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Theatre Company

Inside Out

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The Little Foxes

The Hubbard family is a nouveau riche, merchant family living in the American South in 1900. Marcus Hubbard, the father, has died leaving his estate to his two sons, Ben and Oscar, and the family has appropriated a "position" of aristocracy through Oscar's marriage to Birdie Bagtry, a frail relic from an old Southern plantation. Marcus Hubbard's passionate, willful, but penniless daughter, Regina Hubbard, has only survived by marrying Horace Giddens, a successful banker.

Now, her brothers are desperately eager to parlay their mercantile success into one of the vast fortunes being reaped from the industrialism that swept America in the decades following the Civil War. They are about to invest in a new cotton mill that will make them rich beyond measure and Regina is desperate to acquire part of the riches. The opportuni-



*"Take us the foxes, the little
foxes, that spoil the vines, for
our vines have tender grapes."*

Song of Solomon, II, 15

ty arrives in the form of Mr. Marshall, a Chicago businessman, who agrees to provide Northern capital to finance a cotton mill. Forty-nine percent of the money will come from him, while the Hubbards will provide the remaining 51 percent for the controlling interest. Ben and Oscar will supply two-thirds of this amount; the brothers count on the other one-third coming from Horace, Regina's husband. If she fails to convince her husband to participate, her brothers have threatened to look elsewhere for a partner.

Horace is in a Baltimore hospital with a heart condition and has not answered any of Regina's letters proposing this financial arrangement. Frantic to escape her provincial Southern town, Regina will resort to blackmail, threats, perhaps even murder to gain her objective.

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The Playwright

“ADDIE: There are people who eat the earth and eat all the people on it like in the Bible with the locusts. And other people who stand around and watch them eat it.” The Little Foxes. Act III.

From *The Cleveland Play House Study Guides, A Lillian Hellman Festival, 1994.*

Beginnings

Her career spanned 50 years and touched some of the most turbulent events of the 20th century. Her canon includes more hit plays than any other female playwright and she ranks consistently among the most widely produced dramatists in the world. In her life and her work alike, she addressed fundamental issues: family, money, sex, loyalty, treachery, integrity and justice. By her own admission, she was an angry woman but her anger was galvanic. “I came from a family of Southerners. It wasn’t simply a question that I was brought up and down from the South. I came from a family, on both sides, who had been Southerners a great many generations.”

Lillian Florence Hellman was born in New Orleans in 1906. Her family was German-Jewish on both sides, having come to Alabama and Louisiana in the early 1800s. One grandfather fought for the Confederacy and another grew wealthy during the Civil War—as does Marcus Hubbard, the patriarch of her play, *Another Part of the Forest*, and father of the main characters in *The Little Foxes*. When Hellman was five, her family moved to New York City. But she spent half of every year in New Orleans until she was 19, and she always considered herself a Southerner.

Hellman attended NYU for three years before taking a job as a manuscript reader for Boni & Livewright publishers. She also

worked as a book reviewer for the *New York Herald Tribune* and as a theatrical publicist. In 1925, she married Arthur Kober, then press agent to Broadway producer Jed Harris. Five years later, Kober was offered a screenwriting job at Paramount Pictures so the couple moved to Hollywood. By this time, Hellman had published some short fiction, but she later dismissed it as “Lady writer” stories.

While her husband worked as a screenwriter at Paramount, Hellman led the rather aimless existence of a Hollywood wife. Through Kober, however, she entered the social circle of Hollywood writers who had been rushed west by the studios to provide scripts for the new talking pictures. She found a script-reading job at MGM and shortly after that she met the man who would be a powerful force in her life and work for more than 30 years—the respected mystery writer, Dashiell Hammett. They soon moved in together, then returned to New York where their circle included William Faulkner, Dorothy Parker, S.J. Perelman and Nathaniel West. Hellman and her husband, Kober, divorced amicably and she found work as a play reader for producer-director Herman Shumlin, who would later direct many of her plays.

Hellman blossomed under Hammett’s rigorous guidance. She moved from short stories to satire, but she felt comfortable in neither genre. Her first effort at drama was *Dear Queen*, a comedy she wrote with an old colleague from the Liveright days. It was never produced. Hammett, who at the time was pushing to finish what would be his final novel, *The Thin Man*, suggested that she write a play based on a true story he had hoped to use in

some way. Many drafts later, Hellman placed an unsigned script on Herman Shumlin’s desk; soon after that, *The Children’s Hour* rocked Broadway.

At a time when few contemporary plays openly discussed any form of sexuality, this indictment of a child’s lie about a lesbian love affair and that lie’s consequences caused a sensation on Broadway and transformed Hellman from what one biographer calls “a celebrated writer’s girlfriend,” to a figure of sudden celebrity, life-long controversy and undeniably the first rank of American playwrights. It played more than 600 performances and popular opinion acknowledged it to be the outstanding drama of the 1934/35 season. Yet the Pulitzer Prize committee chose to bypass *The Children’s Hour* for the drama award. The literary and theatre communities were outraged; they declared that a new and more worthy award for playwriting was needed. The following season, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play was created. Lillian Hellman would win it twice—in 1941 for *Watch on the Rhine* and in 1960 for *Toys in the Attic*.

The success of *The Children’s Hour* earned Hellman a lucrative offer to write screenplays for producer Samuel Goldwyn and she returned to Hollywood. Free to choose her own projects, Hellman soon adapted *The Children’s Hour* for the screen. Re-titled *These Three* and directed by William Wyler, it brought Hellman further acclaim as a major writer for both theatre and film. Ironically, her success came just as Dashiell Hammett’s creative decline began. *The Thin Man* (featuring the charismatic Charleses, Nick and Nora) was to be his last novel.

Throughout the 1930s, labor unrest and continued economic depression had led to a surge in political organization nationwide. The writers of the film industry, long powerless in their dealings with studio heads, became particularly active. Hellman and Hammett both joined the fledgling Screen Writers' Guild. Hammett and many others also joined the Communist Party. During this time, Hellman's confidence as a playwright grew, but her next play was the ill-fated political drama, *Days to Come*, which played just six performances. After adapting Sidney Kingsley's play *Dead End* for film, she traveled to France, Russia and then to Spain to see first-hand the brutal civil war there. She returned to America a fervent anti-fascist, yet like many young American intellectuals of the time, a great admirer of Soviet Russia and Stalin.

The Little Foxes

In *The Little Foxes*, arguably her masterpiece, Hellman achieved a new harmony of character and construction. And, in *Regina Giddens*, the playwright realized one of the memorable creations of the American theatre, a villain to root for. In fact, the play is distinguished by the unrepentant malevolence of its appealing protagonists. The play opened on February 15, 1939 and ran for a year, amassing 410 performances and confirming Lillian Hellman as one of the pre-eminent American dramatists of the day. The film, starring Bette Davis, was equally successful. Hellman followed in 1941 with *Watch on the Rhine*, an anti-fascist thriller that introduced something new for the author, a genuinely sympathetic hero. It served notice that when it came to fighting fascism, even Hellman the Russophile could do her patriotic best. During the war, Hellman traveled to Moscow as a guest of the Soviet government; she was even permitted to spend two weeks at the front, an experience she recounts with telling detail in her memoir, *An Unfinished Woman*. Works of this period include: *The North Star*, a film about a Russian village during Nazi occupation; *The Searching Wind*

and, in 1946, *Another Part of the Forest*, a second play about the Hubbards, set 20 years before *The Little Foxes*.

Politics

"A sickening, sickening, immoral and degrading week," Hellman wrote in 1947, as Hollywood producers agreed to blacklist communist, former communist and suspected former communist writers and directors. Hammett was jailed for six months in 1951. Hellman would be subpoenaed to testify in 1952, but she had already been blacklisted since 1948 and would remain so until the early 1960s. Hammett's health deteriorated after a heart attack and he came to live with Hellman in 1958. She supported and cared for him until his death in 1961.

Hellman continued to work in the theatre and her works in those years include *Montserrat*, an adaptation from the Spanish play by Robles; *Regina*, Marc Blitzstein's opera adaptation of *The Little Foxes*; *The Autumn Garden* (1951); *The Lark*, adapted from Anouilh; the libretto for Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*; *Toys in the Attic* (1960) and her final play, *My Mother, My Father and Me*, an adaptation of Burt Blechman's novel, *How Much?* (1963).

Hellman would write a few more screenplays but nothing more for the stage. She spent much of the 60s teaching and traveling and she continued to involve herself in intellectual and political causes, most notably the Committee for Public Justice, which she co-organized to prevent a repeat of the excesses of the McCarthy years.

In 1969, Hellman brought out her first volume of memoirs, *An Unfinished Woman*, which won the National Book Award. She followed with two more volumes, *Pintimento: A Book of Portraits*, (1973) and *Scoundrel Time* (1976), her account of the 1950s McCarthy era witch-hunts. A last volume, an autobiographical story entitled *Maybe*, appeared in 1984.

The veracity of Hellman's memoirs was called into question by intellectuals like Elizabeth Hardwick and

Mary McCarthy (author of *The Group*). Hellman became embroiled in a very public feud with McCarthy, who had called Hellman "a liar" on television. Hellman sued for defamation; the literary world took sides and enjoyed the uproar. But Hellman was infirm. Her eyesight was gone. She suffered from severe arthritis, congestive heart failure and emphysema. Her furious lawsuit was finally resolved by her death at Martha's Vineyard in June 1984. Her last book, written with Peter Feibleman and issued posthumously, was *Eating Together: Recollections and Recipes*.

Lillian Hellman wrote eight original plays, four adaptations of plays, six screenplays, three volumes of memoirs, a novella, and many short stories and essays. Her numerous awards included the Gold Medal for Drama from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, honorary degrees from Yale and Columbia Universities, the Brandeis University Creative Arts Award and the MacDowell Award for outstanding contributions to the arts. She interviewed heads of state. She reported on the Republican Convention of 1940 and the March on Washington of 1963. She fictionalized her own life. She smoked incessantly. She provoked compulsively. For decades, passionately, she fished.

"I think it's the fitting together of things," said Lillian Hellman once, when asked to define wisdom. "The fitting together of people, knowledge, books, aims, all one knows and all one feels; fitting together as many of the pieces as you can."

Another Part of the Forest

A Prequel to *The Little Foxes*

“REGINA: You ain’t smart for a man who wants to get somewhere. You should have figured out long ago that Papa’s going to do just whatever you tell him not to do, unless I tell him to do it.”

Another Part of the Forest, Act I

Throughout history, all tyrants have reached a point in their lives where they must inevitably be deposed. In *Another Part of the Forest*, Lillian Hellman shows us the Hubbard family in 1880 and their nasty struggles to gain supremacy over one another. Money is still the weapon-of-choice and it is controlled by Marcus Hubbard – rich, despotic and despised by his community. (He made his fortune during the Civil War by blockade running and he may or may not have been involved in a Union massacre of

young Confederate military cadets.) He is the father of Ben, Oscar and Regina and his challenge comes from the next generation in his own home. Marcus dominates his conniving son, Ben, and his weaker one, Oscar, with a sadistic cruelty; he adores Regina, his amoral daughter while reducing his sensitive and religious wife, Lavinia, to a mental patient. The play is about the machinations of his three children and the fall of Marcus Hubbard.

INDUSTRIALIZATION of the SOUTH and the RISE of the COTTON MILL

The industrialization of the South began in the late 19th century out of the despair of the political defeat of the Civil War. During Reconstruction, the South had time to reflect on its past and “some sort of moral regeneration occurred.”¹ The will and ambition of Southerners was further fueled by the end of the Depression of 1879 which freed up Northern and English capital for investment. By 1900, the region “had entered upon one of the most remarkable periods of economic development to be found in the history of the modern industrial world.”² From 1880 to 1900, the capital invested in the South in cotton manufacturing alone increased from nearly 22 million dollars to nearly 113 million dollars and the number of mills increased from 180 to 412.

In *The Promise of the New South*, Edward Ayers writes that textile mills prospered because they could be built anywhere there was a power source to run the machinery; dozens of rivers and streams from Virginia to Alabama offered ample water to provide water power. After 1890, when the production of Southern coalfields made steam power possible, textile factories could be located over a much broader area. Moreover, a textile mill required far less capi-

talization than an iron or steel mill and most labor in such factories required little experience or physical strength. Finally, the competition with other regions and countries was less than in iron and steel because textile factories could specialize in particular weaves or grades that other mills were not producing.

The South’s textile mills boasted the latest and most sophisticated machinery and produced a product that was sought in China, India and Latin America. The South supplied 60 percent of all the American cloth sent abroad at the turn of the century. The factories tapped the South’s great cotton crop at the source and saved the expense of transporting bulky fibers to the North. The mills paid a profit almost immediately and kept on paying for decades. After the turn of the century, the textile mills were built with local capital and Northern money was no longer needed. Most importantly, the labor force existed in the many poor white families who fled failing farms to work in the factories.

Ayers says Southerners boasted a new sense of self-esteem and, caught up in the excitement of mill building, saw themselves as benefactors of the mill workers. With such paternalism they built

“mill villages which exhibited a broad range of conditions and elicited a broad range of reactions.”³ Some were clean and healthy and supplied a school and church for the inhabitants; some combined “urban crowding with kerosene lamps, hand pumps, meddlesome livestock, flies and the mud of the countryside.”⁴

In place of a country store, there was a company store that advanced goods against wages and the wages were miserably low. “Wages of adult male workers in North Carolina in the 1890s were 40 to 50 cents a day – and the wages of children, who entered into degrading competition with their parents, averaged 10 to 12 cents a day.”⁵

To a great degree, the expanding industrialization of the South was based upon the labor of women and children who worked to supplement the man’s income. While the New South (like the Hubbards) grew more prosperous, the poor white class worked 70 hours a week or longer for miserly salaries and lived in wretched conditions. Yet even with these hardships, there seems to have been no trouble in filling the factories and few workers ever returned to the farms from which they came.

BLACKS IN THE SOUTH IN 1900

Emanicipation and Reconstruction did little to improve the economic condition of the Blacks. Many of them, still dependent on their former masters, continued to live and work on family plantations; some took jobs as servants in the homes of the well-to-do (as Cal and Addie do with the Hubbards). Some, with government help, acquired their own small farms or became sharecroppers on private, extremely large farms. Others drifted to the cities looking for work. Though Congress had passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 which provided black Americans with "full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property, as is enjoyed by white citizens..." and the states had ratified the 14th Amendment (1868) making black Americans citizens, and the 15th Amendment (1870) giving black Americans the right to vote, repression began anew in 1877 when Reconstruction ended.⁶

As blacks migrated to mining and industrial towns, they found themselves in closer association with poor whites as well as being rivals for the same job. Blacks became the victims of the southern whites' political, economic and social frustration. To bolster the myth of white supremacy, many states passed Jim Crow laws. Named after a black character in an 1820s song created by entertainer Thomas Rice, Jim Crow laws required the separation of races in many public places.

Since 1873, the Supreme Court had been undermining civil rights' legislation. In 1877, in the case of *Hall versus de Cuir*, it overturned a Louisiana law of 1869 that prohibited racial segregation on public carriers. By 1890, when Mississippi passed a law requiring segregation on public carriers, the Court upheld it. Homer Adolphe Plessy challenged the law by refusing to ride in the "colored" coach of a train and his case, *Plessy versus Ferguson*, reached the Supreme Court in 1896. Plessy's lawyer based his arguments on the 13th and 14th Amendments,

but the Court decided against Plessy interpreting the 14th Amendment as a document that could "enforce political equality but not social equality or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either."⁷

In the North as well as the South, job opportunities were closed to blacks, as well as membership in the unions. As a result, black Americans were crowded into ghettos around the edges of industry. Even though more Civil Rights legislation was passed, the laws were ineffectual and the patterns of segregation remained the same. In the press, literature, on stage and in cartoons, the black stereotype emerged: "Blacks were portrayed as lazy, stupid, irresponsible, deceitful, immoral, improvident chicken thieves."⁸

As late as 1900, the *Richmond Times* demanded rigid segregation, and one by one, other southern states legislated segregation in public transportation, in waiting rooms, amusement parks and residential areas. "White Only" signs appeared on drinking fountains, toilets, entrances and exits.

Finally, southern blacks lost the right to vote. For some years they had been disenfranchised by force and fraud, but in 1890, Mississippi passed a law that all voters had to be able to read and to understand any clause in the state constitution. Local election officials, all of them white, determined how well they read. Variations of this act were adopted by other southern states and the Supreme Court upheld the law in 1898.

What was left for the black American in the 1900s? Very little. "The white folks had all the courts, all the guns, all the hounds, all the railroads, all the newspapers, all the money, and nearly all the land—and we had only our ignorance, our poverty and our empty hands."⁹

Significant 1 Events

Political

- British annex Orange Free State and Transvaal, take Pretoria and Johannesburg in Africa.
- Boxer uprisings in China against Europeans.
- William McKinley, 25th President of the US, is reelected.

Literature

- Theodore Dreiser writes *Sister Carrie*.
- Anton Chekhov writes *Uncle Vanya*.

Religion & Philosophy

- Sigmund Freud writes *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

Visual Arts

- Gauguin paints "Noa, Noa" and reports on his travels in Tahiti.
- Toulouse Lautrec paints "La Modiste."

Music

- Puccini writes the opera *Tosca*.

Science

- Max Planck formulates the quantum theory.
- First trial flight of the Zeppelin.

Lillian Hellman's Place as a Playwright

"I have had great benefits from the theater, liked and enjoyed many people in it, count a few of them as my friends, had pleasure in success and excitement even in failure, but I have wandered through it as if I were a stranger."

Lillian Hellman. *An Unfinished Woman*, p. 63.

"T he debate about Hellman's place as a playwright would go on for the rest of her life and well after it," says William Wright in his book *Lillian Hellman: the Image, the Woman*.¹⁰ He notes that few prominent playwrights outlive their own period and, in the 350 years since Shakespeare, only a few—Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, Wilde and Shaw—are regularly revived. Of all literary forms, playwriting, in his opinion, is the most rooted in its own time period.

According to Wright, the 1930s were Hellman's great years; she was highly regarded but certainly not preeminent. Eugene O'Neill, as well as Maxwell Anderson, Robert Sherwood, Clifford Odets, Elmer Rice, William Saroyan and Thornton Wilder outranked her work. "Except for O'Neill, these playwrights have all but disappeared from American stages and Hellman, while never considered in O'Neill's class as an artist, can approach his record for revivals."¹¹

There were other women playwrights in the 1930s, but "their plays are neglected today—because they bear the label of 'politically subversive,'" says Rachel France in her introduction to *A Century of Plays of American Women*.¹² *Take My Stand* (1935) by Elizabeth England dealt with the birth pangs of the labor movement; Ann Seymour's *Lawd, Does You Undahstan'* (1937) was written to aid the efforts of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching. Rachel Crothers, Edna Ferber and Clare Kummer wrote mostly romantic comedies, while Clare Boothe's *The Women* (1936) and Zoe Akins' *The Old Maid* (1934), were more serious-minded but did not deal with the plight of the struggling masses of Americans during the Depression. Hellman does not deal with this issue directly either. But her main characters are women and she "sets them at a time when the struggle between the affective, nurturing role and the rationalizing, self-gratifying one was more clearly divided in our culture along gender lines," explains Timothy J. Wiles in his essay, "Lillian Hellman's American Political Theater: the 1930's and Beyond."¹³ He

elaborates that Hellman makes us experience the tragedy of this social crisis by using the woman issue as it existed in her times to illustrate a point about the exploiters versus the exploited (though she bristled at being called "a feminist writer.")

Carl Rollyson in his biography of Hellman writes that her "place in American theater is not clear, even though her plays are revived frequently in New York and all over the world."¹⁴ She did little to explain or promote her plays, even in her memoirs such as *An Unfinished Woman* or *Pentimento*.

Her work avoided symbolism and pathos, so "she has to be the most unsentimental major playwright America has produced."¹⁵ In fact, she was America's finest radical playwright. Her depth of belief in political principles is rarely found in American drama. She used a realistic form to attack the appeasement of iniquity, the weakness of liberalism and the tendency to ignore the face of evil.

Robert Brustein, a close

friend of Hellman's, feels none of her plays are first rate. In his essay, "Epilogue to Anger," he writes that her plays were fashioned under the influence of Henrik Ibsen. "Like Ibsen, she believed the drama to have a function beyond mere entertainment - that it could be a vehicle for social commentary, psychological insight and, above all, sharp incisions into the diseased body of a corrupted society."¹⁶

To C.W.E. Bigsby, Hellman's best plays were her first and last—*The Children's Hour* and *Toys in the Attic*. In his book, *A Critical Introduction to 20th Century American Drama, 1900-1940*, he judges her plays as realistic and well-made. "They take place in private rooms which are meant to contain not merely private dramas but public issues."¹⁷ Her best plays, set in the South, suggest the sense of a myth that was "created to convey a sense of culture under strain, a world which embraced the trope [metaphor] of faded glory and of anarchy concealed beneath surface order."¹⁸ The events of the 1930s and 40s were to re-enforce her ideas of the power of illusion and the attempt to cling to innocence in the face of lethal anarchy.

"INTERVIEWER: *Which of your plays do you like best?*

HELLMAN: *I don't like that question."*

—from an interview with John Phillip and Anne Hollander (1967) for Writers at Work.

MELODRAMA

When *The Little Foxes* premiered, “critics granted the play’s seriousness and unflinching directness in making its points. They also acknowledged the power it had over audiences.”¹⁹ But how to classify it? Most came to the same conclusion: melodrama. But no two critics could agree on a mutually satisfying definition of melodrama. One said it is when you care what happens next; another said melodramas are plays marked by excessive use of action, particularly violent action. On both counts, the play qualifies. Hellman said that she intended *The Little Foxes* to be perceived as a dramatic comedy; “I think most villains are funny.”²⁰ However, a closer look at the melodramatic form reveals many similarities with the play.

Frank Rahill in *The World of Melodrama* defined melodrama as “a form of dramatic composition in prose partaking of the nature of tragedy, comedy, pantomime and spectacle, and intended for a popular audience. Primarily concerned with situation and plot, it calls upon mimed action extensively and employs a more or less fixed complement of stock characters.”²¹ These stock characters include:

- the virtuous heroine (usually passive, threatened by the villain)
- the hero (sometimes a shield for the heroine, sometimes a pawn over whom the villain and heroine struggle)
- the villain (no moral compunction, thoroughly evil for no apparent reason)
- old father (either emphasizes the moral through giving good advice or fuels the conflict between heroine’s love and duty)
- the lively girl (a comic character with spunk and sauciness in contrast to the heroine).

The melodrama has a strong moral tone and at the end, the fate of the characters is determined by poetic justice. Evil is punished and goodness justified. Guilbert de Pixerecourt in France created this classic melodrama form. An offspring of the French Revolution, it extolled civic virtues and instructed the people in patriotism and military heroism.

Melodrama came to the United States in the late 18th century and became an expression of American society and national character.

Melodrama is a democratic form of drama, designed for large, relatively unsophisticated audiences who wanted

robust entertainment and simple moral instruction. It is optimistic and unaware of humanity’s limitations and tragic flaws; the message of melodrama is that the individual can make of oneself whatever s/he wishes. For a young country, its advocacy of human equality, the power of innocence and the triumph of justice were part of the national ideal. And as the nation matured, so did melodrama. It was the aesthetic root of melodrama that gave rise to the main stream of serious American drama, “reaching its apex in [Eugene] O’Neill and continuing to the present, in affectionately ironic forms.”²²

William Hellman altered the stereotypes of melodrama and forced the audience to view characters that were different from the conventional stock characters. However, if we look at the Hubbards, we see a family dominated by one characteristic—greed.

But where in the play is the battle between good and evil? There are characters with good impulses, for example, Birdie Hubbard, but they are powerless because of position, incapacitation, frailty and youth. “Hellman’s conflict is evil versus evil, and evil triumphs”²³ We find ourselves rooting for Regina as the heroine although her character encompasses primarily selfish/evil motives. “Regina has been trapped in a loveless marriage and stifled in a small town that offers her nothing. She desperately wants romance and the stimulations of a large city while she is still young enough to enjoy them.”²⁴ What audience would deny her?

The Little Foxes established a precedent in entertainment that is still prevalent today. The melodramatic form and characters driven by evil forces is the basic plot of most prime time soap operas on television. Look, for example, at some of the popular television series: (“Dallas,” “Dynasty,” “Falcon Crest,” and “Titans.”) Many focus on families driven by greed, feuds and immoral actions. Perhaps these programs are a testament to the longevity of *The Little Foxes* in the American canon. In *Pentimento* Hellman wrote, “I had meant the audience to recognize some part of themselves in the money-dominated Hubbards; I had not meant people to think of them as villains to whom they had no connection.”²⁵

**1939—
Lillian
Hellman
writes
“The Little
Foxes”**

Significant Events

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9

Political

- Roosevelt asks Congress for \$552 million for defense and demands assurances from Hitler and Mussolini that they will not attack 31 named states.
- Germany occupies Bohemia and Moravia; concludes ten-year alliance with Italy and non-aggression pact with Russia.
- Britain and France recognize Franco's government in Spain, US follows and Spanish Civil War ends.
- Women and children are first evacuated from London.
- World War II begins: Germany invades Poland; Britain and France declare war on Germany
- Roosevelt declares US neutral.

Literature

- Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is translated into English.
- Russel Crouse and Howard Lindsay write *Life with Father*.
- John Steinbeck wins Pulitzer Prize for *The Grapes of Wrath*.
- William Saroyan wins Pulitzer Prize in drama for *The Time of Your Life*.

Religion, Philosophy, Learning

- John Dewey writes *Freedom and Culture*.
- C.G. Jung writes *The Interpretation of Personality*.

Visual Arts

- Frank Lloyd Wright's design for Johnson Wax Co. becomes a reality.
- Henry Moore sculpts "Reclining Figure."
- Films: *Ninotchka*, *Gone with the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz*.

Music

- Aaron Copland writes *Billy the Kid* ballet.
- Rodgers and Hart: *The Boys from Syracuse*, musical.
- Popular songs: "God Bless America," "Three Little Fishes," "Over the Rainbow."

Science

- Igor Sikorsky constructs first helicopter.
- Nobel Prize for Physics: Ernest O. Lawrence for the cyclotron.
- Edwin H. Armstrong invents frequency modulation (FM).

Daily Life

- Radar stations used in Britain to give early warning of approaching enemy aircraft.
- Nylon stockings first appear.

NOTES

Notes:

1. Woodward, p. 113.
2. Murphy, p. 101.
3. Ayers, p. 114.
4. Ayers, p. 115.
5. Woodward, p. 224.
6. Alvarez, p. 29.
7. Alvarez, p. 54.
8. Alvarez, p. 57.
9. Alvarez, p. 58.
10. Wright, p. 276.
11. Wright, p. 276.
12. France, p. 20.
13. Wiles, p. 99.
14. Rollyson, p. 11.
15. Rollyson, p. 12.
16. Brustein, p. 262.
17. Bigsby, p. 295.
18. Bigsby, p. 296.
19. Wright, p. 135.
20. Rollyson, p. 39.
21. Rahill, p. xiv.
22. Gerould, "The Americanization of Melodrama."
23. Wright, p. 137.
24. Wright, p. 137.
25. Hellman, p. 180.

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ACTIVITIES

Students use chronology to organize historical events and people.

Colorado Model Content Standard: History #1.2

Students know how to interpret and evaluate primary and secondary sources of historical information.

Colorado Model Content Standard: History #2.2

Regina is a powerful female character in a time (1900) when women did not have a lot of power. Research the roles of women in the 1900s. Did women have the right to vote? Could they own land? Did women work outside the home and, if so, was this common? Did women hold positions of authority such as in politics, medicine, universities, science, etc.? Look at statistics of women in 1939 when the play was written. What significant events had created change in the role of women? How have things changed today? What has changed in the rights, treatment, or position of women and what has not? Create a chart comparing the rights (politically and socially) of women in 1900s, 1930s, and 2000s.

Students understand how different economic systems impact decisions about the use of resources and the production and distribution of goods and services.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Economics #2

Students understand the results of trade, exchange and interdependence among individuals, households, businesses, governments and societies.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Economics #3

The driving force behind the action of the play is the characters' desire for money. The Hubbards' primary source of income is cotton, which was a major cash crop for the American South. In small

groups, decide upon a business in which you would like to invest; it may be a cotton plantation, a cookie manufacturer, an e-commerce business. Then decide upon the following criteria you would need in order to get your business started:

- What is the best location for your business? Why?
- What materials will you need to get started such as machinery, space, supplies, shipping needs, etc.? How much will this realistically cost you in today's market?
- How will you obtain the appropriate amount of money necessary to get your business started? Will you need investors to provide money and how will you persuade them? What will your investors receive in return?
- What other costs will your business require such as advertising, labor, supplies, payroll, etc.?

Finally, using your research create a realistic budget for the first year of your business. Decide upon how much money you will need to make in order to realize a profit. Share your budget proposal with your class and vote upon the most lucrative business.

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #6

Students understand and relate the role of theatre arts to culture and history.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Theatre #4

Imagine that you have been assigned to create a pilot for a prime time soap opera based upon the Hubbard family. Modernize the characters and events in the play for your pilot keeping in mind that characters in soap operas usually have one driving motivation (greed, integrity, loyalty, selfishness, kindness, anger, infatuation,

coolness, etc.). What would need to change about the play in order to set it in modern times? What could stay the same? Create a *dramatis personae* (list and description of characters) as well as a plot outline of the first show or season.

Students understand and apply the creative process to fundamental skills of acting, playwriting and directing.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Theatre #2

An actor's job is to communicate using not only his voice, but his body. Sometimes a character's walk or posture can reveal more about that character than the lines s/he speaks. Use the following list of melodrama stock characters to explore creating a character:

- the virtuous heroine (passive, young, beautiful, innocent)
- the hero (handsome, brave, young, innocent)
- the villain (thoroughly evil, sneaky, sly, cunning, viscous)
- old father (old, grumpy, miserly)
- the lively girl (spunky, saucy, strong, outspoken, self-assured)

First, create a walk for each character – how does s/he carry him/herself, how is his/her posture, etc. Then, create a walk for each character in *The Little Foxes*. Perform your walk for the class and allow them to guess which character you are portraying.

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #2

Students understand and apply the creative process to skills of design and technical production.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Theatre #3

The battle for power is a major conflict in the play. Often a director or actor will use different devices to help the audience know who is in control. What does the set design for this production indicate about the balance of power in the Hubbard family? What specific props, blocking devices and scenic pieces allude to the struggle of power?

Select a scene from the play – you can use a copy of the script or improvise the lines based around the central conflict of the scene. Decide which character is in the position of power for the scene. How would you block this scene to communicate to the audience the roles of power? Try having one character stand while the other sits and vice versa. You may also try standing on a chair, changing the proximity (distance) between actors, incorporating other props, etc. What is the most effective way to deliver this scene? How does the director of this production use these strategies in blocking?

Students know how to formulate questions and hypotheses regarding what happened in the past and to obtain and analyze historical data to answer questions and test hypotheses.

Colorado Model Content Standard: History #2.1

Because *The Little Foxes* is set in the South, the presence of black American characters is very important. The characters of Addie and Cal are depicted as caring, strong individuals, but virtually powerless in their surroundings and their society. How do you think these characters represent the treatment of blacks in the South in the 1900s? What is their position in the Hubbard family household? What is their position in Southern society at large?

After making a hypothesis about black Americans from clues in the play, research statistics from the 1900s. What rights did blacks have? Could they vote? Could they own property? Could they have jobs? Create a chart comparing your expectations of the rights of

Blacks in the South and what you discovered. Also, remember that although they may have had legal rights in certain areas, it does not always mean that they were treated fairly. Why do you think this is so? Do you see any examples of this division in the play?

Students understand how science, technology and economic activity have developed, changed and affected societies throughout history.

Colorado Model Content Standard: History #4

Students understand how economic, political, cultural and social processes interact to shape patterns of human populations, interdependence, cooperation and conflict.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Geography #4

Create a timeline for the American South from its founding through 1900 when the play takes place. What significant events might have affected the plot of the play? Look at the division of states, the cotton industry, the slave trade, the Civil War and any other events that you think might have had a significant impact. List each event on your timeline as well as a description of how that event affected the history of the South and, specifically, the Hubbard family.

Students write and speak using conventional grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization and spelling.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #3

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #4

Look at these reviews of the play from the original production in 1939:

- *The Little Foxes* is a play to put into a small box and tuck under your pillow at night. You may have nightmares, but they will do you good.
-Robert Benchley, *New Yorker*, 1939
- [Hellman's] people are not mere outlines of types, they are three-dimensional. They have lived their pasts and are projected into a future as turbulent as their present.
-Rosamond Gilder, *Theatre Arts Monthly*, 1939
- [*The Little Foxes*] contemplates the relentless emergence of a new industrialism from the ashes of a sentimental past, the coming to power of a social order that lifted itself from the ranks of the one-time poor whites and used the emotional code of the old South only as a mask for its ascent.
-Richard Watts, *New York Herald Tribune*, 1939

After you have seen the play, can you interpret what each critic was referring to? Write your own review of this production. What do you find most important about the play? What do you think audiences, particularly audiences of your generation, learn from the play? Share your ideas with the class.

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #4

Ask the class to generate a working definition of power. Discuss and give examples of different types of power such as familial, physical strength, parental, gender, language, health, age, money, social class, popularity, job/economic status, or knowledge.

Ask the students to select a person, group of people or institution that exerts the most power over their lives (e.g. school, par-

ents, friends, etc.). Have them answer the following questions about their situation:

- How was the power obtained?
- How does it affect their lives?
- Why do they obey this authority?
- What power do you get from obeying it?
- Does this power have any negative effects on your life?
- Is the power used responsibly in your opinion?
- Is it ever abused?
- How would you wield that power differently?

Relate your discussion of power to the characters in *The Little Foxes*. Which characters have power and which do not? Why? Make a continuum of power listing the characters from most to least powerful and what endows them with or restrains them from power.

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #6

Sometimes in theatre or literature, a character is described by the props or costumes that they use. In *The Little Foxes*, for example, Horace has a safety deposit box filled with items from his past. They include: a piece of an old violin, a poem signed by his mother, two old school books, his daughter's baby shoe and a cheap old cameo on a string. What do these things reveal about his character, his values? Select five items that describe you and share these with your class.

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #6

The following are some of the actions that reveal truths about each character:

- Regina bringing her husband home
- Leo's roughness with the horses
- Zan's enthusiasm to retrieve her father
- Addie's admonishment of Regina for sending Zan to Boston alone
- Horace's decision not give his wife and her brothers the money
- Oscar striking Birdie
- Oscar hunting everyday
- Ben never marrying or having children
- Ben convincing Leo to steal the documents
- Birdie's preoccupation with music
- Oscar not being able to stand Birdie's music
- Birdie's kindness to Zan
- Birdie defying her husband to tell Zan not to marry Leo

What other actions do you remember from the play? What do these reveal about the characters who perform them?

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #4

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #6

The Little Foxes deals with many ethical and moral issues. As a class, create a definition of "ethics" and "morals." What is right and wrong and how do you identify it? Examine some of the characters' actions in the play and decide if these were ethical decisions. What would a more ethical choice have been?

Relate the topic of ethics and morals to cheating in high school. First, identify the reasons for cheating; examples may include: to get the grade, save time, collaborate with your friends, teachers make it easy to cheat, lessons don't really matter in the long run, etc. Can you think of any instances where cheating may be acceptable? Why or why not?

Next, anonymously poll the class using the following questions.

1. Have you ever cheated?
2. Would you do it again?

Display the results of the poll in a graph. Discuss the results: Do you think the results are accurate? Are you surprised by the ethics (or lack thereof) of your peers? Why or why not? What do the results signify about ethics and morals in you and your classmates?

The following are situations where a character must make a decision based upon ethics. Discuss each of the situations and then share your results with your class.

- You and your boy/girlfriend have been together for over a year. Before winter break, you have an argument regarding your relationship. Although you care for him/her very much, you want the freedom to spend time with your other friends. Over break, you meet someone who interests you very much. S/He asks you on a date. What do you do?
- You are on your way to school when you witness a car accident. Although, there are plenty of witnesses around, no one is stopping. If you stop, you will be late to your first class and you have already received demerits for tardiness. What do you do?
- A friend is catalog shopping with you and asks if you will charge an outfit for her and she will pay you later. You do. The outfit arrives and you give it to her at school. A week later she brings in the outfit and says that it does not fit and wants you to return it. As you prepare to mail it back you notice signs that it has been worn and even stained. What would you do?
- Driving home late one night you hit a parked car. The car was parked badly, more than two feet from the curb. It is not a new car and it has other scratches and dents on it. You have knocked off the side view mirror and badly dented the driver's door. Your insurance deductible is \$500 which you do not have and repairs will definitely cost more than that. What would you do?
- You have access to office supplies that the company you work for purchases. You have run out of pens and pencils at school and you are too tired to go to the drug store tonight. No one would notice if you took some pens and pencils or that they were even missing. What would you do?



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