



The Real Nick and Nora: Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, Writers of Stage and Screen Classics

Mr. David L Goodrich

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Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett wrote the screenplays for some of America's most treasured movies, including *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The Thin Man*, *Easter Parade*, *Father of the Bride*, *Naughty Marietta*, and *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. Legendary films, indeed, but writing both the play and screenplay for *The Diary of Anne Frank* was their crowning achievement.

Controlled chaos best describes their writing method. They discussed a scene at length, sometimes acting it out. Afterwards, they each wrote a draft, which they exchanged. "Then," Frances said, "began 'free criticism'—which sometimes erupted into screaming matches." Noisy and contentious, the method worked splendidly.

Enormously successful and remarkably prolific, Goodrich and Hackett began their thirty-four-year collaboration in 1928. Married after the first of their five plays became a hit, they were in many ways an unlikely pair. Frances, the privileged daughter of well-to-do parents, graduated from Vassar, then played minor parts on Broadway. Albert's mother put him on stage at age five, when his father died, to help pay the bills, and he became a highly paid comedian.

The Hacketts were known for their wit and high spirits and the pleasure of their Bel Air dinner parties. They waged memorable battles with their powerful bosses and were key activists in the stressful creation of the Screen Writers Guild. Once they had created Nick and Nora Charles, *The Thin Man's* bright, charming, sophisticated lead couple, played memorably by William Powell and Myrna Loy, many people saw a strong resemblance, and the Hacketts acknowledged that they "put themselves into" Nick and Nora.

The Real Nick and Nora is a dazzling assemblage of anecdotes featuring some of the most talented writers and the brightest lights of American stage and screen. The work was arduous, the parties luminous. On any given night the guests singing and acting out scripts at a party might include F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sheila Graham, S. J. Perelman, Oscar Levant, Ogden Nash, Judy Garland, Abe Burrows, Hoagy Carmichael, Johnny Mercer, Ira Gershwin, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Pat O'Brien, Dick Powell and June Allyson, Dashiell Hammett, Lillian Hellman, James Cagney, and Dorothy Parker.

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