

the man who came to dinner script

The Man Who Came to Dinner is a classic American comedy play written by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber. First premiered in 1939, the play has become a staple of American theatre, captivating audiences with its wit, humor, and social commentary. This article will explore the origins, plot, characters, themes, and the enduring legacy of this beloved play, providing a comprehensive overview of its significance in the world of theater.

Origins of the Play

The creation of "The Man Who Came to Dinner" can be traced back to the collaboration between Kaufman and Ferber, two prominent figures in American theatre. Kaufman was known for his sharp comedic style and innovative approach to playwriting, while Ferber was a celebrated novelist and playwright. Their combined talents resulted in a work that not only entertained but also provided keen insights into society.

The play's inspiration is often attributed to a real-life incident involving the famous radio personality and critic, Sheridan Whiteside. In the late 1930s, Whiteside was invited to dinner at the home of a wealthy family in Ohio. After suffering an injury, he was forced to stay in their home for an extended period. This peculiar situation provided the groundwork for the humorous and chaotic events that unfold in the play.

Plot Summary

The story revolves around Sheridan Whiteside, a famous and acerbic radio personality who becomes incapacitated after slipping on ice outside the home of the wealthy Stanley family in Mesalia, Ohio. As a result, he is confined to their home, and what begins as an unfortunate accident quickly spirals into a series of comedic misadventures.

Act I

The play opens with the arrival of Whiteside, who immediately takes control of the household. He demands the attention of everyone around him, showcasing his larger-than-life personality. As he begins to dictate the lives of the Stanley family, it becomes clear that his presence will dramatically alter their daily routine.

Act II

In the second act, the chaos escalates. Whiteside's influence leads to unexpected developments, including the romantic entanglements of various characters. He attempts

to sabotage the engagement of one of the Stanley family members, while simultaneously orchestrating the arrival of several eccentric guests, adding to the madness.

Act III

The third act culminates in a comedic climax, where the characters confront the consequences of Whiteside's meddling. The play brings together various threads, showcasing how one person's presence can disrupt the status quo and lead to unforeseen consequences.

Main Characters

The play features a colorful cast of characters that contribute to its humor and charm. Some of the main characters include:

- **Sheridan Whiteside:** The protagonist, a witty and domineering radio personality whose presence disrupts the Stanley family.
- **Mrs. Stanley:** The matriarch of the Stanley family, who struggles to maintain order in her home amidst Whiteside's antics.
- **Mr. Stanley:** Mrs. Stanley's husband, who is often caught between his wife's wishes and Whiteside's demands.
- **June Stanley:** The Stanley's daughter, whose romantic relationship is complicated by Whiteside's interference.
- **Dr. Bradley:** The local doctor, who provides comic relief and serves as a voice of reason in the chaos.
- **Miss Preen:** Whiteside's secretary, who is often overwhelmed by his demands but remains loyal to him.

Themes

"The Man Who Came to Dinner" explores several themes that resonate with audiences, including:

1. The Nature of Fame

Sheridan Whiteside's character serves as a commentary on celebrity culture. His larger-than-life persona and the way he commands attention highlight the absurdities of fame and the impact it can have on personal relationships.

2. Social Class and Privilege

The play also delves into the dynamics of social class. The Stanley family's wealth and status are juxtaposed with Whiteside's celebrity, raising questions about the power dynamics in society. The interactions between characters from different social strata reveal the absurdities and complexities of privilege.

3. Chaos and Control

The disruption caused by Whiteside's presence illustrates the theme of chaos versus control. As he takes charge of the Stanley household, the characters grapple with the loss of their autonomy, leading to humorous yet poignant moments of reflection.

Production History

Since its premiere, "The Man Who Came to Dinner" has been performed countless times across various venues, from community theaters to Broadway productions. Its enduring popularity can be attributed to its universal themes, witty dialogue, and the timeless appeal of its characters.

The play was adapted into a successful film in 1942, starring Bette Davis as Mrs. Stanley and Monty Woolley as Sheridan Whiteside. This adaptation introduced the story to a broader audience and solidified its place in American pop culture.

Legacy and Influence

"The Man Who Came to Dinner" remains a significant work in the canon of American theatre. Its influence can be seen in various forms of media, including television shows and films that explore similar themes of disruption and social dynamics. The play's comedic approach to serious subjects continues to resonate with audiences, making it a favorite among both performers and spectators.

Why It Endures

Several factors contribute to the enduring appeal of "The Man Who Came to Dinner":

1. **Relatable Characters:** The characters' struggles and desires mirror those of the audience, making their experiences accessible and engaging.
2. **Witty Dialogue:** The sharp, clever dialogue keeps audiences entertained and engaged, showcasing the playwrights' talent for humor.
3. **Universal Themes:** The exploration of fame, social dynamics, and the chaos of life resonates with people across generations, ensuring its relevance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, "The Man Who Came to Dinner" is more than just a comedic play; it is a reflection of society's complexities and the absurdities of human behavior. Through the lens of humor, Kaufman and Ferber create a rich tapestry of characters and themes that continue to captivate audiences today. Its legacy as a cornerstone of American theatre is well-deserved, and it remains a cherished piece of art that speaks to the human experience. Whether in its original stage format or through adaptations, the play's charm and insight will undoubtedly endure for generations to come.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main plot of 'The Man Who Came to Dinner'?

The play revolves around a famous radio personality, Sheridan Whiteside, who is invited to a wealthy family's home for dinner but ends up being confined to their house due to an accident. His presence dramatically disrupts the family's life and leads to various comedic situations.

Who are the main characters in 'The Man Who Came to Dinner'?

The main characters include Sheridan Whiteside, the witty and demanding radio personality; Mrs. Stanley, the hostess; Mr. Stanley, the husband; and a cast of quirky supporting characters that contribute to the chaos of the story.

What themes are explored in 'The Man Who Came to Dinner'?

Key themes include the impact of unexpected guests on personal dynamics, the clash between social classes, and the absurdity of human behavior in stressful situations.

Who wrote 'The Man Who Came to Dinner'?

The play was written by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber and premiered in 1939.

What is the significance of Sheridan Whiteside's character?

Sheridan Whiteside serves as both a source of humor and a critique of celebrity culture, showcasing the complexities of fame and how it affects personal relationships.

How does 'The Man Who Came to Dinner' reflect its historical context?

The play reflects the social dynamics and cultural attitudes of the late 1930s, including views on wealth, class, and the rise of media personalities, which were becoming increasingly influential at the time.

Has 'The Man Who Came to Dinner' been adapted into other formats?

Yes, the play was adapted into a successful film in 1942, starring Monty Woolley as Sheridan Whiteside, which helped popularize the story beyond the stage.

What makes 'The Man Who Came to Dinner' a classic comedy?

Its sharp wit, memorable characters, and the hilarious situations that arise from the chaos of an uninvited guest contribute to its status as a classic comedy that continues to resonate with audiences today.

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