

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE

PART ONE: THE STORY
OF A CHILDHOOD

BY HORTON FOOTE



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE, PART ONE: THE STORY OF A CHILDHOOD
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The World Premiere Production of THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE
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Michael Wilson, Artistic Director; Michael Stotts, Managing Director,
and Signature Theatre Company,
James Houghton, Founding Artistic Director; Erika Mallin, Executive Director.

The three-part version of THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE
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Original Music and Sound Design by John Gromada

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Horton Foote began writing *The Orphans' Home Cycle* following the deaths of his parents, Albert Horton and Hallie Brooks Foote who passed away within a year of one another in the early 1970s. Horton loved his mother and father very much: their sixty-year devotion to one another had provided him a nurturing childhood, the example of a happy marriage, and the power of making a family with someone you love.

Yet his parents had both endured difficult lives, particularly Horton's father, who had been brutally separated from his own parents and made an orphan when he was only twelve.

Horton began to conceive a cycle of plays that would trace his father's harrowing but miraculous journey from his wandering childhood through his courtship and marriage to Elizabeth Vaughn (based on Horton's mother) and their struggle to make a family during the turbulent years of World War I and the influenza epidemic of 1918. The cycle would ultimately interweave the stories of three generations of three families in post-Reconstruction Texas, from 1904 to 1928. In the final play, its author would appear in the guise of the ten-year-old Horace Robedaux, Jr.

Horton wrote the plays out of order in New Hampshire and began developing them quietly with his long-time collaborator, Herbert Berghof, at HB Studios in the West Village. On the heels of his Oscar-winning films, *Tender Mercies* and *The Trip to Bountiful*, Horton with his wife, Lillian, produced three of the plays as films in the mid-1980s: *Courtship, Valentine's Day* and *1918*. They all starred Horton's daughter, Hallie, who played Elizabeth, the character based on her grandmother. At the same time, Hallie played opposite Matthew Broderick's Horace in a critically acclaimed Off-Broadway production of *The Widow Claire*.

When I first met Horton in 1987, four of the cycle plays had yet to be produced on stage or screen. I recall a visit with Horton and Lillian one night after supper in the parlor of their Wharton, Texas home in the summer of 1991. They were actively figuring out how to produce the rest of the cycle on film, as they had virtually given

up on ever seeing all the plays produced either singly or much less all together on stage. I remember thinking to myself how could such a singular achievement — a cycle of nine plays (one that had been attempted but not realized by Eugene O'Neill) — created by arguably our country's greatest storyteller be so ignored by our own American theater?

Years passed. In 1997, Horton asked me to direct the premiere of the cycle's final play, *The Death of Papa*, once again starring Hallie and Matthew. A year later, I was appointed Artistic Director at Hartford Stage and invited Horton to make an artistic home there. For the next eleven years, we enjoyed many happy collaborations together, in Hartford, at the Alley in Houston, the Guthrie, and at Lincoln Center Theater and Primary Stages in New York.

But there remained the holy grail of Horton's *Orphans' Home Cycle*. Through the years, I had been fortunate to see a number of epic productions, spanning nine or more hours in the theater, including Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata*, Ariane Mnouchkine's *Les Atrides*, Peter Hall's *Tantalus*, and Jack O'Brien's staging of Tom Stoppard's *Coast of Utopia*. I asked Horton to consider adapting his nine full-length play cycle into three three-hour evenings of theater that could be produced in repertory and seen over three nights, two nights, or all in one day.

For a long time, he was reluctant. Then in June 2008, while he, Hallie and I were working together in the back porch study of his boyhood home in Wharton, he said to me, "Buddy, I have found my way through. And that is, to simply follow Horace. It is through his story we will experience the lives of all the other characters as well."

And that's what he did. He began adapting, sometimes rewriting but mostly carefully cutting his original plays to make Horace even more the central protagonist of his cycle. André Bishop hosted the first reading of Parts 1 and 2 in January 2009, the day after we closed *Dividing the Estate* on Broadway. Horton passed away quietly in Hartford on March 4. Twelve days later, Jim Houghton and I hosted the first reading of Part 3 at Hartford Stage. Thanks to an extraordinary gift from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and

several generous angels, Horton's three-part, nine-hour version of *The Orphans' Home Cycle* began rehearsals at Hartford Stage in June of that year, with all three parts running in repertory, including all-day marathon performances, as the Signature Theatre's 2009–2010 season. Posthumously, Horton received his first New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for his cycle in 2010.

So here the plays are, with all of Horton's immense, unflinching humanity. You can produce one part at a time, one part each season, or ambitiously do them all together. The settings can be simple, evocative. Horton marveled at the imagination of directors and designers, and was not, as some of his critics suggest, a stubborn realist or a merely miniature portrait artist, as these plays prove. He loved the theatre and was very curious about the use of dance, music and poetry to tell his stories. In fact, the title of his cycle comes from a line from Marianne Moore's poem "In Distrust of Merits" — "The world's an orphans' home." By creating a cycle that captured his own experience of being orphaned by the death of his parents, Horton made it possible for audiences and readers to better understand their own inevitable passage to becoming an orphan.

Enjoy your journey through his dark yet somehow very hopeful world of American life at the beginning of the twentieth century. The full-length versions of his cycle plays — as well as many of his other masterpieces — are also available through Dramatists Play Service. His writing uniquely captures what it means to be human and our collective American experience.

Michael Wilson
March 14, 2013

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE, PART ONE: THE STORY OF A CHILDHOOD premiered Off-Broadway at Signature Theatre Company, produced in collaboration with Hartford Stage, on November 19, 2009. It was directed by Michael Wilson; the set design was by Jeff Cowie and David Barber; the costume design was by David C. Woolard; the lighting design was by Rui Rita; the original music and sound design were by John Gromada; the projection design was by Jan Hartley; the choreographer was Peter Pucci the wig and hair design were by Mark Adam Rampmeyer; and the fight director was Mark Olsen. The cast was as follows:

PROLOGUE

HORACE ROBEDAUX	Bill Heck
MRS. COONS	Pamela Payton-Wright

ACT I: ROOTS IN A PARCHED GROUND

MRS. THORNTON	Annalee Jefferies
HORACE ROBEDAUX (at age 12)	Dylan Riley Snyder
CORELLA ROBEDAUX (as a young woman)	Virginia Kull
LILY DALE ROBEDAUX (at age 10)	Emily Robinson
INEZ THORNTON (as a young woman)	Maggie Lacey
ALBERT THORNTON	Justin Fuller
MINNIE ROBEDAUX CURTIS (at age 17) ...	Jenny Dare Paulin
MR. RITTER	Mike Boland
MRS. ROBEDAUX	Hallie Foote
TERRENCE ROBEDAUX	Stephen Plunkett
PAUL HORACE ROBEDAUX	Bill Heck
JOHN HOWARD	Devon Abner
GEORGE TYLER (as a young man)	Lucas Caleb Rooney
LLOYD	Henry Hodges
PETE DAVENPORT (as a young man)	Bryce Pinkham

ACT II: CONVICTS

HORACE ROBEDAUX (at age 14)	Henry Hodges
MARTHA JOHNSON	Pat Bowie
BILLY VAUGHN	Mike Boland
ASA VAUGHN	Hallie Foote
BEN JOHNSON	Charles Turner
LEROY KENDRICKS	Gilbert Owuor
SOLL GAUTIER	James DeMarse
SHERIFF	Lucas Caleb Rooney
JACKSON HALL	Leon Addison Brown

ACT III: LILY DALE

LILY DALE ROBEDEAUX	Jenny Dare Paulin
CORELLA DAVENPORT	Annalee Jefferies
HORACE ROBEDAUX	Bill Heck
PETE DAVENPORT	Devon Abner
WILL KIDDER	Stephen Plunkett
ALBERT THORNTON	Justin Fuller
MRS. COONS	Pamela Payton-Wright

EPILOGUE

LILY DALE ROBEDEAUX	Jenny Dare Paulin
CORELLA DAVENPORT	Annalee Jefferies
ALBERT THORNTON	Justin Fuller
HORACE ROBEDAUX	Bill Heck
MRS. COONS	Pamela Payton-Wright

CHARACTERS

HORACE ROBEDAUX
MRS. COONS
MRS. THORNTON
CORELLA ROBEDAUX
LILY DALE ROBEDAUX
INEZ THORNTON
ALBERT THORNTON
MINNIE ROBEDAUX CURTIS
MR. RITTER
MRS. ROBEDAUX
TERRENCE ROBEDAUX
PAUL HORACE ROBEDAUX
JOHN HOWARD
GEORGE TYLER
LLOYD
PETE DAVENPORT
MARTHA JOHNSON
BILLY VAUGHN
ASA VAUGHN
BEN JOHNSON
LEROY KENDRICKS
SOLL GAUTIER
SHERIFF
JACKSON HALL
PETE DAVENPORT
WILL KIDDER

PLACE and TIME

Prologue

A railroad car on the way to Houston, Texas. 1910.

Act One

Harrison, Texas. 1902 – 1903.

Act Two

Floyd's Lane, Texas. 1904.

Act Three

Houston. 1910.

Epilogue

Houston and a railroad car on the way back to Harrison.

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE

PART ONE: THE STORY OF A CHILDHOOD

Prologue

As the lights are brought up, we see a section of a train. Horace Robedaux, 20, is seated and looking out of the train window. A woman in her early 50s comes in. She is Mrs. Coons.

MRS. COONS. Mind if I sit with you, son?

HORACE. No, ma'am.

MRS. COONS. I can't stand a train trip without a little company. I wouldn't care to ask to sit beside those older gentlemen. They might think I was forward. (*She looks at Horace.*) How old are you, young man?

HORACE. Twenty.

MRS. COONS. Twenty! I have a boy just your age. Where are you going?

HORACE. Houston.

MRS. COONS. So am I. Houston your home?

HORACE. No, ma'am. I'm going to visit my mother.

MRS. COONS. Your mother? Not your mother and your daddy?

HORACE. My daddy is dead; she's married again. My stepfather doesn't have a whole lot and it's all he can do to take care of my sister and mother.

MRS. COONS. Oh, well, times are hard all over. I think they'll get better though, don't you?

HORACE. I certainly hope so.

MRS. COONS. I have a rich uncle, thank God ... from New Orleans. When things get too tight, I just write dear Uncle Julius and I say, "Here I am begging again." He's real sweet about it too, just sends me whatever I need. You got on the train in Harrison. Do you live there?

HORACE. No, ma'am. I used to. I live in Glen Flora now.

MRS. COONS. Well, I live in Harrison. Been there two months ... like it real well. I used to live in Houston, but my husband lost his job there and he got a position at the cotton gin in Harrison. He's a bookkeeper. I hope he'll keep that. (*Pause.*) We have a problem — my husband, that is. He drinks. He's taken the Keeley Cure more times than I can count. He swears this time he's learned his lesson. I'm going in now to see about shipping our furniture out to Harrison. We just sold our home in Houston. We won't buy a house in Harrison until we see if we are going to be permanent.

HORACE. Whose house are you renting in Harrison?

MRS. COONS. They call it the old Robedaux place. It's a sad house. The man was a brilliant lawyer and drank himself right into the grave. Mr. Coons said —

HORACE. That was my house. At least it was my father's. I lived there until I was twelve. Until my mama and papa separated.

MRS. COONS. Separated? Oh, mercy! I hope it didn't end in divorce?

HORACE. No, ma'am.

MRS. COONS. Is it your daddy died a drunkard?

HORACE. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. COONS. I feel sorry for you, son. Deeply sorry. I know what that can mean. (*Pause. She sighs dolefully and then looks up at Horace.*) Are you a Christian, son?

HORACE. Yes'm. I guess so.

MRS. COONS. What do you mean you guess so, son? There's no guessing about being a Christian. You're either saved or not. Are you baptized?

HORACE. I don't know, ma'am.

MRS. COONS. What do you mean you don't know?

HORACE. Well, I hadn't thought about it one way or the other. If I was baptized, I was too young to remember it.

MRS. COONS. Mercy! You ask your mama the first thing you see her. You ask her if you're baptized. Your soul is in terrible danger if you're not, son. Do you attend church?

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE, PART ONE: THE STORY OF A CHILDHOOD

by Horton Foote

14M, 8W (doubling)

Act One: "Roots in a Parched Ground." When his father dies and his mother and sister move to Houston, Horace Robedaux is left behind in Harrison, Texas with his feuding relatives, the Robedauxs and the Thorntons.

Act Two: "Convicts." Horace takes a job on Soll Gautier's plantation in order to earn money to buy a tombstone for his father's grave and while there witnesses the harsh treatment of Gautier's convict laborers.

Act Three: "Lily Dale." Horace makes a rare visit to Houston to see his mother, Corella, and sister, Lily Dale. As Horace's presence stirs up difficult memories for his mother and sister, Corella strives to maintain harmony between her children and their stepfather, Pete Davenport.

"There is so much life compressed here: greed, disease, murder, cruelty to children, the bitter legacy of slavery and a sad, ambivalent hero — Horace Robedaux, alienated observer of a family that abandoned him ... Foote's understated epic is an authentic American classic about the birth pangs of the twentieth century. It's told with humor, deep sadness and great writerly craft. I can't wait to see what happens next."

—Time Out New York

"The first part of THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE will, I suspect, be remembered as the most significant theatrical event of the season, the kind of show you tell your grandchildren you saw. THE STORY OF A CHILDHOOD has the narrative sweep that you look for in major novels, coupled with the electric immediacy that only live theater can supply."

—The Wall Street Journal

"Heart-piercing ... [Horace Robedaux] is unusually honest, and I think you're going to want to spend as much time in his company as you can. THE STORY OF A CHILDHOOD leaves you as eager as a kid who has just started his first fat work of fiction by Charles Dickens, say, or Mark Twain, when putting down the book, even for an hour, feels like punishment. Seen together, the plays of THE STORY OF A CHILDHOOD ... acquire a pulsing narrative vitality. They allow Foote to claim one of the most abiding and irresistible traditions of literature — the tale of the orphan adrift in a big, scary world — as his own."

—The New York Times

Also by Horton Foote

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE, PART TWO:
THE STORY OF A MARRIAGE
THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE, PART THREE:
THE STORY OF A FAMILY
and many others

ISBN 978-0-8222-2475-4



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