

**The Ultimate Hybrid Character:
A Study in Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes***

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Abstract

In modern literature, the notion of hybridity becomes increasingly significant as being a vital medium that portrays the current situation of life. Everything in the world, accent, culture, identity, and life turns into hybridity. Even human beings are no longer pure human, but become hybrid figures whose entities are based on the incorporation of the elements from different worlds: human and animal.

This study has typically concentrated on the concept of hybridity in relation to the human being. The research object is the interpretation of hybrid character from different perspectives, and mainly on its dramatization by the modern American playwright Lillian Hellman (1905-1984) in his *The Little Foxes* (1939) whose ultimate hybrid character is Regina Giddens.

The aim of this study is to offer the possibility of donating the actual meaning of hybridity and the image of hybrid character in *The Little Foxes* which is situated in the South at the turn of 20th century. Hence this study exhibits how (in the post-war depression) the human moral values are defeated by bestial cunning ones and how the modern family is destructed by greed and desire.

Keywords: Hybrid, Hellman, *The Little Foxes*, Regina, woman, and character.

Introduction

In the end, a life form is always a hybrid, a being endowed with some X-power such as being able to breathe for a few seconds out of water.

That's how evolution works. Spectrally. We are all mermaids.

(Morton, 2021, p.32)

A life form itself is always a hybrid as it is indicated above by philosopher Timothy Morton whose writing radically reimagines human relationship with non-human world. Nothing left to be pure, everything becomes hybrid, and recently it becomes the secret behind the success as blending common things to introduce uncommonly and new hybrid entity.

Simply, the word "hybrid" is derived from the Latin word "hybrida" which is used to refer to "a tame sow" and "a wild boar", and did not come into the common usage in English till the beginning of nineteenth century. In its natural world, hybrid means the offspring of two entities that can be two different animals or dissimilar plants of unlike subspecies, or any divergent breeds, varieties, or species. (Boulenger, 1937, p.40) While in the human context, hybrid indicates a person whose identity and social background is sprung out of the combination of two diverse traditions and cultures. Recently and in the scientific language, hybrid is interpreted as the heterogeneous creature in origin or in composition (different complementary DNA). It is the production of the combination of two or more separate constituents that reflect a kind of heterogeneity whether in

origin or in appearance, one of the major described one is human-animal hybrid.(Vernot & Akey, 2014, p.343)

Human-animal hybrid (animal-human hybrid) refers to the creature whose entity is based on the incorporations of the elements from both the human and the animal worlds. The word hybrid is frequently used to refer to the animals and their worlds in various fictional context, as I the folk tales whose writers leave no space between the human and the animal potentiality in their story telling. To the extent, the animals are portrayed in multiple traditional domination of the ancient cultures, like the stories of interspecies friendships with animal kingdom, as that between the humans and their pets.(Vernot & Akey, 2014, p.344)

Hybrid Character and Literature

The human-animal hybrid that embroider the fictional world has heavily reflected the legendary one. One can find many examples such hybrid in Greek mythology, like the deity Pan who symbolizes the untamed wild being that is worshiped by shepherds and hunters or like Satyr, the mischievous character whose appearance is essentially human except that his hindquarters legs and horns of a goat. Actually, many examples can be enlisted here about the human-animal hybrid but to draw the attention towards the famous ones that are heavily welcomed in art, one has to mention Anubis, the Egyptian god of death, and Kitsune which is the fox-like Japanese being. (Boulenger, 1937, p.41)

The significant question is that why do the authors intend to introduce the hybrid characters in their literary worlds? Sure there is no definite answer, since the goals are different from one author to another, but it can be counted with various interpretations. First, the introducing of hybrid character can be interpreted in relation to literary escapism when the author finds no satisfaction with the surrounded world, he is looking to escape the monotonous of daily life in a unique world that is based on hybridity.

Certain authors adopt hybridity in their literary worlds under the impact of the common belief in their ages, as in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1612) which is "a drama of human action"(Iyengar,1986, p.601). This play is highly recognized by the involvement of hybrid characters who are indications of the spread of superstition in English Renaissance, "a book culture", like its primary antagonist, Caliban. (Grose & Oxley, 1969, p.14)

Caliban is the subhuman son of the malevolent witch, Sycorax, and referred to as a calvaluna or mooncalf, a freckled monster, and at the same time he is the only human inhabitant of the island that is otherwise "not honor'd with a human shape".(*The Tempest*, I.ii.L.283) He is "as semi-human or half-animal character with an unsolved identity" (Ahmed,2022, p.45) Caliban is the hybrid character who hopes that he can fill such island with a race of Calibans, "Thou didst prevent me, I had peopled else this isle

with Calibans".(*The Tempest*, I,ii,L.350) Shakespeare is the author who is heavily welcomes hybrid characters in his plays literary worlds

One of the plausible explanations for the creation of hybridity is the issue of gender, as in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* that reflects "gender reversion". Lady Macbeth sacrifices her dynamic sexual power to convert herself into a masculinized being with awful brutality.

She sucks his "unconscious manliness" of her husband and tries to escape from all weakness of femininity and motherhood and introduces the future babe as a ransom for her new hybrid being.

"Come, you spirit

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,

And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull

Of direst cruelty!" (*Macbeth*, I, v,L.38-41)

Modern world is invaded by the idea of third sex that shows the recent attempts to delete the boundaries between the two distinct genders: male and female. The authors contextualize the attempt of one gender to step into the limit area of the other, as in A. Strindberg's *The Father*(1887) where the hero, Captain appears as weak and timid husband whose manliness is transformed to his wife, Laura who represent the hybridity of third sex.(Brustein, 1965, p.326)

Laura: You have fulfilled your function as unfortunately necessary father and bread-winner. You are not needed any longer, and you must go. (*The Father*, Act.II)

The concept of hybridity can also be interpreted in relation to the notion of the identity. In post-colonial era, the author tries to introduce the hybrid character to represent the destructed entity of modern man whose being is a mixture of minor pieces of identities that have been collected by time. In other words, hybridity can be caused by the "transmission of culture". (Bhabha, 1996, p.53) The identity cannot keep its own different entity and the boundary as it is torned in / between different (or alike) cultures. The dominance of the new cultural identity on the original interior one can lead to the creation of new hybrid being which mirrored in various literary texts that illustrating or criticizing the current situations.

Through the employment of hybridity, the author can criticize the great confusions in human values in his surrounding world, particularly in the hard and gloomy stage after the aggressive years of colonization or dictatorships. The focus on the destruction of the world and the absurdities of the inhabitants is the intended active call for the recreation progression of the pure humanity and its high proper and moral values as in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and The Jewel* (1963).

Capturing the hybrid character in modern literature is a common thing due to the impact of certain scientific theories like that of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) which remarks that "man descended from lower animals

and that in the animal life there was a continuous struggle for existence which leads to the survival of the fittest by a process of natural selection". (Mohammed, 2005,p.11) Modern era witnesses a gradual decline of the traditional moral values and spiritual bases of man's life. This degradation of moral and spiritual values is combined with an increase of anxiety and uncertainty that led people to think that "modern man is caged in bonds of the new mechanized world".(Mohammed, 2005, p.37) that sets disillusionment to man's dreams of prosperity and liberty.

Here-upon, "man as an exceptional animal"(Mohammed, 2005, p.10) becomes a familiar idea that is recurrently involved in in modern literature whether in the aspect of theme or characterization as in Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*(1939). This play is regarded as a classic masterpiece of American theatre, so it is performed more than 410 times. (Bloom,1993, p.89) In this play, Hellman tries to reduce humans to the apparently more mechanistic level of animals", (Mohammed, 2005, p.37) and focuses on "the graceless behavior of a society in which the more ambitious become scoundrels and the more decent stand by".(Lederer,1979, p.40)

Hybrid Character and the Hellman's *The Little Foxes*

The title of Hellman's play "The Little Foxes" is originally derived from Song of Solomon 2:15 that documented in scripture of the King James Version and not the new International Version that mentions "catch for" instead of "take".(Falk,1978, p.51)

Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines
have tender grapes.
(Song of Solomon 2:15)

Reading the play clarifies the identity of the title characters, "the little foxes", not as actual animals , but as human beings who are characterized by hybridity, the human foxes.

Generally speaking, foxes are the animals whose cunning nature and magic power are stressed in all cultures whose folklore never eliminate the fox. In certain tales, the fox appears as minor, wise, and benevolent, but the fixed image during times with unpredictable change is the associating with cunning nature, greedy, transformation and intelligence which is quietly reflected in Hellman's play. Hellman's major characters whose foxy nature revealed through the action of the play are Benjamin, Oscar, Leo, and Regina.(Similey,1972,p.100) The latter, Regina is the ultimate hybrid character in this play.

Regina Giddens' woven tale of foxiness is the most powerful and inspiring thing in this play which situated in the south at the turn of 20th century. Hellman focuses on Southern aristocrat Regina Giddens, her two brothers, Benjamin (Ben) and Oscar Hubbard, and their families during the spring of 1900. Since only sons were considered legal heirs back then,

Benjamin and Oscar are independently wealthy while Regina must depend on her dying husband Horace.

The Little Foxes which is described as "the tragedy of all gentle people who fall prey to the predatory and of all those who merely standby"(Going,1975, p.158) displays how a modern family is torn apart by greed and desire, and how the human moral values are defeated by bestial cunning. Brothers Ben and Oscar Hubbard plot to establish a mill in their town and need \$75,000 for the project. They ask support from their sister Regina, "a handsome woman of forty"(*The Little Foxes*,p.5) who is married to the president of the local band, Horace. "[He] is a tall man of about forty-five. He has been good looking, but now his face is tired and ill". (*The Little Foxes*,p.65) He is too sick and left with a short time to live. So, he refuses to become involved in such contract. Oscar's son Leo, working at the bank, steals bonds to help his father. The theft is discovered by Horace, but he decides not to put the brothers on trial. So, he makes a new will in which Regina will receive only the precise amount of the theft. Horace dies and the leading position is now occupied by Regina who blackmails her brothers into assigning her a 75 percent interest in the mill. (Jing,2010, p.60)

REGINA: I'm smiling, Ben because you are quite safe while Horace lives. But I don't think Horace will live. And if he doesn't live I shall want seventy-five percent in exchange for the bonds. You want so much of everything.

REGINA: Yes. And if I don't get what I am going to put all three of you in jail.

Ben: (Steps back, whistles, laughs) Greedy! What a greedy girl you are! (*The Little Foxes*,p.140)

"What a greedy girl you are!" The same exclamation raised by Regina's daughter, Alexandra who has also discovered her mother deceitfulness, treachery, and greed. So she leaves her home for ever.

In *The Little Foxes*, Hellman shows how post war depression affects the family relations and makes them follow the capitalistic principles. People miss their human moral values and converted into a vehicle of making money. This clarifies Regina's sacrificing her motherhood and losing her solo daughter Alexandra.

To understand the hybridity of this play, and to judge each character in relation to his/ her own moral normal, the audience has to keep in their minds the general circumstantial situation of American society during the play's writing period.

The turning of the 20th century witnessed the United States' shift from a rural to an urban society. The forces of modernization had a strong impact on people's ideas and way of life, and the impact was extremely fierce on the south. During this period, American were experiencing a bewildering kaleidoscope of events and pathology of uncontrolled expansion; the rise of the New South; secularized religion; an

increasingly mechanized and compartmentalized daily life; and the advent of the 'New Woman'. (Frick, 1990,p.165)

New woman is the term that appears after 1890 to represent the new generation of women who try to destroy all limitations of gender norms and the restriction of Victorian Ideals. This new generation of women steps into public life in all its fields: acting, labor, education and politics. In brief, new woman is the woman who tries to find herself a new identity that grants her with great freedom and independence, and draw herself the new image that is opposite to the Victorian image of true woman that is associated with passivity and home life. (Walter,1966, p.154)

The end of nineteenth to the first decade of 20th century, is the period of the unsettling change in region, class, race, politics, historical conditions, technology and culture. So, woman tries to prove her active presence in the public sphere by adopting new traits and behaviors that were considered by their contemporaries as "semi-fallen and semi-odd" women who call for a new phenomenon of moral decadence.(Auerback,1978,p.145) So, the New Woman is not a representation of a single image of hybrid character, but a spectrum of hybrid features and behaviors that formulate the contemporary understanding of modern femininity. (Patterson,2008,p. 2)

The best example of New Woman is Ibsen's Heroine Nora Helmer in his *A Doll's House* (1879). Nora reflects the image of new woman who tries to liberate herself from the dilapidated conventions of the male-dominated society and proves her own rational, self-governing and independent being in action and performance. (Williams,1964,p.76)

Nora: That is just it; you never understood me.

I have been greatly wronged, Torvald-

first by papa and then by you.(*A Doll's House*, III,p.46)

Nora tries to step into man's world as she thinks that the identity and the authority that she searches for exist in the masculine world merely. She tries to remove the forbidden territory that exists between man and woman. She wants to establish new image of woman who is almost like a man in everything.(Far fan, 1988, p.65) Ibsen's Nora is the new hybrid woman who creates new self-definition for the human being that occupies the position of wife and a mother.

Nora: I don't believe that any longer. I believe that

I am first and foremost a human being, like you..

Or anyway, that I must try to become one.

(*A Doll's house*, p.61)

Nora is identified by Torvald as "squander bird", "little bird", or "an angle", and her feminine helplessness adds more to her attractive nature. He addresses her: "You are safe here; I shall watch over you like a hunted dove which I have snatch unharmed from the claws of the falcon."(*A Doll's House*, p.52) But as soon as Nora decides to leave him and violates all the moral, social and legal standards of his patriarchal society, Torvald

describes her as a monster, "What kind of madness is this?... and but this is monstrous!" (*A Doll's House*, p.66)

The quick transition of Nora from the angel-woman into the monster-woman attracts the attention towards Hellman's Regina Giddens whose beauty and false angelic incarnation is demolished in her personal desire of ranging her role from a mother into a business woman.

Hellman's new woman, the commanding and self-governing Regina Giddens reflects the understandable human qualities of a woman as being attractive, good-looking, courteous, seeking grace, honorable hostess, social position, and public respect, and at the same time that of cunning and greedy nature of a little fox. She is the only daughter of the Hubbards, but born into a southern aristocrat family means going to get nothing from the family's wealth, unlike her brothers, Ben and Oscar who inherit the entire fortune as it is set by their father. So, Regina must trade her marriage to Horace Giddens in return for the financial holdings he will bring to her. (Wright, 1988, p.79) So, it is a marriage that is based on benefit and material aspects and not on love or spiritual bases, as she admits to her husband saying, "I hope you die! I hope you die soon! I'll be waiting for you to die!" (*The Little Foxes*, p.71)

Regina uses all the inaccessibility of her husband as a stratification of her deception with pretending that Horace is holding off investing as he wants a larger share of the income, to convince her brothers to increase her share. As a truth, she has heard nothing from her husband, but she is too cunning lady. Having the same foxy nature, no one can feel sorry for the way that she treats them (her brothers). Having the ultimate skill and the intelligence of the fox enables Regina to turn the tables and correct her father's sexist decision of leaving his money just to his sons. She is too hard woman that cannot surrender easily and she is ready to reveal anything publically even the pitfalls of her family as she says that there are not enough people in the state who have not been cheated by her brothers to make up a jury that searches for the nature of their business practices. (Abbotson, 2003, p.49-50)

Struggling for liberty and prosperity within the limitations of American social conventions of the early twentieth century, Regina sacrifices her family's love and bond for the sake of control and ambition. From her maidenhood, she does her best to flee from the disgusting family and the dreary and boring life in the South. So, she fights against the patriarchal restrictions of her father and brothers, and pursue her individual and financial independence. Regina tries to find a new identity for her spirit that combines the image of charming woman with that of cunning and foxy creature. She is the embodiment of a new hybrid woman who tries to get rid of the first two letters (wo) in order to free herself from the weakness of passion and femininity.

Regina probably wins the money and achieves victory over her brothers, but she loses her daughter, Alexandra whom she has dictated all her years. Throughout the play, Hellman utilizes the development of the character of Alexandra to be a foil character for her mother Regina. Through the method of characterization, Hellman creates a parallel for the invasion of evil and greed within the family during the twentieth century.

ALEXANDRA: You couldn't, Mama, because I want to leave here. As I've never wanted anything in my life before. Because now I understand what Papa was trying to tell me. (pause) All in one day: Addie said there were people who ate the earth and other people who stood around and watched them do it. (*The Little Foxes*, p.151)

The innocent member in Hubbard's family, Alexandra has highly affected after realizing her mother's true motivation and nature. So, she determines to leave the house with a young man named David Hewitt, who provides her with what she needs like love and moral support.

Alexandra shows a sign of powerful revolt in her final words: "Are you afraid, Mama?". (*The Little Foxes*, p.153) This quote foreshadows Alexandra's breaking away from the family structure and seeking another happy life that ruled by high moral human values. She assumes her mother loneliness despite her financial victory. She predicts the loss in her win like the prediction of the second witch to Macbeth.

When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.
(*Macbeth*:I,i,L.3-4)

Financial victory does not save Regina from the cruelty of emotional alienation. As she wins the bigger share from the inheritance of her father, she also loses the bigger share of her human feelings and turned to be egotistical, covetous and eventually aggressive. She is a quite hybrid character whose ambiguous being reflects the twisted nature of the modern man between the triumph in technological world but the defeat in the spiritual one. Moreover, the hybridity of Regina enables Hellman to put no definite end for his play and to escape from the convincing plot which is the major characteristic of the traditional melodramatic frame.

In brief, *The Little Foxes* which "becomes a scornful and heartfelt parable of the rise of the industrial South in all its ruthlessness", (Nagamani, 2001, p.88) Hellman develops a set of hybrid characters, a set of little foxes who try to obtain the ultimate power within their own lives. In this play, Hellman tries to criticize and denounce the evil power of Capitalism (Bloom, 1993, p.112) and show the greedy nature of man that lead to the collapse of not only the family structure, but of all human values within its members who end so close to the animal kingdom more than to the human one.

Conclusion

The basic subject of Hellman's *The Little Foxes* is the self-realization of the true image of human being which is situated at the top of the creation hierarchy. The selected drama shows how the true humanity is endowed with the new measures of false (material) reality.

Hellman points out how the greed and ambition create a new hybrid character whose bestiality overcomes his/ her humanness as in the character of Regina Giddens who represents the new foxy woman.

Hellman potentially redefines his human characters: Regina Giddens, her two brothers, Benjamin (Ben) and Oscar Hubbard as he afford them an added dimension of reality to their being through their embodiment of bestiality that allows theatre take part in the effective understanding of the surrounding hybrid world.

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الشخصية الهجينة المطلقة
دراسة في مسرحية "الثعالب الصغار" للكاتبة ليليان هيلمان
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خلاصة

في الأدب الحديث ، أصبح مفهوم التهجين ذا أهمية متزايدة باعتباره وسيطاً حيويًا يصور الوضع الحالي للحياة. كل شيء في العالم ، اللهجة ، والثقافة ، والهوية ، والحياة يتحول إلى هجين. حتى البشر لم يعودوا بشرًا نقيًا ، بل أصبحوا شخصيات هجينة تقوم كياناتها على دمج عناصر من عوالم مختلفة: الإنسان والحيوان.

ركزت هذه الدراسة بشكل نموذجي على مفهوم التهجين فيما يتعلق بالإنسان. و ان هدف البحث هو تفسير الشخصية الهجينة من وجهات نظر مختلفة ، وبشكل أساسي في التمثيل الدرامي للكاتب المسرحي الأمريكي المعاصر ليليان هيلمان (1905-1984) في مسرحيته "الثعالب الصغار" (1939) حيث تؤدي ريجينا جيدينز الشخصية الهجينة المطلقة.

الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تقديم إمكانية توضيح المعنى الحقيقي للتهجين وصورة الشخصية الهجينة في مسرحية "الثعالب الصغار" التي تصور الجنوب في مطلع القرن العشرين. ومن هنا تُظهر هذه الدراسة كيف (في فترة الكساد ما بعد الحرب) تم هزيمة القيم الأخلاقية الإنسانية من قبل الماكرة الوحوش وكيف يتم تدمير الأسرة الحديثة بسبب الجشع والرغبة. الكلمات المفتاحية: هجين, هيلمان , الثعالب الصغار, ريجينا , المرأة و الشخصية.