

the little foxes

The Little Foxes is a classic American play written by Lillian Hellman in 1939. The narrative delves into themes of greed, betrayal, and moral decay, as it portrays a family's ruthless pursuit of wealth in the American South during the early 20th century. This article aims to explore the play's characters, themes, historical context, and its impact on American theater.

Overview of the Play

Set in Alabama in 1900, *The Little Foxes* centers around the Hubbard family, who are driven by ambition and a lust for wealth. The title refers to a biblical phrase from the Book of Song of Solomon, which symbolizes the destructive nature of small, seemingly insignificant acts that can lead to larger consequences.

The play unfolds over a single day and is filled with tension as the characters navigate their personal ambitions and family loyalties. The plot thickens as Regina Giddens, the cunning and strong-willed matriarch, seeks to secure a lucrative business deal that could elevate her family's status. However, her schemes come at the expense of her own family members, revealing the lengths to which she will go for financial gain.

Key Characters

The characters in *The Little Foxes* are richly drawn and contribute significantly to the play's exploration of themes such as greed and betrayal. Here are the main characters:

- **Regina Giddens:** The ambitious and manipulative matriarch who is determined to secure her family's fortune.
- **Ben Hubbard:** Regina's brother, who is equally greedy and scheming. He partners with Regina in their business ventures.
- **Oscar Hubbard:** Regina's other brother, who is less intelligent than Ben but still partakes in the family's corrupt dealings.
- **Birdie Hubbard:** Oscar's wife, who feels trapped in her marriage and is often the victim of the family's ambition.
- **Leo Hubbard:** Regina's son, who is caught between his mother's ambitions and his own moral compass.

- **Horace Giddens:** Regina's sickly husband, whose wealth is the target of Regina and her brothers' schemes.

Themes

The Little Foxes encompasses several themes that resonate with audiences even today. Some of the most prominent themes include:

Greed and Ambition

At the heart of the play is a powerful critique of greed and ambition. The characters are willing to betray their family for financial gain, illustrating how the desire for wealth can lead to moral corruption. Regina's relentless pursuit of success highlights the destructive nature of ambition when it crosses ethical boundaries.

Gender Roles

Regina stands out as a complex female character in a patriarchal society. She is strong, intelligent, and fiercely independent, but she is also constrained by societal expectations of women during her time. Her struggle for power and autonomy reflects the broader challenges women faced in the early 20th century.

Family and Betrayal

The play portrays a fractured family where loyalty is often overshadowed by self-interest. The Hubbards' relationships are marked by manipulation, deceit, and betrayal, showcasing how greed can erode familial bonds. The characters' willingness to turn against one another for personal gain highlights the dark side of human nature.

Socioeconomic Commentary

Hellman's work serves as a commentary on the socioeconomic landscape of the American South during the early 1900s. The Hubbards epitomize the emerging capitalist class, willing to exploit others for their gain. The play reflects the tensions between the old Southern aristocracy and the new money, as well as the impact of industrialization on traditional values.

Historical Context

To fully appreciate *The Little Foxes*, it is essential to understand the historical context in which it was written. The play debuted in 1939, a time when America was grappling with the aftermath of the Great Depression. The economic hardships of the era influenced many artists and playwrights, and Hellman's work reflects the anxieties and aspirations of a society striving for prosperity.

During this period, the South was undergoing significant changes. The transition from an agrarian economy to one focused on industry and commerce marked a shift in power dynamics. The play captures the essence of this transformation, portraying characters who are emblematic of the struggle for wealth and status in a rapidly changing world.

Impact on American Theater

Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* has had a lasting impact on American theater. The play is notable for its strong female lead, which was a rarity at the time. Regina Giddens has become an iconic character, representing the complexities of female ambition and power.

The play's themes of greed, betrayal, and moral ambiguity resonate across generations, making it a staple in theater curricula and professional productions alike. Its exploration of family dynamics and ethical dilemmas continues to engage audiences, prompting discussions about the nature of ambition and the cost of success.

Adaptations and Legacy

Over the years, *The Little Foxes* has been adapted into various formats, including film and television. The most notable film adaptation came in 1941, directed by William Wyler, which starred Bette Davis as Regina. The film was well-received and helped to solidify the play's place in American culture.

In addition to its adaptations, *The Little Foxes* has influenced countless playwrights and screenwriters. Its themes and character dynamics can be seen echoed in modern works, underscoring the timelessness of Hellman's exploration of human nature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Little Foxes* is a powerful exploration of greed, ambition,

and the complexities of family relationships. Lillian Hellman's incisive writing offers a window into the moral dilemmas faced by individuals in their pursuit of wealth and status. The play's enduring relevance and its rich characterizations continue to resonate with audiences today, solidifying its status as a classic in American theater. Through its gripping narrative and thought-provoking themes, *The Little Foxes* remains a poignant commentary on the dark side of human ambition and the intricate web of family loyalty and betrayal.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of 'The Little Foxes'?

The central theme of 'The Little Foxes' is the destructive nature of greed and ambition, showcasing how personal desires can lead to familial betrayal and moral corruption.

Who is the playwright of 'The Little Foxes'?

The playwright of 'The Little Foxes' is Lillian Hellman, an influential American playwright known for her strong female characters and social critiques.

What is the setting of 'The Little Foxes'?

The play is set in Alabama during the early 1900s, a time of economic change and social upheaval, which influences the characters' motivations and actions.

Which character is considered the antagonist in 'The Little Foxes'?

Regina Giddens is often considered the antagonist, as her ruthless ambition and manipulative nature drive much of the conflict in the play.

How does 'The Little Foxes' explore the theme of gender roles?

The play highlights the limitations placed on women in a patriarchal society, as Regina battles societal expectations to assert her power and secure her family's wealth.

What role does family play in 'The Little Foxes'?

Family dynamics are central to the play, showcasing how loyalty, betrayal, and ambition can fracture relationships and lead to moral decay.

What are the 'little foxes' referred to in the title?

The 'little foxes' refer to the destructive forces of greed and ambition that can spoil the vineyard, symbolizing how small, seemingly insignificant actions can have devastating consequences.

What is the significance of the play's ending?

The ending of 'The Little Foxes' leaves audiences with a sense of unresolved tension and highlights the ongoing cycle of greed and betrayal, suggesting that such themes are timeless.

How has 'The Little Foxes' been received in modern theatre?

The play remains a significant work in modern theatre, often revived for its powerful portrayal of ambition and the complexities of human relationships, resonating with contemporary audiences.

[The Little Foxes](#)

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