for although the Corsicans are dissolved, Jim is already planning to become a member of another organization. The dialogue makes rather good reading for one who is not in sympathy with such organizations, but for an active member the satire in the drama goes a little too far.

All three of the satirical comedies about the government are written in the musical comedy form. The first of

these was the very successful play, Of Thee I Sing, in which the emphasis is placed on a satirical view of a political campaign including the committee meetings and a campaign rally, of the place of the vice-president in our government scheme, of the Supreme Court, and of our relations with foreign countries. The farcical spirit in which the whole play is written can easily be illustrated with a few of the election results that are reported:

Atlanta, Ga.
16 election districts out of 184 give:
Wintergreen. 12,736
Jefferson Davis. 1,653

Hollywood, Cal.
Wintergreen. 160,000
Mickey Mouse 159,000
Gloria Swanson's First Husband . . . 84,638

Lexington, Ky.
Wintergreen. 27,637
Light Wines and Beer 14
Straight Whiskey 1,850,827

Macy's Basement
Wintergreen. . . . . 97¢[3]
(Only one to a customer)

There are other election returns also that reflect this same spirit. The plot of Of Thee I Sing, which has been sumarized in the previous chapter, is based on the political campaign of 1920. John P. Wintergreen represents Warren G. Harding, and Alexander Throttlebottom represents Calvin Coolidge. About half of the action of the play is set during the campaign of John P. Wintergreen, and the action of the last half takes place during his administration.

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[3] George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, Of Thee I Sing, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1932, Act I, Scene V.

The incidents of the plot have definite causal relationship. The first scene sets the action in motion. Here the committee decides on a campaign based on "love," a subject of interest to everyone in the country. Wintergreen is to marry the winner of a beauty contest at Atlantic City. Wintergreen is rather disturbed at the prospect, and is comforted by his secretary, Mary. They fall in love, and the next thing to happen is, of course, an expression of the feelings of the contest winner, Diana. This comes in the form of a visit from the French Ambassador who says that war between the United States and France is eminent. Wintergreen is about to be impeached because he broke his promise to the party when he married Mary, but the situation is saved when Mary announces that she is about to become a mother. The final scene shows among many things the Supreme Court justices throwing dice to see if they can guess whether it will be a boy or a girl. Relations with France are smoothed when Throttlebottom says he will marry Diana, and the final climax to the whole action is the announcement of the birth of a pair of twins. Each action that has taken place has, then, led on to something else. Frequent use of spectacle is made in this play. The first example of this is the political parade that occurs in the first scene in the play. The staging here is more important than the lines, although the campaign slogans such as:

Vote for Prosperity and See What you Get
A Vote for Wintergreen Is a Vote for Wintergreen
Even your Dog Loves John P. Wintergreen[4]

add much to the actual color of the scene. The political rally in Madison Square Garden is also a good example of the use of spectacle. The actual stage business is very cleverly worked out with the lines of the play, especially in the second scene of the play. When Throttlebottom finally convinces the committee members that he is the vice-presidential candidate, he has a hard time trying to make them understand his name. A waiter arrives with a check and hands it to Lippman.

Throttlebottom: But that isn't my last name, it's Throttlebottom.
Lippman: Throttle what?
Throttlebottom: Bottom
Lippman: How do you spell it?
Throttlebottom: (As he starts to spell, Lippman takes the check from the waiter and writes) T-h-r-o-t-t-l-e-b-o-t-t-o-m.
Lippman: Right! And thank you very much (the waiter goes and takes with him the signed check)[5]

This careful working out of the details of the stage business with the lines of the play is one of the important characteristics of Kaufman's plays. Of Thee I Sing being a musical comedy, naturally, many of the best parts actually are the songs and dances. The actual lyrics as they appear on the printed page are not Kaufman's work; however, they are so

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[4] Ibid., p. 4.

[5] Ibid., p. 19, 20, lines 9-10, 1-4.

closely in tune with the rest of the lines that one feels that Kaufman must have had something to do with them. The lyrics for both Of Thee I Sing and Let 'Em Eat Cake were all written by Ira Gershwin. The music for the lyrics was composed by George Gershwin. About one-fourth of the lines in the play are made up of Ira Hershwin's lyrics.

The second of these plays, Let 'Em Eat Cake, was a sequel to this first one but did not have quite as fortunate a choice of subject matter. There is also a political campaign in the sequel play resulting in the defeat of Wintergreen and Throttlebottom for re-election. Opening with a political raid in its first scene too, the play contains campaign slogans of the same type used in Of Thee I Sing. Wintergreen's supporters say, among other things:

> Never mind his record
> When he closed the Banks, they stayed closed.
> Just the right height for a president.
> The same promises as last time.[6]

John P. Tweedledee's supporters used the same type of slogans in advertising their candidate:

> Vote for Tweedledee--What's the Difference?
> More promises than Wintergreen
> Off with the old crooks--On with the new.[7]

The plot of this play is also the comical type. After being defeated, Wintergreen and Throttlebottom organize a group

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[6] George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, Let 'Em Eat Cake, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933, p. 4-5, lines 6-7, 3, 3.

[7] Ibid., 6-7, lines 21-22, 1-2.

of revolutionists. First, however, they go into the manufacturing of blue shirts--joining forces with Kruger of Union Square, they become revolutionists and revolt against the government. However, they are not successful. A baseball game between the members of the Supreme Court and the nine foreign representatives of the League of Nations is to decide the outcome of the nation's problems. The plot of Let 'Em Eat Cake, while still of a causal nature, is not as closely woven as that of Of Thee I Sing. The use of spectacle is not done very well in this play. There are two parades in it that resemble very closely the one in Of Thee I Sing. The lyrics are of less importance than they were in Of Thee I Sing, also forming only about a tenth of the lines of the later play.

In I'd Rather Be Right, the government again bears the brunt of the satire. This time the characters have the real names of our government officials: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Alfred M. Landon, the various members of Roosevelt's cabinet in 1937, and so on. The theme of the play is based on Roosevelt's attempts to balance the budget so that young couple, Phil and Peggy, can get married. There is practically no plot at all in this play, but it is rather a group of different scenes satirizing different parts of the government. The stage business was also worked out very cleverly in this play. The Supreme Court judges, for example, kept popping out from behind rocks and trees in Central Park at the slightest provocation. Another bit

that is quite good is Farley's list of deserving Democrats. He says it is just a short list, but it turns out to be six feet long. I'd Rather Be Right also contains some lyrics, written by Lorenz Hart, but they do not have as important a place in the play as they do in the two previous ones. There are two places in this play that are especially good. One of them is Roosevelt's attempt to explain the Wagner Labor Act to a merry-go-round owner and his employee. The other is a take-off on Roosevelt's fireside chats. The program is introduced in the method used by many of our modern radio comedians.

> Farley. Good evening, everybody! This is your Master of Ceremonies, Postmaster-General Farley, on the air with our new program--WHITE HOUSE HOTEL, featuring FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT and all the lads. Every week at this time, we invite you to gather round the White House fireside, and join us in our White House Jamboree. We open tonight's program with Franklin D. Roosevelt's Hillbilly Swing Orchestra. Let 'er go, boys!
> ...Yowsay, yowsay! Those boys can certainly carve it out, can't they folks? And remember, they are just as hot in the Cabinet....And now, folks, your Master of Ceremonies will endeavor to amuse you with a few jokes right out of the Dead Letter Office--ha, ha! Assisted by that delightful, delirious diplomat, the Secretary of State.[8]

Each of the two plays in the second group in this division, the satirical comedies of character,, has one main character, an actual person, about whom the action of the play revolves. In First Lady, this character is Lucy Chase Wayne based

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[8] George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, I'd Rather Be Right, New York: Random House, 1937, Act II, p. 113, lines 1-15.

on the life of the already slightly historical figure, Alice Roosevelt Longworth. Lucy is conceded by most critics to be one of the best characters in any of the plays on which Kaufman has collaborated. Burns Mantle describes her very well when he says that "Lucy alertly minded, socially popular, craftily tactful but not one to be put upon by her rivals, seeks the advancement of her husband and suffers a temporary setback when her deepest laid plan goes wrong. She is able in the end, however, to recover literally acres of the lost ground."[9] The plot of First Lady can easily be called an intrigue plot. Lucy is trying to outwit Irene, her rival, and at the same time she is planning on having the presidential nomination offered to her husband. She schemes to get Gordon away from Irene, because she believes that Gordon is also of presidential timber. When she secretly starts a demand for Irene's husband, Carter Hibbard, to be chosen as the party's candidate, thinking that this will take Irene's mind off Gordon, she almost causes the actual nomination of Carter whose acceptance is stopped only by the knowledge that Irene was not legally divorced from her Slavanian Count. The play borders very closely on the farce, but the general tone of it is generally on a higher level than that of the farce comedy. However, some parts of it are farcical, for example, many of the people who come to

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[9] Burns Mantle, Contemporary American Playwrights, New York: Samuel French, 1926, p. 20.

Lucy's home were examples of exaggerated character studies. Mrs. Luella May Creevy, the national president of a woman's association is a good example of this. She represents the very essence of the American clubwoman carried out to a ridiculous degree. In the second of these plays, the central figure is Sheridan Whiteside, a dramatic caricature of Alexander Woollcott. Whiteside is forced to stay in the Stanleys' home because he has broken his hip. He takes over the control of the place, ordering the family to use the backstairs. All sorts of people come to see him, including some prisoners, a zoology professor, a playwright, and a movie star named Sanjo. Regardless of whoever is there, the action of the play all centers on Whiteside. About half of the lines in the play are spoken by him.

Kaufman is usually thought of as being the champion of Broadway versus Hollywood, but this does not mean that Broadway is free from his satiric thrusts. One of the last group of satirical plays is a satire on the producers who supply the money necessary to produce a show on Broadway. The "butter-and egg man," in the play of the same name, is an utterly gullible young man from upper New York state who has inherited a few thousand dollars and has come to New York City determined to become a big theatrical producer. In spite of warnings from Fanny Lehmen, he invests all of his money in a play being produced by her husband. No one believes that the play is actually any good until it is

given a trial performance in another city. The play shows definite possibilities of becoming a hit in New York City, and the "butter-and-egg man's" investments, though foolishly made, were actually very wise. Most of the action takes place in the office of a theatrical producer and in the hotel in the city where the try-out performance was held. The principal emphasis in the play is on presenting a satirical picture of the way in which plays are produced. It is rather significant to note here that Kaufman in this play which he wrote alone used the same general plan that had been used in his plays with Connelly. This is more fully discussed later in the chapter.

Almost an identical situation is used in June Moon except that the young man does not inherit his money, and he wants to become a song-writer. The subject matter of most of our "popular" songs comes in for its share of the ridicule in this play. Fred comes to New York City and becomes the partner of Paul Sears who has not written a hit song since "Paprika" was published several years before. Fred at first sees all the things he has wanted to see in and around the city: Grant's Tomb, the harbor, Coney Island, and so on. All of these places furnish him with material for songs. However, he soon becomes too sophisticated for his former sweetheart Edna and starts going around with Eileen, Paul's sister-in-law. Fred is not able to compose any good songs until he goes back and writes June Moon, a song that he had been inspired to write by Edna. She and Fred are re-united, and

Fred becomes a popular song writer.

The setting of most of the play is in the office of a music company where Fred hopes to sell his songs. Here a song-writer named Maxie sits around composing snatches of music. Fred's attitude toward this office is a sort of almost "holy awe." The characters in the play, of course, represent various types of characters. Paul Sears is the sophisticated New Yorker who has not been so successful lately. His wife, Lucille, is a dissatisfied woman who becomes the mistress of an old friend of hers. Eileen represents the "gold-digger" who is trying for anything she can get. Fred and Edna are the rather innocent young people who try to adjust themselves to city life, but who are still countrified at heart. The plot of the play is a causal one, all the events being closely connected with what has happened before. The final scene contains the climax. Here Paul becomes aware of the real characters of his wife and sister-in-law and is left alone to begin his career all over again.

Both of the plays that have a satire of the moving pictures as their theme, Merton of the Movies and Once in a Lifetime, follow the same general idea, that of a young man who makes good in Hollywood in spite of the lack of intelligence on his side. In these plays, the moving picture industry and everything that is concerned with it are shown in a very absurd light. In the first, Merton goes to Hollywood inspired by fabulous accounts of the life of Harold

Parmalee, a matinee idol who performs extraordinary feats of daring, and Beulah Baxter, a movie queen. Merton secures no work in the movies except for one or two extra's parts in which he is not particularly distinguished. Finally, he is cast as a comedian though he believes that he is acting a great tragic role. When he discovers that the directors have been misleading him, he is ready to quit but is convinced that there is a place for him in the movies where he may some day be a great tragedian. The action of this play moves from Simsbury, Illinois, to Hollywood. In Simsbury, Merton is a store clerk who dreams of becoming famous in Hollywood. He has taken a correspondence course in acting and feels that he is ready for Hollywood. This first act emphasizes very clearly the absurdity of a person like Merton going to the coast to become a star. The change from the sleepy little town to the hard and sophisticated Hollywood leaves a very great gap that it is hard to span. Merton is a type of character representing thousands of young men who have tried or have wanted to try to make a place for themselves in the moving pictures.

In the second of these two plays, the experiences of a vaudeville team who go to Hollywood to establish a speech school form the basis of the action. They are not successful in this undertaking but are hired by a studio to film pictures. George, one of the three members of the group, is given the position of director. His opportunity to establish his reputation as a great director seems doomed

when he films a script taken from a waste-paper basket instead of one from a script basket. However, the critics approve the picture, and George is looked upon as being a genius in the field of directing.

Once in a Lifetime should really be classed as a farcical satirical comedy because it is made up of all of these elements. It is a satire on the moving picture industry, and its characters are rather typical of those of the farce. They are exaggerated characters, each with his own peculiarity. Most of the action takes place in the moving picture studio and the office of Glogauer Productions in Hollywood. Here, we get exaggerated pictures of the business and professional methods of the people connected with the moving pictures. For example, Laurence Veil had been waiting for days to see Mr. Glogauer. Because he had not yet seen the other five men whom one had to see before speaking to Glogauer, he was still waiting. All of the men were busy or out of town except the one who had to be seen first, and as Kaufman says, no one ever sees this man. The scene during the filming of George's picture "Gingham and Orchids" is an especially effective one. Exaggeration and satire are the keynotes of this scene. The following quotation from Once in a Lifetime is a good example of the attitude the authors of "Gingham and Orchids" have taken toward this industry:

> Glogauer. The trend is changing, Miss Daniels--they just been telephoning me! Everybody wants to make aeroplane pictures, but they can't make 'em because the Doctor bought up all the aeroplances! Every com-

pany is phoning me--offering me any amount!
George. Yes, I thought they would.
Susan. Isn't it wonderful?
Glogauer. So, Doctor, you saw the trend coming. You saw the trend.
May. Saw it? He is the trend!
Jerry. You don't realize the kind of a man you've got here!
Glogauer. Yes, I do! Doctor--this is the way you work--always you make believe you are doing the wrong thing --and then. Doctor, I bow to you![10]

One more point should be made in connection with Kaufman's use of satire. Many even of the plays that cannot be classes as satire throughout, often have good satirical scenes in them. For example, in Minick, a play in a more serious tone than most of his, there is a scene which contains a good description of a women's committee meeting from an amused observer's point of view. First of all, the members do not arrive on time; then, they are not prepared for the business on hand; and, lastly, though they try to use strict parliamentary rules, they do not know how to conduct a meeting. The lines that follow Nettie's calling of the meeting to order are a good example of the tone of this scene.

Nettie. Ladies! The meeting will please come to order. The--uh--first business of the day is the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting. Oh, Marge isn't here.
Miss Crackenwald. Why, she was made secretary!
Nettie. We can defer the reading of the minutes until Mrs. Diamond gets here. Is there any unfinished business?
Mrs. Lippincott. Madam Chairman!
Nettie. Mrs. Lippincott?

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[10] George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, Once in a Lifetime, in Burns Mantle, Best Plays of 1930-1931, New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1932, p. 145, lines 23-36.

> Mrs. Lippincott. I call for the order of the day. I believe the chair is in error.
> Nettie. Oh!
> Mrs. Lippincott. Failing the reading of the minutes the next business is the Reports of Boards and Standing Committees and Special Orders. Then, and not until then comes Unfinished Business.[11]

Another good example of this is the sly dig Kaufman takes at the European royalty, either real or fictitious, who work in various establishments in New York City especially. In the third act of You Can't Take It with You, the grand Duchess Olga Katrina visits the Vanderhofs' home to get some supper.

> DePinna. You know, Highness, I think you waited on me in Childs' once. The Seventy-Second Street Place?
> The Grand Duchess. No, no. That was my sister.
> Kolenkhov. The Grand Duchess Natasha.
> The Grand Duchess. I work in Columbus Circle.
> Grandpa. Quite a lot of your family living over here now, aren't there?
> The Grand Duchess. Oh, yea--many. My uncle, the Grand Duke Sergei--he is an elevator man at Macy's. A very nice man. Then there is my cousin, Prince Alexis. He will not speak to the rest of us because he works at Hattie Carnegie's. He has cards printed--Prince Alexis of Hattie Carnegie. Bah!
> Kolenkhov. When he was selling Eskimo Pies at Luna Park he was willing to talk to you.
> The Grand Duchess. Ah, Kolenkhov, our time is coming. My sister Natasha is studying to be a manicure, Uncle Sergei they have promised to make floor-walker, and next month I get transferred to the Fifth Avenue Childs'. From there it is only a step to Schraffts', and then we will see what Prince Alexis says![12]

The American custom of having business meetings in banquet form also comes in for its share of Kaufman's derision in To the Ladies. The annual banquet in progress is that of

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[11] George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, Minick, in Bruns Mantle, Best Plays of 1924-1925, New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1926, p. 364-5, lines 19-36, 1-2.

[12] George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, You Can't Take It with You, New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937, p. 182-185, lines 8-11, 1-17.

John Kincaid's Sons, piano manufacturers.

> Toastmaster. I am sure that Mr. Moffam's story of the Farmingham strike has been both instructive and interesting to everyone hear. I think I am safe in saying--will the waiters please not clear the tables while the speeches are going on? It's very annoying. I say Mr. Moffam need not apologize for the forty-five munutes that he has used. And I am sure that we are very grateful to him for making the trip all the way down from Farmingham--just to be with us tonight. It is with great regret that I announce that one of our foremost speakers cannot be with us this evening. He is a gentleman with whom you are all familiar--namely, Mr. Dudley Field Malone. He has sent me this telegram, however, explaining why he cannot be with us, and--ah--stating how very, very sorry he is. "W. J. Henrici, Hotel Commodore, New York. Regret that I cannot be with you. Signed Malone."[13]

The farcical comedies also may be divided into several groups. In general, Dulcy, To the Ladies, The Royal Family, and Dinner at Eight can be grouped as farcical comedies of character. It should be remembered also that many of the plays that are grouped more easily under the classification of satirical comedies also have a decided farcical element in them. This is especially true of at least parts of Of Thee I Sing, Let 'Em Eat Cake, I'd Rather Be Right, and Once in a Lifetime, also, Merton of the Movies. In fact, practically every play on which Kaufman has had a hand in the writing of contains some farcical element. In the first two of the farcical comedies mentioned, emphasis is placed on the central characters, Dulcy in the former, and Leonard in the latter. Dulcy, who is unintelligent, thinks

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[13] George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly, To the Ladies, in S. Marion Tucker, Modern American and British Plays, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931, p. 784, lines 26-50.

she is capable of helping everyone. She surrounds herself with an extremely assorted group of people, including an ex-gangster for a butler, a lunatic who thinks he is a big business man, a movie-scenario writer, a jealous advertiser, her husband's employer, and his wife and daughter. Dulcy manages to tangle everybody's affairs into a terrible mess, but the action rather ludicrously arrives at a satisfactory ending. Leonard, in the second of these plays, is the same type of character. The plot of the play is given later in this chapter. It concerns his blundering efforts to rise in the business world.

A farce is marked by an exaggeration of character and incidents and by seeing not what people think but what they do. This is certainly true of both the characters of Dulcy and Leonard. Dulcy and Leonard are probably not even capable of any deep thought; at any rate, neither thinks before he asks, but impulsiveness is a characteristic of each. Not only do the two main characters in these two plays illustrate farcical elements, but other characteristics of the farce are also present. The farce should provoke the reader into immediate laughter of a rather superior sort. This is true of these plays. One laughs at Dulcy and Leonard, not with them. The action of a farce is derived largely from the situation. In Dulcy, the situation is that she wants everybody to be happy. Everything that she does comes from this one desire. In To the Ladies, Leonard's one desire is to rise in the business world. All his efforts are bent in this direction.

The Royal Family is based on the activities of a family of stage people. Fanny, the eldest, is an "old-timer" wanting to stage a comeback. Julia has become tired and unhappy with stage life and wants to retire. Tony, her brother, has become a movie star who continually gets into escapades. Gwen, Julie's daughter, marries and tries to forget the stage but has to return to it. The characters again are one of the best examples of the farcical elements in this play. All of them are highly exaggerated characters. Tony, the movie star, for example, contains just about all the bad qualities that are associated with others of his profession. The same is true of all of the other characters; they are all highly intensified. A farce also is written to ridicule something. The whole Cavendish family are treated with a sort of gentle ridicule. The same type of characters appear in Dinner at Eight. It includes all sorts of characters, including a villainous looking chauffeur, a butler about to commit bigamy, a doctor who cannot cease having affairs with his patients, and an aging matinee idol still trying to appear young.

You Can't Take It with You may be classified as a farcical comedy of "humors". It is the story of a group of eccentric people, each with his personal crotchet, who are continually doing rather queer things. Mr. Vanderhof, for example, collects snakes, likes to go to Columbia graduation ceremonies, and pays no income tax. His daughter, Penny, writes plays because a typewriter was delivered there several years previously. She is also an artist. Her husband makes

fireworks in the basement with an iceman who came one day and forgot to go away. Her daughter Essie is studying ballet and makes candy. Essie's husband plays the xylophone and prints revolutionary messages to put in Essie's candy box. He prints these just because they look so nice in print, not because he actually has any revolutionary tendencies.

Minick is also a comedy of character, but the farcical element is lacking. The treatment of the old man who is forced to live with his son is much more sympathetic than the other character treatments. Minick, who has lived in a small town all his life, tries to conform to the cosmopolitan life of his son, but in spite of everything he can do, there is continual friction between the two generations. Minick finally decides, in spite of the objections and promises of his children, to go to a home for old men.

Kaufman has written besides the plays in the above groups, one expressionistic comedy, Beggar on Horseback, which he wrote in 1934 with Marc Connelly. A successful expressionistic play is supposed to liberate the imagination of both the dramatist and the audience, and the purpose of the type according to Ludwig Lewisohn is "to fling the inner life of the dramatic figures immediately upon the stage; to synthesize, instead of describing, their world and their universe with symbolic vision that shall sum up whole histories, moralities, cosmogonies in a brief moment and a fleeting space."[14]

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[14] Charles H. Whitman, Representative Modern Dramas, New York: Macmillan Company, 1938, p. x.

Expressionism then begins by translating elements of real life into universal terms and is concerned not with characters but with ideas these characters represent.[15] Often the character can be named Mr. Billionaire, Mrs. Housewife, Mr. Businessman, and so on. The action may take place on more than one plane of consciousness. S. Marion Tucker writes that it "may start with something resembling realism and finally pass into the wildest phantasmagoria, even within the limits of a single action." The scenic designs and the staging of the play also usually carry out the symbolic atmosphere and reflect the states of mind of the characters. Beggar on Horseback, a good example of this type of play, is a drama satirizing the methods of American businessmen with especial emphasis on the way in which they deal with artists and the fine arts. First of all, this play reveals the real feelings and desires of the central character, Neil Mac-Rae, who is being forced to choose between a life of freedom from worries about money but one of comparative slavery to the business world and a life of hardships in which he would be free to compose his music as he wanted it to be done. Secondly, the play symbolizes the habits of that group of people commonly referred to as the successful upper middle class. This latter thought finds expression in the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Cady and their children, Gladys and Homer. Mr. Cady's one desire in life is to make more

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[15] S. Marion Tucker, Twenty-Five Modern Plays, New York: Harper Brothers, 1933

money, and he is continually giving his friends advice so that they can do the same thing. Gladys wants Neil and Mrs. Cady wants Gladys to have what she desires. Homer is slightly cynical over it all and refers to Neil as a "dirty dog" because his father bought him for Gladys. The action of the play opens with a realistic scene in Neil's apartment. Here he finally decides, with the coaching of Albert, that the best thing for him to do is to marry Gladys even if it means losing the friendship of Cynthia, the girl who lives across the hall. He is given some soothing powders by the doctor (Albert) and goes to sleep. From this part on until the last scene, the action that takes place is only a dream of Neil's. The staging and scenic effects used in the play also carry out the expressionistic design of the play. Neil's piano, which was the central piece of furniture in the first scene, remains in the same position all through the play regardless of the locale of the other scenes. In the Cady's house or the court room, his piano is still there. The piano, of course, is symbolic of Neil's desire of becoming a great musician. When Gladys and Neil are married, the procession comes down the aisles of the theater. One group was headed by Mr. Cady and Gladys who carries a bouquet made up of banknotes. The ushers wore frock coats and have huge bridal veils draped over their heads. The other party is headed by Mr. Cady and Homer. The four bandsmen who follow them also wear huge bridal veils. The wedding ceremony takes place in the

railroad station and is mixed up with train calls and bits of conversation. The scene that represents the Cady's home is also a good example of this. Here everything is magnificent, having red velvet curtains huge columns, and so on. Two symbolic devices aptly chosen to show the characters of this group of people are used in the first part of the play. Mrs. Cady comes into the room with a rocking chair strapped to her. She sits down and begins rocking, knitting, and gossiping, showing the eternal occupation of her type. A few lines later, Mr. Cady appears wearing golfing clothes but with a telephone strapped to his chest over which he continually makes big business deals such as the following:

> Cady. (Into the phone) Yep! Yep! Well, I'll tell you what to do! Sell eighteen holes and buy all the water hazards. Yep! Yep! Hullo! Well, I'll tell you what to do! I expect caddies will go up any time now. How's the eighth hole this morning? Uh-huh. Well, sell it in three. Yes, sir. That is fine. Yep! Yep! Hullo! Well, I'll tell you what to do! Buy---[16]

Neil attends a business conference with Mr. Cady. The men all file in and sit around in stiff poses. The men regard Neil as a genius and give him a million dollars. Cady gives each of the men a gold piece. They all say it has been a wonderful meeting because they got to spend a million dollars. After being forced to marry Gladys, Neil finds he cannot stand it and murders the whole family. In the next scene, the locale is in a court-room where Neil is to be tried for

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[16] George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly, Beggar on Horseback In E.J. Watson and Benfield Pressey, Continental Drama, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941, p. 902, lines 32-40.

murder. The judge is Mr. Cady, and the dancing masters who appeared in the previous scene are the members of the jury. Homer and Mr. Cady testify against Neil. He presents his case and is allowed to play his symphony as evidence. He has not been able to write any more on it since he was married and when he tries to play the part that had been written before only discords were heard. Cynthis appears and suggests that they play their dream pantomine, "A Kiss in Xanadu." No one in the court-room thinks that it is beautiful. Gladys dances off with the jury who give the verdict of guilty. Neil is placed in prison in an "art factory" where all types of artists also live. If Mr. Cady, the owner of the factory, wishes to publish a new novel, he orders one of the writers to produce it quickly. This is usually done by writing another novel backwards, and so on. The same is true of the writing of poetry and music, and for painting and the other arts. When Neil awakens, he realizes that he loves Cynthia and cannot marry Gladys regardless of her money. When the latter telephones that she has met an old friend of hers and wants to go out with him, Neil is intensely relieved. It would be hard to say just what parts of the play are the result of Kaufman's work and what parts belong to Connelly. However, from the other plays that have been written by these two men, it would be rather safe to assume that Kaufman is responsible for the cleverer lines, the satire, and the staging, and that Connelly is responsible for the phantasy element in the play.

Kaufman has written only two serious plays, Merrily We Roll Along and The American Way. The first of these, written in 1934 with Moss Hart, is a genuine tragedy, because it presents a picture of the main character as a failure. The tragic emotion is raised in the reader, because he is shown so clearly what the protagonist might have been if the forces affecting his life had been arranged in a different way. Richard Niles, the protagonist, is a playwright, and he represents the modern tendency in the drama to let an individual represent the type or class. The theme of this play also follows one of interest to modern dramatists, that of social problems. It is shown clearly in the play that if his life had been just a little different, he would have been an entirely different man. It is rather doubtful if the second play, The American Way, also written with Hart (1939), should really be classed under tragedy, because the real theme is not so much the life and death of Martin Gunther as it is patriotic propaganda to demonstrate that America is a great country and that we should all be glad we live here. However, the predominant emotion aroused in the reader is one of solemnity if not actual tragedy and justifies the inclusion of the play in this group.

There now remains to be discussed only one more form of drama that Kaufman has used. This is the pageant, which is really not a play at all. The Fabulous Invalid has to be so classed because it is nothing except a series

of different scenes describing some past theatrical performances, a modern moving picture house, and a burlesque show. Kaufman and Hart made a feeble attempt to tie all these together by introducing a sort of plot. The ghosts of two actors who died on the night of one of their performances come back and wander about the theater. As long as the form of entertainment survives in some manner, they are free to roam about the earth, but if the theater dies they have to go to Heaven. After the burlesque show is raided and closed by the police, the theater is boarded up, and it looks as though the end has come. Paula and Larry (the ghosts) come to say good-bye to the theatrical world. However, a group of young dramatists appear in the theater ready to begin rehearsing a play. Paula and Larry know that they are the future actors and actresses who will keep the theater going and will bring about a revival of interest in this field of art. Kaufman and Hart's attitude toward the theater is illustrated in the speech made by the ghost of "Bill" Shakespeare when he is summoned to cheer Paula and Larry.

> No--don't give up yet. I can't believe it. I can't believe that an art that's survived Queen Elizabeth, Oliver Cromwell and the War of the Roses is going to be killed by something called the Warner Brothers--What was it I once said? I can't remember the play any more, but it's still true. 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' Or, in plain English, you never can tell...Good-bye.[17]

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[17] George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, The Fabulous Invalid, New York: Random House, 1937, p. 132, lines 5-11.

Most of the plots of Kaufman's plays are rather thin and conventional, and his plays rely more on their clear dialogue and timing than on any story-interest that might be aroused in the audience. This is true of practically all of his collaborations with the exception of those written with Edna Ferber, whose career as a novelist has made her presumably more adept at handling material of the other kind. The plays that these two have written together were based on stories already written by Miss Ferber. The same is true, also, of the one play written with Ring Lardner. With most of the other dramatists the plot is usually weak and often uninteresting. Consider, for example, one of Kaufman and Hart's latest plays, The American Way. The actual plot is the simple tale of Martin Gunther and his life in America. He came over as a young German immigrant and made good, building up a prosperous business only to lose it in the depression. He starts over again, but before he can reach a second peak of success, he is killed in a Nazi meeting. However, plot is not the most important feature of this play. It is really a calvacade of recent American history, and Martin's story is only a slender thread on which to suspend the action of the play. The same thing is true of his plays that have won the Pulitzer awards. The first of these, Of Thee I Sing, is a political satire based on the campaign and subsequent administration of John P. Wintergreen, in which a beauty campaign is held to select a suitable wife for him, and disaster is eminent because he falls in love with his secretary and mar-

ries her instead of the contest winner. The second of these plays, You Can't Take It With You, is based on the rather outworn plot of a poor girl who wins the boss's son. Alice, the only sensible member of her family, and Tony fall in love. After Tony meets her family, he likes them, but both are rather sceptical of what the reaction will be when Tony's family meet her family. Mr. and Mrs. Kirby are invited to dinner and arrive a day earlier than they are expected. Of course, the Vanderhof home is in its usual turmoil and the Kirbys are very cool towards the family. Everything that Alice was hoping to avoid happens on this particular night, including a police raid which ends with the whole party being thrown in jail. Tony's parents are furious and forbid Tony's seeing Alice again and threaten to disinherit him if he does. Alice also forbids Tony to see her and is going to leave her family. Tony comes anyway and is there when his father arrives in a conciliatory mood, because the supper the night before was the first one he had had in years that did not give him indigestion.

Kaufman does have, however, some good farce plots. Perhaps the best is that of The Man Who Came to Dinner (Hart), which opened in 1939 and is still running on Broadway, and which, therefore, proved to be very popular with the theater-going public. A farce is written to ridicule events and for immediate entertainment to make the audience laugh. It is characterized by the exaggeration of incidents and character traits and does not have to have consistency

in the characterization and reality in the action. The action is usually the most important phase of the play. The Man Who Came to Dinner is full of amusing intricacy and quaint ironic reversals which make a rather good farce plot. Sheridan Whiteside tries to run the lives of everyone with whom he comes in contact. Therefore, when his secretary falls in love, he does all he can to put a stop to the affair and almost seems to be succeeding for a time. However, the affair is much too strong for him to stifle. Whiteside also helps the Stanleys' children's plan to run away, but Mr. Stanley guides them and brings them back. The plan in the second act that Maggie and Beverly make for getting Lorraine back to England is another example of a plan that was reversed only because of an accident. Perhaps the best example, though, of the ironic twist happens to Whiteside himself. He had been only pretending that his hip was broken, but, just as he was leaving the house with a flourish, he slips and really breaks his hip.

Perhaps one of the best examples of a more closely woven plot is that of Minick written with Miss Ferber. Everything that happens in this play about the old man who is forced to come and live with his son and his son's wife is the result of the first incident, old man Minick's arrival at his son's apartment. When he finally decides to leave for the old folk's home, his reasons for reaching this conclusion have already been clearly shown, and the decision is a fitting climax for what has preceded it.

Some mention of what have been called by some critics[18] his "formula" plays should be made in connection with the discussion of his plots. Dulcy, To the Ladies, Merton of the Movies, The Deep Tangled Wildwood, Be Yourself, The Butter and Egg Man, June Moon, and Once in a Lifetime should be included in this list. The formula was established by Kaufman and Connelly and was so successfully that Kaufman used it in his best play written alone and later with Ring Lardner and Moss Hart. The last play in this group Once in a Lifetime is a sort of climax of skill in his application of this formula. The method is based on the humor that is to be found in the accurate reporting of the conversation of rather commonplace characters. It involves the selection of a main character who may be easily recognized as a type. He or she is lovable as a rule, but utterly lacking in common sense, and hence a person at whom the audience may laugh with a feeling of superiority and tolerance. The unpleasant complications which confront the character as a result of his own stupidity are completely overcome at the end of the play with a magnificent stroke of luck, frequently the result of this very thick-headedness. There is also a character in the play who is a sort of interpreter of the action for the audience. Dulcy, the play that established the success of this formula for Kaufman, is also a very good example of it. The main character is of course, Dulcy herself, who

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18 Carl Carmer, "George S. Kaufman, Playmaker to Broadway," Theatre Arts Monthly, Vol. 16, p. 809-10.

manages practically to ruin Gordon, her husband's, business, and her own social position because she is thoughtless in her actions. Dulcy tries, among other things, to get twenty-five per cent of a merger for her husband instead of the sixteen and two-thirds per cent offered him, to interest Schuyler Van Dyck in her husband's affairs, and to promote the elopement of Angela Forbes and Vincent Leach, a movie-scenario writer. Instead the desired results, she almost causes Angela's father who is Gordon's employee, to divorce his wife; Schuyler Van Dyck turns out to be a lunatic, and Gordon is to be completely left out of the merger which would absolutely ruin his business. Only by a lucky chance is all this trouble averted. Angela marries Ducly's brother, Bill, for which settlement Dulcy wrongfully gets the credit, and, as Mr. Forbes believes that Dulcy is lying when she finally confesses the truth about Van Dyck, he gives Gordon the twenty-five per cent interest. Bill is the personage plays the part of the sensible commentator. In To the Ladies, Leonard Beebe plays the part of the person utterly lacking in common sense, and his wife, Elsie, has the role of commentator. In Merton of the Movies, Merton is the former, and Miss Montague is the latter. In Once in a Lifetime, these parts are taken by George and May.

One characteristic that is especially important to note in a study of Kaufman's plays is his use of the "wise-crack." Practically all of the references that were read in connection with this study state that this is really

Kaufman's greatest single contribution to the plays on which he has been a collaborator. He uses it in a rather different way from that in which it has been used by other dramatists of the past. High comedy of manners has been by tradition a sort of give-and-take of dialogue among the characters. The audience enjoyed one character's witty saying and at the same time looked forward to another's answer. The players were usually not rude; they did not wish to silence the others, but wished to bring out a response from a worthy opponent. Kaufman's wisecracks, however, are not like this. John Mason Brown says that by his use of wisecracks, the drama has been transformed from a comedy of good manners to one of bad manners. Kaufman's wisecracks are marked by rudeness, bullying the opponent into silence, frankness, lack of reflection on the part of the speaker, smartness instead of wiseness, and brevity. Each one is spoken as if it would be the last word uttered. Wisecracks can be found in practically all of Kaufman's plays, but some of the best ones are in the plays he has written with Moss Hart. One of their recent plays, The Man Who Came to Dinner, contains many very good ones; in fact they make up most of the dialogue in the play itself. Of Kaufman's wisecracks Brown writes, "When, for example, such a character as Sheridan Whiteside in The Man Who Came to Dinner has had his lethal say, no answer is as a rule possible. He uses speech not as a rapier but as a Flit-gun. The whole joyous and effective purpose of his wisecracks is that of a Maxim

silencer."[19]

I have chosen a few representative wisecracks frome some of Kaufman's plays. The first few come from plays written with Marc Connelly. In Dulcy, while Leach, a movie-scenario writer is making love to Angela, Bill happens to come in.

> Leach. Yes, I'd love to see you framed against the glowing splendor of a twilit garden.
> Bill. My golly, the man even makes love in sub-titles![20]

It is safe to assume that the wisecracks are really a part of the contributions of Kaufman to his collaborations because they are present in all his plays including The Butter and Egg Man which he wrote by himself. In this one, Fanny, Lehman's wife has just been looking at the rehearsal of his new show.

> Fanny. I just been taking a peep at that trick troup of yours.
> Lehman. Yeh? Well, you keep out of them rehearsals, you hear me?
> Fanny. You got a show that that's going to make history, do you know it? They'r e going to date things from the time you open this one.
> Lehman. I ain't asked you what you think about it.
> Fanny. I caught that bit where the leading lady was supposed to be sixteen or something and climbing up apple trees. The thing to make them trees out of is reinforced concrete.[21]

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19 John Mason Brown, Broadway in Review, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1940, p. 73.

20 George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly, Dulcy, New York: 1921, Samuel French, p. 48, lines 1-4.

21 George S. Kaufman, The Butter and Egg Man, in Garrett H. Leverton, Plays for the College Theater, New York: 1932, Samuel French, Act I, p. 666, lines 31-46.

Usually the wisecracks in the plays by Miss Ferber and Kaufman are very short and terse. The two following from the Royal Family are good examples of wisecracks in that they really do not need any explanatory material from the play itself.

> Dean....I have never done a play without consulting Fanny and Julie.
> Kitty. Maybe that's why you never have a hit.
> Kitty. I like a nice womanly figure myself.
> Fanny. You ought to be very happy.[22]

Not all of the wisecracks are spoken by characters who are supposed to be very witty. Some very effective ones are even the lines allotted to the unintelligent characters, such as the following from Once in a Lifetime. Mr. Glogauer, the famous Hollywood producer, is telling George, May, and Jerry that he will send for his car to take them out to inspect his mansion.

> Glogauer.....Phone my secretary--I send my car for you.
> May. Why, that'll be wonderful.
> Helen. Yes, and what a car it is! It's a Rolls-Royce!
> May. You don't say?
> George. What year?[23]

There are two types of wisecracks in June Moon, first, the smart responses of Maxie, a song-writer, and secondly, the supposedly sincere remarks of Fred, a country-boy who

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22 George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, The Royal Family, in Burns Mantle, Best Plays of 1927-1938, New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1929, p. 80, lines 5-7, p. 81, lines 31-32.

23 George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, Once in a Lifetime, in Burns Mantle, Best Plays of 1930-1931, Dodd, Mead, and Company (New York), 1932, p. 120, lines 34-40.

has come to New York City to become a song-writer. An example of the first is the following:

> Fred. I was thinking of another idea on the way up here. Maybe a song about the melting pots--all the immigrants from overseas who've come to the Land of Liberty. Take the Jews--do you know there's nearly two million Jews in New York City alone?
> Maxie. What do you mean--alone?[24]

One of the second type is spoken by Fred at the end of Act I.

> Lucille. I'll tell you where I haven't been for a long while! The St. Regis Roof!
> Eileen. Grand!
> Lucille. They've a wonderful view!
> Fred. Where?
> Lucille. The St. Regis Roof.
> Fred. I get dizzy if I climb a ladder.[25]

Of Thee I Sing, Kaufman and Ryskind's Pulitzer Prize winner, is literally crammed with wisecracks, most of which are short, snappy rejoinders which need no explanation to be understood by the reader. In other words, most of them do not depend directly on the action of the play. Some of the best ones are the following:

> One of the Girls. Say! What does a President's wife have to do anyhow?
> Gilhooley. That depends on the President.[26]

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[24] George S. Kaufman and Ring Lardner, June Moon, in Burns Mantle, Best Plays of 1929-1930, Dodd, Mead, and Company (New York), 1930, p. 247, lines 8-12.

[25] Ibid., p. 251, lines 18-24.

[26] George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, Of Thee I Sing, Alfred A. Knopf (New York), 1932, Act I, Scene III, p. 47, lines 3-5.

Jones. Don't let anybody find you--don't let anybody see you.
Throttlebottom. I won't. I won't even come out in February to cast my shadow.[27]

Fulton. We're going to impeach him!
Gilhooley. He wouldn't play ball with us!
Throttlebottom. Well, I don't play very well--you see this finger--[28]

Throttlebottom. I'm going to be President!
Scrubwoman. I'd rather have this job. It's steady.[29]

Even in Kaufman and Hart's serious play, Merrily We Roll Along, there are several good wisecracks, though of course not as many as in the later farces. Two of the best are, first, in the first scene at the party celebrating the first night of Richard's latest play when Julia is talking to David who is mixing a drink for himself at the bar:

Julia. (Indicating her glass) Know what I'm having?
David. What?
Julia. Not much fun![30]

and secondly, in Act II, Scene III, when Althea has just returned from an evening performance of her play.

Althea. Mother, will you please stop calling me Annie?
Mrs. Riley. Well, for Christ's sake, that's your name, ain't it? That's what you were born. Annie Riley to Althea Royce--that's a sleeper jump for

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[27] Ibid., Act I, Scene III, p. 53, lines 2-5.

[28] Ibid., Act II, Scene II, p. 162, lines 11-13.

[29] Ibid., Act II, Scene II, p. 164, lines 6-7.

[30] George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, Merrily We Roll Along, in Burns Mantle, Best Plays of 1934-1935, Dodd, Mead, and Company (New York), 1936, p. 204, lines 23-25.

> you. And I see by the program where your grandfather was the founder of the Irish Theatre. Old Patrick Royce. The only place he was ever found was under the seat drunk.[31]

The wisecracks in Kaufman's play with Katherine Dayton, First Lady, follow more closely the conventional pattern of give-and-take between two people, but even here the reader perhaps unconsciously wishes that Lucy will utterly defeat her opponent, in this case Irene Hibbard. The two principal characters are not the only ones, however, that have witty lines to say. The following is part of a conversation between Belle Kerdwick (a senator's wife) and Lucy about Irene:

> Belle. Well, every First Lady has to have a pet charity, and it was a toss-up between the Scouts and the Wayward Girls. She finally plunked for the Scouts.
> Lucy. Too bad--she and the Wayward Girls could have had such fun swapping stories.[32]

Whenever Lucy and Irene appear in the same scene, there are some good lines. For example,

> Irene. Really, I don't know what we're going to do without you here. It'll be like Washington without the monument.
> Lucy. Why, that's sweet of you, Irene.
> Irene. I'm sure you'll find it such a relief--living back in New York again, where no one will notice you. It'll be so restful just to be nobody.
> Lucy. Well, of course you know more about that than I do.[33]

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31 Ibid., p. 226, lines 29-36.

32 George S. Kaufman and Katherine Dayton, First Lady, Random House (New York), 1935, Act III, p. 158, lines 1-5.

33 Ibid., Act III, p. 175, lines 5-8.

There are many good lines but very few wisecracks as such in Kaufman and Ferber's Stage Door. About half of the latter border on the risque, such as the following:

> Pat. Looks don't count any more. It's good old sex appeal.
> Kendall. Would you rather go out with a handsome man without sex appeal, or a homely man with it?
> Bernice. I'd rather go out with the handsome one.
> Judith. Sure, and stay in with the other one.[34]

The proportion of the off-color humor that gets in print is not as high as a reader of his latest plays would probably imagine. There is very little, if any, humor of this sort in the Connelly plays. The early Ferber plays also show very little. However, the later plays, especially by Kaufman and Hart, have a much larger percentage of off-color humor, The Man Who Came to Dinner having at least one-third of its humor in this vein.

The satirical framework used by Kaufman and Hart in I'd Rather Be Right gave the dramatists good opportunity for several devastating wisecracks. One of the best is spoken by the character of Jim Farley in the first act.

> Farley. Frank, that gives me an idea. Suppose every letter has to be sent air mail? That would double the revenue from stamps. If it only goes from the Bronx to Brooklyn, it has to go air mail.
> Roosevelt. No, Nobody in the Bronx has got anything important enough to send air mail.
> Farley. They wouldn't go air mail--we'd just

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[34] George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, Stage Door, Dramatists Play Service, Inc. (New York), 1936, Act III, p. 113, lines 19-22.

send them the regular way. But it would double the revenue.
Roosevelt. No, no, Jim. That wouldn't be honest.
Farley. Oh! I thought you were talking about taxes.[35]

None of the lines in The Fabulous Invalid are particularly good, and the wisecracks also fall flat. They are not especially funny and do not appear to have much intelligence behind them. A typical one is

The Doorman. No, Larry. They want Screeno. And dishes, and silverware, and groceries. Personally, I don't think they'd come to see Bernhardt nowadays, unless they got a bunch of asparagus with her.[36]

Even their play with a serious subject, The American Way, contains several wisecracks, but they are not like the ones found in the comedies. They are more simple and natural, suiting themselves to the mood and characteristics of the people in the play itself. Instead of being harsh, rude, and brilliant, they seem more like something that any small-town person would probably say in like circumstances. One example is spoken by Winifred as she and Mr. Brookton come off the dance floor.

Winifred. No, Samuel, it has nothing to do with your dancing. It's just that I may want to walk again some day.[37]

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35 George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, I'd Rather Be Right, New York: Random House, 1937, Act I, p. 33, lines 4-13.

36 George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, The Fabulous Invalid, New York: Random House, 1938, Act II, p. 145, lines 8-11.

37 Kaufman and Hart, The American Way, New York: Random House, 1939, Act II, p. 107, lines 7-8.

The last play written by Kaufman and Hart that was available for this study, The Man Who Came to Dinner, contains extremely good examples of the purely biting, sarcastic wisecrack. The dialogue is composed of one "gag" after another from practically the first word Whiteside utters to the last word. In the first scene of the play the timid little nurse, Miss Preen, was the brunt of most of Mr. Whiteside's wisecracking.

> Miss Preen. Oh, My! You mustn't eat candy, Mr. Whiteside. It's very bad for you.
> Whiteside. My great-aunt Jennifer ate a whole box of candy every day of her life. She lived to be a hundred and two, and when she had been dead three days she looked better than you do now.[38]

But sooner or later, everyone else who came in contact with him also felt his sarcastic tongue. Bert Jefferson, the newspaper editor, is speaking:

> Bert. Hello, everybody. Say, do you know it's snowing out? Going to have a real old-fashioned Christmas.
> Whiteside. Why don't you telephone your scoop to the New York Times?[39]

There are relatively few wisecracks as such in You Can't Take It With You. Instead of consciously humorous retorts, the humor is unconsciously funny. A good example occurs very early in the play.

Penny. The only trouble with dancing is, it

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[38] George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, The Man Who Came to Dinner, in Stage, p. 102, col. 3, lines 9-15.

[39] Ibid., p. 117, col. 2, lines 57-61.

takes so long. You've been studying such a long time.
Essie. Only--eight--years. After all, mother, you've been writing plays for eight years. We started about the same time, didn't we?
Penny. Yes, but you shouldn't count my first two years, because I was learning to type.[40]

The percentage of unconscious humor in the early formula plays will run quite high (perhaps fifty-fifty) of the type of the central figure. However, in the latter plays there is very little of this type of humor.

From the preceding illustrations which are just a very few out of hundreds of possible ones, the inference may be drawn that the use of the wisecrack is distinctly a characteristic of the dramatic style of George S. Kaufman. The importence of the fact that there are examples in all of the plays of which he has been co-author should not be underestimated, for it is only from comparisons of this sort that it is possible to decide in any way just what his contributions to his collaborations have really been.

Some of the best lines of Kaufman's plays are not necessarily closely connected with the plot or dramatic situations in the play itself. In fact, a few examples will show that it would be practically impossible to tell from which play these lines are taken by their content. They are merely comments on various subjects that make the

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[40] George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, You Can't Take It with You, New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937, p. 6, lines 1-5.

dialogue more interesting, but aside from this add really nothing to the play. The following lines from First Lady could be from almost any play:

> Ganning....Of course, catching a newspaper reader is a very delicate operation, very delicate.
> Lucy. What do you see? Salt?
> Ganning. No, no. But recently we conducted a scientific inquiry: Who is the most popular person in America?
> Lucy. How interesting!
> Ganning. And what was the result? The winners were Father Coughlin and Shirely Temple.
> Lucy. Well, then the thing for Carter to do is to turn his collar around and wear curls.[41]

These next lines, from Stage Door, which happen to describe a group of actresses who have not been able to secure parts in plays, could just as easily describe any group of unsuccessful people.

> Judith. "Two eggs and fold in the beaten whites." The beaten whites! That's us![42]

The Man Who Came to Dinner contains many good examples that could illustrate this point. One is the lines that are spoken by Whiteside to a neighbor of the Stanleys' who has just dropped a glass of jelly.

> Mrs. McCutcheon. Oh, dear! My calf's-foot jelly.
> Whiteside. Made from your own foot, I have no doubt.[43]

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41 George S. Kaufman and Katherine Dayton, First Lady, New York: Random House, 1935, p. 169, lines 6-14.

42 George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, Stage Door, New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc., 1939, p. 72, lines 13-14.

43 George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, The Man Who Came to Dinner, in Stage, Vol. 1, No. 1 (November 1940), p. 99, col. 1, lines 25-28.

Another is in the second act when Bert Jefferson has given Maggie a Christmas present.

> Maggie. I told you it was beautiful, Bert; See?
> Bert. Well, shows what you get if you save your coupons.[44]

This practice of writing lines not particularly essential to any one play is probably due to Kaufman's long experience as a columnist, whose chief business according to Joseph Wood Krutch is to make brief random comments upon a thousand things. These lines usually strike one as comments of Kaufman himself upon something in the play or in the world around him at that time.

As it has already been indirectly shown, the subject matter used by Kaufman is definitely contemporary. He writes about things that he sees about him in the world, including institutions, popular fads, conditions both social and political, and so on. Even when he is writing an adaptation (Beggar on Horseback) of a German story, he endows it with so much satirical material about our contemporary American business world that one would never imagine, unless one already knew, that the play he was seeing or reading was first written by a German about conditions in Germany. Really, Kaufman has used very few subjects, and all of his plays can be classified under a few simple heads. He often uses a topic, and then, merely by changing the framework, of the play, uses it again. The topics that he has written a-

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[44] Ibid., p. 118, col. 1, lines 11-14.

bout are politics, the movies and the theater, the business world, and character studies, especially of people living in the suburbs. Of Thee I Sing represents the first treatment by Kaufman of the topic of politics. The reconsideration of the subject appears in Let 'Em Eat Cake, First Lady, I'd Rather Be Right, and The American Way. Merton of the Movies is his first play using the second topic; it was followed by The Butter and Egg Man, The Royal Family, June Moon, Once in a Lifetime, Merrily We Roll Along, Stage Door, and The Fabulous Invalid. The business world as a subject is found in Beggar on Horseback, and to some extent in Dulcy, To the Ladies, and Dinner at Eight. The character studies include Dulcy, To the Ladies, Minick, The Good Fellow, First Lady, You Can't Take It With You, and The Man Who Came to Dinner. It will be noticed that some plays appear in more than one classification, but it is practically impossible to avoid this because the plays do often represent more than one type.

Kaufman's plays often lack a universal appeal because of their localization of subject matter. In other words, people who live outside of New York City or some other large metropolis often do not understand fully what Kaufman is writing about. For example, the satire in June Moon and The Butter and Egg Man is not enjoyed or understood as fully by someone who knows nothing about Broadway as they are by those who are closely acquainted with it. The same

is true of some of his plays of suburban life (Dulcy, To the Ladies, and so on). The Royal Family and Stage Door are also plays that especially suffer from the specialized locality of their subject matter. However, there are also exceptions to this rule. Though You Can't Take It with You has New York City for its locale, in the picture form at least, it was enjoyed by people all over the United States. And anyone who takes any interest al all in the government of our country can easily appreciate Of Thee I Sing, The American Way, and the other plays in this group.

Kaufman's plays are not essentially literary products, but then he does not wish them to be so. What may be called his philosophy of the theater is that he will give the public what it wants, and if the public does not demand a finished, literary product, they will not get it from him. He finds just what general types of plays have been successful and then writes others like them. This practice can be seen in the continued use of the "formula" play for so many years and his present use of the satirical comedy form for most of his recent plays. He writes plays with the idea in mind that the theater should provide good contemporary entertainment regardless of its intrinsic worth, and that good entertainment pays. John Chapman writes: "To him, a play is not primarily a message or a moral or an opinion; it is first a play, a good idea--something that will click upon the stage and that people will come to see."[45]

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45 "The Gloomy Dean," op. cit., p. 16, col. 3.

CONCLUSION

The fact that Kaufman has won his place as one of the leading dramatists of today as a collaborator cannot be stressed too much. Every criticism of the plays on which he has collaborated must be approached from this angle. Any discussion of the plays also must be based on the knowledge that he is after all principally a collaborator and not an entirely original playwright.

There are some definite limitations as well as some definitely good qualities in the dramatic work of Kaufman. One of the limitations is that making the most of contemporary events is the basis for Kaufman's plays. The topics that he chooses are of newspaper interest at the time that he is writing. This is a definite drawback to his plays becoming universally and eternally popular because the more contemporary allusions a piece of literature contains, the more difficult it becomes for succeeding generations to understand and enjoy it. However, plays of this type are excellent sourses of material for historians, and they will in all probability continue to study some of the greatest ones. This will be especially true of his plays about the contemporary theater: Once in a Lifetime, The Butter and Egg Man, and The Fabulous Invalid; and the ones about the government: Of Thee I Sing and I'd Rather Be Right.

I'd Rather Be Right is a splendid example of this first point because not only is it definitely dated by the subject matter, but it also uses the real names of the persons it

portrays.

Kaufman's plays are also limited because of their locality. He writes plays definitely for the "New Yorker." There are often details that are entirely missed by people not familiar with the scene of the play. For example, in the banquet scene in To the Ladies, a telegram is read from Dudley Field Malone. The significance of this would be entirely missed by those who did not know that Malone was a District Attorney of that city.

Kaufman's plays are also limited by his rather narrow choices of subject matter. He writes about the government, about the moving pictures, and about phases of city life from suburban dwellers on to the theatrical world. The last category is often met with a lack of appreciation from people other than New Yorkers.

One of the good features of his plays that have been praised in Kaufman is his use of the wisecrack. This has been discussed in detail in the third chapter.

Kaufman is also a master of brilliant repartee and of conversation as such. He has an excellent sense of the rhythm of conversation and works out the lines until he thinks the rhythm is just right. He often "rehearses" with his back to the stage so that he will only hear the lines. This quality makes the plays interesting reading also.

Another of his outstanding accomplishments is his uncanny sense of timing. He seems to know exactly how long

a pause for a laugh needs to be, exactly when a certain piece of stage business can be done most effectively, exactly when the curtain should be lowered, and so on. Kaufman always sees that the stage business continues even though the lines have paused because of the laughs. The business goes on, and this give a sense of continued forward motion with no stops whatever in the play.

Kaufman is a satirist, and hardly one of his plays is not marked in some way with his satiric touch. His satirical musical comedy, Of Thee I Sing, is recognized as being one of the best of this type ever written. His satire can be devastating, biting, and savage, but it can also assume a more sympathetic aspect.

Kaufman's plays almost invariably find critical approval and have attracted a large ticket-buying public before the play has even opened. Kaufman has always written with this prospective audience in mind, and, in all probability, will contine to do so. The fact remains that, whether Kaufman's plays become a living part of our dramatic literature or not, he still is the foremost dramatist and the most successful one on a monetary standard in the American theater of today.

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