

Intrigue and Chicanery in Lillian

Hellman *The Little Foxes*:

A Thematic Re-consideration.

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الملخص

ليليان هيلمان كاتب مسرحي أمريكي أصبح اسمه مرادفًا للمعايير الأخلاقية في أوائل القرن العشرين. تميزت مسرحياتها بمواضيعها الأخلاقية عن الشر. كما لوحظ أنهم يصورون شخصيات لا تزال على قيد الحياة في الدراما الأمريكية بسبب شخصياتهم الملونة وأدوارهم الممتازة وتصويرهم الواقعي .

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فحص "الثعالب الصغيرة" ليليان هيلمان كنقد للثقافة الأمريكية في أوائل القرن العشرين. على الرغم من حقيقة أن أمريكا تأسست على آمال ومثل الحرية والسعادة، لم تكن حياة الكثير من الناس مليئة بالسعادة خلال فترة الكساد الكبير. فاقم انتشار الأيديولوجيات السياسية البديلة وانهلال الحب والأخلاق من تحديات الحياة واعتُبر عاملاً محفزاً. لقد تحولت أمريكا، موطن الفرص، إلى عالم أجوف يتمحور حول المال والثروة المادية، مما يحرم مواطنيها من الحب والقيم الإنسانية. يُلام الثعلب الصغير، كما يرمز إليه العالم السياسي والمادي في مسرحية هيلمان، على ظهور أنواع جديدة من البشر، الثعالب الصغيرة، فضلاً عن تدهور القيم الإنسانية.

Abstract

Lillian Hellman was an American dramatist whose name became synonymous with early twentieth-century moral standards. Her plays were notable for their moral themes of evil. They were renowned for their vibrant personalities, standout performances, and realistic portrayals, and they were also famous for playing characters who are still alive in American drama.

This investigation tries to analyze The Little Foxes by Lillian Hellman as a critique of early twentieth-century United States civilization. Despite the fact that America was founded on the hopes and ideals of freedom and happiness, many people's lives were not filled with happiness during the Great Depression. The prevalence of alternative political ideologies, as well as the decay of love and morals, exacerbated life's challenges and was regarded as a motivating factor. America, the home of opportunity, was

devolved into a hollow world centered on money and material wealth, depriving its citizens of love and human values. The little fox, as symbolized by the political and material world in Hellman's play, is blamed for the rise of new types of humans, the small foxes, as well as the deterioration of the human values.

Introduction

The Little Foxes, Hellman's second hit play from 1939, is one of her best. It lasted over two years and was broadcast 410 times across the nation. The most often revived of Hellman's plays, the play is still a gripping and timeless masterpiece of American theater, due to its exceptional features (Bloom, 89). (Dorothy Parker provided the title, which is based on the Bible ""Take us the foxes, the small foxes, that damage the vineyards, for our vines have sensitive grapes," Solomon says in Song of Solomon 2:15. (Falk, p.51). The title foxes refers to the Hubbards for " [i]n truth, there is no single protagonist in any Hellman play; thus, the titles are treated either symbolically or thematically as allusions to a certain group of people. " Lederer, p.41).

The dramatic canon was controlled by men. Her plays were hugely popular both commercially and critically, particularly *The Children's Hour* (1934), *The Little Foxes* (1939), a Pulitzer Prize finalist that year, *Watch on the Rhine* (1941), and *Toys in the Attic* (1960), which both received the New York Drama Critics Circle Awards. Hellman, on the other hand, struggled to attain the same acclaim as her male contemporaries. Many of them, particularly Tennessee Williams, have cast a shadow over her. Feminist historians wanted to honor her role that they argued about whether she was a feminist writer or not (Barlow, p. 67). According to the

New York Times, she was "the first American dramatist to make effective use of the changing South's mores in the theater." (Goodman, p.138).

Around the dawn of the 20th century, when American society was experiencing a quick engaging in materialistic and capitalistic standards, the drama is set in a small town in the South. The Hubbard family, comprising Regina Hubbard Giddens and her two brothers Ben and Oscar Hubbard, typifies a new generation of Americans who take advantage of others—including one another—for selfish gain. They intend to work with William Marshall, a wealthy Chicago businessman, to construct a cotton mill where the underpaid and exploited workers will work long hours. They need Horace Giddens, Regina's heartbroken husband, to contribute financially so they can make Regina a partner in the company. Horace is unable to collaborate with the Hubbards because of his understanding of their harshness and dishonesty in business.

At curtain rise, Cal, the black porter, brings out a bottle of the best port while Addie, the black maid, is organizing. Birdie Hubbard, a well-bred but faded woman, emerges from offstage, obviously tipsy, from the dinner party. Oscar, her husband, walks up behind her, scolding her for boring their special visitor. After finalizing, his sister Regina Giddens and brother Ben show up with Mr. William Marshall of Chicago, enjoying light-hearted banter, and they strike a deal to build a new cotton mill that will make them all wealthy. Marshall is ecstatic with the result. to prevent labor disputes Only Horace Giddens, a banker and Regina's husband, stands to gain financially from the transaction. He is receiving treatment for a heart condition in Baltimore. Leo, Oscar's spoiled son, has been managing his bank. Regina and Mr. Marshall are seen openly flirting, and Regina promises to see him in Chicago. It looks that her brothers support this potential connection because it will improve the business ties.

After Mr. Marshall leaves, the Hubbards' relatives argue over how to handle the millions they have earned. Regina's ambitious aim is to relocate to Chicago and join the elite. Ben interrupts the desire-making to suggest that they spend \$225,000 to acquire a 51 percent controlling stake in the business. Ben and Oscar put pressure on Regina to ask Horace for her share of the investment money because he hasn't responded to her letters. Regina deftly plays on their skepticism by fabricating the idea that Horace is refusing to accept a smaller piece. The brothers grant their sister this benefit in order to preserve the transaction within the family. Oscar's share will make up the difference. Alexandra (Zan), the daughter of Regina, is the woman Oscar wants to marry in return. Regina says she'll simply give it some thought. Birdie gives Alexandra a promise that she won't let her family force her to marry Leo. She conceals from Zan her husband's slap on the cheek. Alexandra is informed by Regina that she will be departing early the next morning to bring her father home. Alexandra is shown when the curtain closes, looking bewildered and afraid.

The family is anxiously awaiting Horace's arrival after one week. Cal makes a casual joke about the steak Oscar is wasting and Oscar cuts him off with an unpleasant alert. In order to give themselves two-thirds of the investment and turn the tables on Ben, Leo and Oscar plan to "borrow" \$88,000 in Union Pacific bonds from Horace's safe. Before Horace noticed that the ties were missing, they would replace them. Ben shows up off-stage, and the siblings complain about Horace's tardiness over breakfast. Addie rushes to the door when she hears voices in the hopes of seeing Horace, who appears to be completely exhausted, and Alexandra, who is covered in soot from the trek.

Alexandra requests Aunt Birdie rather than her mother. For a few period, Addie and Horace pleasantly recall, and then Horace inquires as to why he was called home. Horace disapproves of the entire plan when she tells him about the scheme to marry Zan to Leo. But it doesn't take long for Horace and Regina's issues to reappear. She encourages a talk about the investment despite his obvious tiredness. When Horace finds out that the Hubbards promised Marshall low wages and no strikes, he anticipates that Ben will carry this out by inciting conflict among the employees. Horace intends to obstruct the Hubbards by forbidding Leo and Zan to wed and by withholding money from Regina. Ben advises him to wait, but Regina follows him up the stairs. Oscar lays forth his strategy to get around Horace and Regina by "borrowing" \$88,000 from a friend of Leo's, with their enraged voices audible. Ben inspires them to continue but disagrees to shake hands with Leo, assuming the friend's identity. Regina returns unsuccessfully downstairs, hardly acknowledging Alexandra's request to quit causing her father worry. Instead, Regina turns to Ben, who surprises her. as soon as it was revealed that everything had been fixed and Oscar would be going to Chicago. When Horace comes downstairs to take pleasure in the Hubbards' argument, Regina claims that he is doing so because he is dying and wants to harm her. In response, Horace says he won't help the Hubbards.

Two weeks later, on a wet afternoon, Both Birdie and Alexandra happily play a piano duet while Horace stands next to them. Horace immediately orders Cal to head to the bank with the confusing instruction that he has obtained the safe deposit box and now demands that the management have an attorney come over that evening. He is addressing Leo. With the help of Birdie's elderberry wine, she is transported back in time to when Horace used to play the fiddle. According to Birdie, her

mother would never socialize with the Hubbards if she was intoxicated. She admits that in order to obtain the Lionnet cotton that Ben desired, she married Oscar. Birdie hopes Zan won't become like her, who is constantly falling behind the influential people.

Horace tells Regina that they have actually been working in the cotton industry when she comes in. She initially feels triumphant because she thinks Horace has consented to join her, but she has erred. Horace will allow the brother to keep the illicit cash, which is her only bequest, in the new will he is prepared to write. She replies that she has never loved him and that the thought of his impending demise makes her joyful. Horace is sufficiently surprised to reach for his heart medication, but he trips over it, breaking the bottle. For the following bottle, he is unable to reach Addie, and Regina shows no sign of trying to help. He stumbles and has to be helped upstairs. Ben and Oscar exonerate Leo of any culpability when the brothers and Leo show up. Regina then admits that she is aware of their misconduct. She and Ben now seem to love sparring to gain the upper hand.

If Horace lives, Ben and Oscar will triumph, but if he dies, Regina will triumph and put her brothers in jail. Regina made a bet that Horace would pass away in an attempt to blackmail them for a 75% share. Ben and Oscar are prepared to give it to Zan when she arrives downstairs in order to save themselves. Due to Regina's stance, which implies that Horace is deceased, she has prevailed. They can't help but think about Regina. Regina cautions the brothers about Regina's influence over Mr. Marshall, saying that he will cancel the purchase rather than face a scandal. Since they are both made of the same material, Ben and Regina make amends. Immediately after Oscar has left, Ben strikes his final blow: he shares Zan's thoughts about Horace's death. Regina will suffer another setback before the play's conclusion when Alexandra declines to join her to Chicago because she wants to stop the

world from being consumed by evil people like her mother and uncles. She understands the dangers posed by those who are prepared to endanger their own families in order to amass wealth and power.

The Hubbards reflect the brutality that characterizes the new century, as well as "the inhumanity and vices of capitalism," and "it would be impossible to find a more venomous band of petty robber barons than Miss Hellman's primary characters" for these and other reasons (Nagamani, p.47). During the Civil War and after the South's defeat, the Hubbards represent white southerners who put their region's loyalties aside and allied with northern speculators for their own financial benefit (Wakefield, p. 57. One reviewer who identified the Hubbards right away explained:

The greedy, corrupt, petty, grasping remnants of the South after the Civil War [...] who abused the land below the Mason- Dixon line for all the good, hard cash it was worth, replacing black slavery with economic enslavement for black and white, defacing their countrysides with grim soot from mills that were rapidly erected with the moneybags from the North, blind to all the codes of human decency. (Ross, p.491)

Regina is the play's main antagonist as well as a character. She is a stunning forty-year-old woman. Her beauty isn't her only asset; over the events, she reveals herself to be a cunning manipulative lady, ambitious and eager to wield power over the course of the actions, she reveals herself as a cunning, manipulative woman who is ambitious and eager to use money and power to rule over her brothers and the people around her: Tens of millions will attend, Birdie. What do I always say when people tell me we are wealthy, do you know? I suggested that you should either be a millionaire or a nigger. . What is the point of being in the middle, like us

what for?" (The Little Foxes,21). (Regina will never accept a share that is less than or equal to that of others; she always wants the larger share; she does not want to be in the middle. Her ambitions are what drives her. That is why she intends to go for Chicago as soon as the cotton mills provide them with a large sum of money, because Chicago represents the huge world to which she aspires. Regina is transformed by Hellman into a quick-witted woman capable of defeating her cruel brothers (Wright, 79). When the brothers grow tired of Horace's silence, she uses his lack of response as a deception tactic, demanding a large percentage and implying that she is the cause of Horace's silence. She wears a variety of masks to play her part, which is that of a naive woman who has no business experience. (Smiley, p.112) and is only concerned with her husband's interests:

Well, I don't know. I don't know about these things. It would seem that if you put up a third you should only get a third. But then again, there's no law about it, is there? I should think that if you knew your money was very badly needed, well, you just might say, I want more, I want a bigger share. You boys have done that. I've heard you say so. (The Little Foxes,p.33) .

Regina repeats the cycle of greed in her plans for her daughter's arranged marriage to her brother's son; Regina was forced to marry Horace Giddens by her father and brothers, Regina must be referring to this agreement when she informs her daughter Alexandra : "Too many people used to make me do too many things" (The Little Foxes, p.78). Regina does not seem to be conscious of her own status as a victim of male trade. In this play, there is something quite startling. As part of their agreement in these deals, she integrates herself into her male relatives' contact network, engaging in business with them as well as proposing the marriage of her own daughter to her brother's son, Alexandra's nephew Leo. Regina comes up with a plan to bring Horace home from his five-month hospital stay since she needs his

share of the money in order to participate in her brothers' arrangement (Moody, p. 97). Even their African American maid Addie finds Alexandra's assignment to fetch her father alone offensive: "Going alone? Is she traveling alone? "A youngster that age!" 71) (Little Foxes).

As a financial transaction involving men progresses to a potential swap involving a woman—her own daughter—Regina continues to deal. With her brothers, Regina raises the stakes by requesting double the compensation they had previously agreed upon and revealing that she would think about giving Leo Alexandra in marriage as part of the scheme. After failing to convince Horace to make a financial commitment in time for the sale to close, Regina's brothers and nephew come up with a new plan of action. The bonds they need for their investment are in Leo's uncle's safe deposit box, which he has access to as a bank employee. (Barlow, 84). Unbeknownst to Regina, Leo "borrows" Horace's bonds to deliver to Marshall, with the men intending to repay them in five months when Horace checks the box again. Horace, on the other hand, hears of the heist and travels to Regina. When he passes away, he plans to leave Regina the \$88,000 in bonds and Alexandra the remaining funds, while promising to keep quiet about the theft up until then. Regina was practically left penniless after her husband's inheritance was stolen by Regina's brothers. Horace had a heart attack while they are talking, and Regina just stands by and observes as he frantically reaches for his medication, refusing to help him as he collapses to his death down the landing. Regina blackmails her brothers for 75% of the profits in order to reclaim power, claiming to go to the authorities and declare the bonds stolen if they do not comply with her demands. Regina disguises herself as a fox and joins the Hubbard men, defeating them at their own game (Nagamani, pp. 63-4).

Hellman does not execute her adversaries or subjugate them as a form of retribution. Regina will be left alone as her punishment. Regina is no longer a wife and mother, but she will most likely land the part she wants. Despite being the biological mother, Wakefield writes that she "does not carry out the generally defined maternal / feminine duty of consoling her children." Because she loses her daughter's respect and admiration by doing this.. Alexandra decides to leave her since a person with such a nefarious mentality is unfit to be her mother. She's also because "has no maternal instincts, only the desire to outdo her brothers in their 'race' to become wealthy. "They are commodities or things...to be used to obtain cash," Regina says of her husband and daughter" (Ibid). Thus, Regina clearly equates love with matter or 'things,' and this materialistic perspective on life is a component of and "a result of the worth method promoted by a capitalistic American society" (Ibid., p. 52), in which everything in life is reconsidered in light of its materialistic importance. (Ibid,p. 54).

The bachelor brother, Benjamin or Ben Hubbard, is just as ruthless as Regina. He's "fifty-five years old, with a huge jolly face and the light graceful motions that large men are known for" (The Little Foxes,p.6). Ben has no desire or interest in the spiritual aspect of life, nor in love, emotion, or other human relationships. What captures his eye is everything that can be utilized to make money. He has exploited and defrauded the workers in his small southern town. Additionally, he promises Mr. Marshall that his new company will be profitable and that there won't be any strikes because he (the predatory businessman) understands how to turn people against one other (Galens, p. 164).

As Hellman notes in her journal, Ben is "quite merry and far less solemn than the others and far more dangerous" than his siblings, which makes him different from them in terms of personality (Lederer, p. 4) .

His ability to observe people and plot against them without disclosing his genuine thoughts, or, in other words, his capability to deceive others, makes him dangerous (Wright, p. 57). Ben has the capacity to convince everyone, even Oscar, who is furious about Regina getting his slice of the pie instead of him.

My, my, I feel like I'm under attack right now. My brother came next, then my sister. And I'm not the kind of man who likes to get hit. I think it's God's will for the strong to display their might, so I don't mind if it has to be done. Oscar, you really need to take this seriously. I've already earned money for you. I will now increase your financial gain. You'll be very prosperous. What does it matter if a bit more goes here and something less goes there? It's all in the family, right? And it will be transmitted from generation to generation. I'll never get married. (p.37 in The Little Foxes).

Ben plans the robbery with Oscar and Leo while keeping Regina in the dark. But when Regina outsmarts them by informing them of their theft and attempting to intimidate them with jail time or a larger share of the earnings, Ben responds in a more nasty, albeit fairly typical Hubbard fashion. He hears Zan questioning or inadvertently accusing her mother of killing her father, so he threatens to accuse his sister of killing her husband. He takes use of this speech to defend himself from Regina's criticisms. Ben and Regina are foxes who are always competing for the best; each is as risky as the other. Their poisoned thinking and deceitful techniques of acquiring what they desire are similar. In order to get the enormous reward,

they are willing to destroy one another. Ben is bad, and his evil manifests itself in various demonic forms, one of which is hypocrisy (Bloom, pp. 76–77). He is a hypocrite, and "a part of the hypocrisy is so practical and commonplace that he no longer notices it" (Adler, p. 21). Because of this, Hellman leaves open the question of whether to heal Ben or save him from his evil nature.

Oscar might be a tad weaker than Regina and Ben. However, he, too, is a fox. Like Regina, he married Birdie solely for financial gain. He is a recluse who told his son that "it is every man's job to think of himself" (*The Little Foxes*, p.158). He stole Horace's bonds with the help of his son and pretended he didn't know anything about it. Oscar is a multifaceted character whose main characteristic is sadism. He causes anguish to others, particularly Birdie. His sadism finds an expression in hunting. In eight years, Even though, he has only missed one day of hunting, he refuses to let the famished Negroes shoot the animals. (Alder, p. 61.) Both are used to advantage by the Hubbards. the wealthy and poor African Americans The maid, Addie, is a helpless observer of their decline. The educated aristocrats are also victims of the Hubbards. (Ibid, p.62).

"A dishonest toady with all of his father's greed and deception and none of his mother's cultural sophistication," says Leo, the small fox (Galens, p. 164) . He is also a villain with a wicked personality, but he is unable to outsmart his father and uncle when the robbery is uncovered and they accuse him. Hellman's portrayal of the Hubbard family thus demonstrates the depth of their vice. Her "focus is on the characters who make their living in a material sense but are as devoid of social, moral, or spiritual values as a nest of vipers" (Dusenbury, p. 143).The Hubbards were created from Hellman's imagination and memories of her relatives. She resembles

her mother in appearance. She recalls family get-togethers when writing about Regina and her brothers (Going, p. 112).

In a broad sense, the drama solely features characters who have won and lost; there are no heroes or heroines. Birdie is the only aristocrat in the family. Her family regularly makes fun of her. She is helpless, pathetic, and completely dependent on the Hubbards. She drinks by herself to numb her memories of a contented life at the Old Plantation. She is the one who informs Alexandra of the Hubbards' evil intentions and depraved practices. She tells Alexandra not to rely on her family and that she hates her own son. After twenty years, she anticipates still receiving the same treatment. She reveals the Hubbards' true nature, explaining that they made their money by swindling unsophisticated niggers by charging them high interest on their purchases. Horace, a gentle and ill man, is also a victim, dying at Regina's hands (Lewis, p.86).

The play's setting in 1939, in the aftermath of the Great Depression, is significant since the world's economy was in freefall. As a result, the subject of money and its potentially hazardous influences piqued Hellman's curiosity. In the play, Hellman selects the Hubbards to demonstrate how avarice and the pursuit of one's own money may affect avaricious people and their surroundings. (Smiley, p.104). "An passionate indictment of money, the cruelty it inspires, and the damage it spreads," Wright said of *The Little Foxes* (p.44). The audience and readers become aware while seeing or reading the play that the excessive need for more and more money is a disastrous goal since it deteriorates the humanistic aspect of the characters' psychological aspects.

Hellman sets her drama in the South around the turn of the century since she is familiar with the region and its inhabitants thanks to her mother's ancestors. Various tools were used to ruthlessly amass wealth and exploit workers at the start of the twentieth century, in 1901. Hellman uses the Hubbard family to shed light on important subjects. These include the fallout and effects of capitalism, industrialization, and the American Civil War (Wakefield, p. 58). In a time of rapid change in many facets of life, she serves as an example of what money can do to a person's mentality. "Unscrupulous businessmen who penetrated the New South and nourished a sort of predatory capitalism that [she] calls predatory capitalism," she writes a danger to the American way of life" (Galens, p.164). In his account of the Hubbards' exploitation of low-wage workers, Hellman shows how they harass individuals who are in need of assistance. The Hubbards are therefore capitalists who subvert the lower classes to encourage oppression and persecution (Lederer, p. 46). According to Sam Smiley, they use the influence of money to control their surroundings:

Regina, Ben, Oscar, and Leo are examples of the burgeoning industrial capitalists in the South in the year 1900. They expose the brutal character of people who brought about modern capitalism. Hellman wanted to make the audience aware of the significance of ambition and greed in the capitalist system and get them to think about what could be done to control these vices through this play. (Smiley, p.100).

The author plainly intends the Hubbards case to be universal. "I had expected the audience to recognize some part of themselves in the money-dominated Hubbards," Hellman writes in *Pentimento* (p.180).

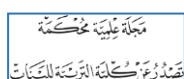
"I simply happened to write about the south because I knew the people and understood the place....but I didn't mean it to be just for the south," she says

(Wakefield, p.59). "[i]n the world of business without ethics, these imaginary turn-of-the-century robber barons show an all too similar resemblance" to selfish "nice gentleman" of any time and place, she wishes to emphasize (Ibid). People must stop the Hubbards of the world because preventing the small foxes from "going free...is all humanity's obligation, and the misery of Zan...is the tragedy of all mild people that fall prey to the predatory and of all those who passively stand by" (Going, p.158). To combat the growth of evil, Hellman urges individuals to take action, not to sit by and do nothing. "Sometimes I think it ain't proper to stand and watch them do it," she says via Addie's words (The Little Foxes,p.110). "It emphasizes on showing us the graceless behavior of a society in which the more ambitious become scoundrels while the more decent stand by and allow them get away with exploiting the poor," Henry Hewes said of the play (Lederer, p.40). Fighting the despoilers is the responsibility of the entire civilization. Passivity is used and condemned by Hellman "in its many manifestations as a catalyst for truth-telling, deceit, and, most significantly, self-deception: all recurring themes in her plays" (Alder, p.19). She urges people to act, just as she does in her own life; to stand up to the evildoers, whose numbers are growing by the day (Ibid).

Conclusion

The Little Foxes is a demonstration against American corruption in the early 20th century. As a social playwright, Hellman highlights the individual wrongs that spread their poison across society and implores onlookers to take action. Hellman succeeds in exposing the main flaws of her society and time as a social dramatist. Hellman emphasizes the big fox that gives birth to many little foxes through his portrayal of the Hubbard family. This big fox symbolizes the materialistic world and the capitalist system. According to the author, letting the foxes, of which the Hubbards are one, go wild could lead to chaos. The relationship between the model and copy is even more difficult when the copy—the play—offers us a shattered mirror-world defined by duplicity and deception. The most crucial thing to remember in the the Little Foxes is the truth. it is the domain of the best liar, and every character, from the most pitiful to the most heinous, is a master storyteller. Furthermore, in *The Little Foxes*, chicanery is explicitly positioned in a theatrical context: the medium is the subject.

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