

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE

PART THREE: THE STORY
OF A FAMILY

BY HORTON FOOTE



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
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The World Premiere Production of THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE
was produced by Hartford Stage,
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
was commissioned by Hartford Stage.

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Original Music and Sound Design by John Gromada

SPECIAL NOTE ON MUSIC

A CD with cue sheet of the original music and sound design composed for this Play by John Gromada is available through the Play Service for \$35.00, plus shipping and handling. The nonprofessional fee for the use of this music is \$25.00 per performance.

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 THREE: THE STORY OF A FAMILY premiered Off-Broadway at Signature Theatre Company, produced in collaboration with Hartford Stage, on January 26, 2010. 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:

ACT I: 1918

HORACE ROBEDAUX	Bill Heck
SAM GOLDMAN	Gilbert Owuor
BROTHER VAUGHN	Bryce Pinkham
BESSIE STILLMAN	Virginia Kull
ELIZABETH ROBEDAUX	Maggie Lacey
MRS. VAUGHN	Hallie Foote
MR. VAUGHN	James DeMarse
IRMA SUE	Emily Robinson
DR. GREENE	Justin Fuller
MRS. BOONE	Annalee Jefferies
BOY	Henry Hodges

ACT II: COUSINS

GORDON KIRBY	Justin Fuller
HORACE ROBEDAUX	Bill Heck
LEWIS HIGGINS	Lucas Caleb Rooney
ELIZABETH ROBEDAUX	Maggie Lacey
MR. VAUGHN	James DeMarse
MONTY REEVES	Mike Boland
WILL KIDDER	Stephen Plunkett
LOLA REEVES	Hallie Foote
PETE DAVENPORT	Devon Abner
LILY DALE KIDDER	Jenny Dare Paulin
CORELLA DAVENPORT	Annalee Jefferies
NURSE	Pat Bowie
SYLVESTER MALONE	Leon Addison Brown
MINNIE ROBEDAUX CURTIS	Virginia Kull

ACT III: THE DEATH OF PAPA

HORACE, JR. Dylan Riley Snyder
ELIZA Pat Bowie
GERTRUDE Jasmine Amii Harrison
ELIZABETH ROBEDAUX Maggie Lacey
MRS. VAUGHN Hallie Foote
BROTHER VAUGHN Bryce Pinkham
CORELLA DAVENPORT Annalee Jeffries
INEZ THORNTON KIRBY Pamela Payton-Wright
HORACE ROBEDAUX Bill Heck
WALTER Charles Turner

CHARACTERS

HORACE ROBEDAUX
SAM GOLDMAN
BROTHER VAUGHN
BESSIE STILLMAN
ELIZABETH ROBEDAUX VAUGHN
MRS. VAUGHN
MR. VAUGHN
IRMA SUE
DR. GREENE
MRS. BOONE
BOY
GORDON KIRBY
LEWIS HIGGINS
MONTY REEVES
WILL KIDDER
LOLA REEVES
PETE DAVENPORT
LILY DALE KIDDER
CORELLA DAVENPORT
NURSE
SYLVESTER
MINNIE ROBEDAUX CURTIS
HORACE, JR.
ELIZA
GERTRUDE
INEZ THORNTON KIRBY
WALTER

PLACE and TIME

Act One

Harrison, Texas. 1918.

Act Two

Harrison and Houston, Texas. 1925.

Act Three

Harrison. 1928.

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE

PART THREE: THE STORY OF A FAMILY

ACT ONE

“1918”

Scene 1

The lights come up downstage on a graveyard plot. Horace is there looking at the gravesites. Sam Goldman, carrying a hoe, comes over to him.

SAM. What are you doin' out here this time of day, Mr. Horace?

HORACE. I'm having a tombstone put on my father's grave. Mr. Deitrick has ordered one for me, but I don't know which one is my father's ... do you?

SAM. No. When was he buried?

HORACE. In 1902.

SAM. I don't know who worked here then. Wasn't there no marker on the grave?

HORACE. Must have been at one time. See, there are three unmarked graves. My father is buried in one, my Uncle Cal and my Aunt Loula are buried in the others.

SAM. There are a lot of graves out here. None of them marked. You have to get yourself a big, good tombstone if you wants your grave to stay marked. *(In the distance church bells ring.)* Isn't this flu terrible?

HORACE. Yes, it is.

SAM. Had three white funerals last week, all from the flu. Two colored funerals tomorrow. I just been over in the colored cemetery helping dig the graves.

HORACE. Who died?

SAM. Delia Washington, and old George Harris.

HORACE. George Harris?

SAM. Yes sir.

HORACE. My God! I ordered him a suit of clothes for Christmas. He just finished paying it out last week.

SAM. Then they're going to bury him in it.

HORACE. Did they both have the flu?

SAM. Yes sir. Everybody's gettin' it. Black and white. Not sparin' anybody. I hear you're opening up a store.

HORACE. No, not for a while now. I took the money I'd saved for that to buy war bonds last night at the rally. I figure there'll be plenty of time to open a clothing store when the war's over.

SAM. We're winning ... so they tell me ...

HORACE. I hope so. Well, I don't know how to figure this, Sam. I have a cousin living in Houston. Maybe she'll remember. I guess I'll just have to write her. Mr. Deitrick will just have to hold the tombstone until I hear from her.

SAM. A lot of people won't have anything to do with him. They tell me because he's for Germany to win.

HORACE. I know that. I don't let him get started on the war with me. He knows how I feel.

SAM. Some folks say he should be locked up for the way he talks.

HORACE. I know. There are a lot of hotheads on both sides. (*The church bells ring again.*)

SAM. If I buy a suit, how much will I have to pay down?

HORACE. Whatever you can. Three dollars, five dollars. Then you pay it out so much a week. (*Sam turns to Horace.*)

SAM. How old was you when your daddy died?

HORACE. Twelve.

SAM. I never knew my daddy at all. He died before I was born. How come you waited so long to put up a tombstone?

HORACE. I couldn't afford it before. (*He starts out.*) So long, Sam. (*He goes off in one direction, Horace in another.*)

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE, PART THREE: THE STORY OF A FAMILY

by Horton Foote

14M, 8W (doubling)

Act One: "1918." The 1918 Flu Epidemic strikes Harrison, and the Robedaux family is hit particularly hard.

Act Two: "Cousins." Horace is called to Corella's bedside in Houston when she faces another operation. Meanwhile, as everyone attempts to sort through their complex family trees, the past haunts his cousins Minnie Curtis and Lewis Higgins.

Act Three: "The Death of Papa." The death of Elizabeth's father sends the Vaughn and Robedaux households into a tailspin while Horace struggles through the turbulent economy to keep his store open and support his family.

"The three short dramas that make up THE STORY OF A FAMILY ... are both the starkest and most sentimental of this lovingly painted life-and-times portrait ... Foote weaves his melodrama into the plain cloth of everyday events. He knows life's natural littleness doesn't cease when big events happen."
—The New York Times

"The show is filled with riches. To his credit, Foote ... doesn't tie things up with a pretty bow — rather with something more uncertain. The line that lingers near the end is a simple one: 'A family is a remarkable thing, isn't it?' It is. So is this theatrical event."
—New York Daily News

"... elevated and elemental, like Greek tragedy ... the action exists in a kind of suspended reality — not bound by the laws of time and faintly ritualistic ... temporal strangeness only heightens the complex pleasures of Foote's melancholy masterpiece." —New York Magazine

"Foote's final gift to the stage is glorious, an essential American masterwork ... Foote's sympathetic but rigorous eye misses nothing. He puts his characters forward without judgment, sentimentalizing nothing and letting us make what we will of the unfolding human panoply. If there's a better illustration of the adage that universality is rooted in specificity, I can't think of it."
—BackStage

Also by Horton Foote

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE, PART ONE:

THE STORY OF A CHILDHOOD

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE, PART TWO:

THE STORY OF A MARRIAGE

and many others

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