



**Women and Equality in Lillian Hellman's The
Little Foxes**

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Women's equality and gender issues have been powerful social issues, which are related to feminist concerns. Therefore, women playwrights who write from their experiences as women expose oppression and marginalization. Such concerns establish the basic feminist themes that are associated with a female character's identity as a woman. The purpose of this study is to examine the portrayal of women and the necessity for gender equality and how gender was portrayed in Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*. This article highlights the passive representation of women as victims and sufferers criticizing the stereotyping phases against women. This study is based on the Feminist theory and theory of gender that suggests women's rights and equality are subject to constant debates. **Keywords:** equality, Feminism, Hellman, Little Foxes, representation, suffering, women

Introduction

O women! Lovely Women! There is in you we believe of heavens Amazing brightness, purity and truth, Eternal joy and everlasting love. -Thomas Otway God has endowed women with hearts overflowing with love. She is a messenger of the gospel of non-violence. She is the mother-maker and silent leader. She is the guardian angel who fertilizes, enlightens, stimulates and vibrates the hearts and minds of her family members. She symbolizes Christ, who awaits her crucifixion in every age to redeem her chosen beloved in spite of her miserable and wretched conditions. Her thirst for her family is unquenched. Women occupy an important position in the family because they are regarded as a glue that put the family together. Women are traditionally expected to accompany this speech. Women from the classical period are depicted as serving wife, loving mother, and sacrificing lady who provides happiness, tranquillity and a love to her family at the expense of her own happiness. It is expected of women to be submissive. However, such women have been condemned since the days of Adam and Eve. From the start, she was held responsible for everything. Women have suffered in every way imaginable since Eve bit into that apple. Women are consigned to the lowest level of vassal since religion was formed by man and the Bible was written by a man. Women have distinct attributes depending on their position in society and family. Their most cherished roles are those of mother, sister, and wife. In each role, they are not only in charge of the family's finances, house management, and kitchen housekeeping, but they are also in charge of maintaining the family's harmonious relationships. A woman is more emotional, sensitive, and tender than a male, yet she also possesses considerable endurance and patience. She holds a more important place in man's life. Nobody can deny that every married man's wife is his better half. She is a friend, a counselor, a mother, and a partner all rolled into one. Her responsibility is not simply to perpetuate the line, but also to assist the family-head in navigating the seas of life. The scent is a lady if a man is a flower. The radar is a woman if a man is a ship. She may be sweet and bitter, compassionate and vicious, gentle and rough, soft and seductive, silent and outspoken at times but also elusive and difficult to please. The woman is the potter and the family is the clay. The potter is shaping the clay into different objects with definite shapes. The woman is also like a potter in shaping the family members in the family. She has more responsibility in shaping the family. She is the only person to preserve peace and happiness in the family. She must know to act according to the situation. Many women sacrifice themselves for the welfare of the family by keeping silent. But she should not be always silent. She should be outspoken also at times wherever it is needed. She must talk according to the place. If the woman acts with a sharp mind according to the situation, then she can keep her home-like temple with peace and happiness in the family. Literature has given many woman characters to show how women fulfil the desire for a home by maintaining silence and preserving peace and happiness. In Shakespeare's *King Lear* Cordelia, the youngest daughter looks after her father in his old age. When it comes time for her to outdo her sisters in their declarations of undying love for her father Lear, she remains curiously mute. Lear reacts passionately and withholds her inheritance, leaving her fortune to chance because he will no longer be involved with her. Later in the performance, she expresses her tremendous love for her father silently. Similarly in Henry's "The Gift of the Magi", Delia is portrayed as a loving wife who cuts off her beautiful long hair for getting a platinum fob chain as a Christmas gift for her husband. She sacrificed her long hair silently to give Christmas gift with a lot of love to her partner. Here she preserves happiness between husband and wife with silence. In Ezekiel's "The Night of the Scorpion", the mother shows the epitome of selfless love silently and it is a perfect revelation of motherliness who is always interested in the welfare of the children. Thus these three characters of women as a daughter, wife, and mother epitomize woman as a preserver of peace and happiness by silence. Though silence is helpful to maintain happiness in the family, it is for a certain level only. If she is always silent

then it causes destruction. Hence, women should be courageous to speak whenever they should to maintain harmony in the family. In ancient days, the women were never allowed to speak. They were completely muted. This silence was mainly responsible for the ultimate suppression of women. Being uneducated, their life was spent only on household chores and looking after her husband and children in the family. They are unable to express their feelings freely either to her husband or others. So, they cannot be outspoken. Throughout the years, society looks down to women and regard them as second players. In modern times, the role of women has been changed. Women nowadays have overcome all barriers to carve out a position for themselves as wives, daughters, and business leaders. They have smashed all limits in boardrooms, courtrooms, on screen, and in society. They have risen from the margins to shape their destinies on the main stage. Women have shown to be a global force; whether in business or the legislature, they have overcome all crises and reinvented the notion of leadership. Mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters have juggled cultural expectations while pursuing their dreams. For some, their mothers-in-law have been essential, while for others, it is their mothers who have encouraged them to pursue jobs they otherwise would not have had. Hence women are needed to be outspoken in this modern era. The place of women in contemporary society is closely linked with the status of women. G.T. Basden says about women's role in society as: The most striking facts perhaps about women are that they are extraordinarily alike. They are intensely conservative in their habit and their ideas and to know one is to know all, these women have their clubs and societies in every town and exercise great influence in various directions. (*Among the Ibo of Nigeria*, p.5) Generally outspoken is characterized by directness in manner or speech; without subtlety or evasion. It can be defined in other words as to speak bluntly. There are pros and cons of women being outspoken. Women should not speak whatever they think. It may create many problems. Normally the person uses a different style or way when talking to others. They are formal when they talk with official persons. At the same time, the woman also should be able to filter and express her thoughts or feelings through words frankly and clearly at home according to the circumstances. Sometimes many problems are also created due to being outspoken, especially in the marital life. God, who is the creator and controller of the universe, established the marriage institution. God, who owns society, also owns the individual lives that comprise society. As a result, he built marriage institutions in order to maintain unity and bring cohesiveness to society. Marriage refers to a man and woman's formal bond in which they become husband and wife. The husband-wife partnership evolved into a family institution that multiplied through pregnancy and childbearing. Both husband and wife perform significant duties at home in order to create decent children who will benefit the family and society as a whole. Women hold prominent positions in the home and hence play an essential part in household administration and child-rearing. There are numerous perspectives on outspoken women. Some people believe that it is tough to get along with outspoken women because they are not hesitant to express their thoughts and beliefs. They would not consider the ramifications of their words. They should not be this way. They must analyze what is right and wrong in their opinion and be vocal about it. Because males are accustomed to being the dominant partner in a relationship, most men find it difficult to live in the same house or be in a relationship with outspoken women. So, men cannot change their attitudes of dominance and allow women to go in the right way. This shows how society programs both males and females. In the most renowned classic play *The Little Foxes*, Lillian Hellman beautifully expresses the character of the woman and how she is being outspoken at last. She has chosen this apt title from *King James Bible*, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes." (15, Chap. II) and these portrayed symbols can cheerfully be seen in this play. She genuinely depicts the characters' struggles for control of a family business, as well as some of the most essential issues, such as family bonds and obligations, the concept of corruption, the true essence of a modern lady, and the final outpouring of the soul. When William Marshall, a prominent Chicago businessman, arrives to negotiate a contract with Horace Giddens, Marshall is eager to become partners with Horace, who owns a cotton mill, despite the fact that Regina's brothers, Benjamin and Oscar, also own shares. Benjamin and Oscar want the sale to go smoothly, and Regina agrees. They immediately agree because it means millions of dollars in profit for all of them. Horace, on the other hand, has a different plan in mind. Horace states that the family earns enough money to provide for everyone. As a result, Marshall rejects the investment, remembering his cunning wife and her greedy family, who are constantly wanting more and more. He believes that he is already an elderly man with a damaged heart and that he will not live long enough to reap the rewards of the investment. Furthermore, Benjamin and Oscar Hubbard are enraged by Horace's

decision. Leo, Oscar's son, intends to steal Horace's bonds and use them to obtain funds for the investment without Horace's awareness. However, the scheme does not proceed as planned because Horace discovers the theft quickly but chooses to exact revenge rather than report it. He informs Regina that he intends to write a new will in which he will give her some money and nothing else in the form of his bond holdings. When Regina learns of this, it propels the deceptive lady to new heights. The unhappy old man suffers a heart attack as a result of her stimulating ideas of absolute scorn for Horace. He slips and breaks the bottle because he is unable to take his prescription. When he is in his wheelchair, he politely requests that Regina go upstairs and get him his other bottle. But, being a clever lady, she refuses to move. Regina severely instructs her boys that she is well aware of their bond stealing and warns them in exchange for the bonds being returned without incident. Later, Alexandra, Regina's daughter, weeps and notifies her mother that Horace has died. But Regina remains silent and then reveals that she will meet with a judge the next day. She then reminds her brothers that they should not expect an impartial jury and argues that everyone in town has been a victim of the brothers' pranks at some point. Alexandra quickly loses respect for her mother, and she gradually begins to desert her. Finally, Regina is enormously wealthy as a result of her shrewd and outspoken character, but she is alone. Women are portrayed as weak creatures, but later on they flourish into strong and independent women.

Conclusion

To put it in a nutshell, Women are soft and tender in nature. They should be silent as well as outspoken. But no woman should be a cunning one. Kindness is the garment of every woman. In *Little Foxes*, Regina is greedy towards wealth, not even ready to take care of Horace in his worst situation. Therefore, Hellman expressed the realistic soft as well as cunning two-edged sword of Regina. She shows us a woman who only thinks of bettering her station in life. Alexandra is soft and silent, even when she hates the peculiar nature of her mother, she immediately abandons her, but Regina is outspoken in nature, even though she was not ready to save a soul due to her greediness towards wealth. It is in the way the characters confront this subjugation that Hellman mesmerizes the reader. The play also forces readers to make philosophical choices about the price of such success and independence. Thus, this play is an American classic and a social comment on women's equality.

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