

## P R E F A C E

In the year 2002, Horton Foote can look back on a remarkable career of more than sixty years in the American theatre beginning in 1938. In 1995 he won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama with *The Young Man from Atlanta*, the climax to a series of his many works for the theatre. Although other media have their appeal and he would not willingly give them up, Foote is happiest when writing for the stage, which is his most enduring love.

Foote's work has been awarded many prizes. In addition to the Pulitzer Prize and others, this productive writer has won the following awards: the Academy Award for the adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), the Academy Award for the original screenplay of *Tender Mercies* (1982), the Academy Award nomination for the screenplay adaptation of *The Trip to Bountiful* (1985), and the William Inge Lifetime Achievement Award (1989).

This playwright has consistently shown his unflagging compassion for others. Describing the Southeast Texas setting of an early play, he said it was true to the towns he had known: "It has its tragedies and comedies, its rich and poor, its great virtues and its terrible injustices. It has my heart."<sup>1</sup>

Although many people have written about the work of Horton Foote, I believe that a systematic examination is urgently needed; his life and plays should be better understood. The resources available are abundant—the Horton Foote Collection, the previous scholarship, his published plays, my teaching of them and attendance at performances, and my interviews with Foote, including a memorable visit to Wharton, on March 12, 1994. Two superior dissertations have appeared, by Terry Barr (1986) and Marion Castleberry (1993). Thematic studies have been published by Rebecca Briley (1993) and by Gerald Wood (*Horton Foote and the Theatre of Intimacy*, 1999).

Foote's papers, a massive trove of manuscripts and correspondence, have been placed in the DeGolyer Library at Southern Methodist University. My book is the first to make extensive use of the correspondence in this collection, which is abbreviated in this text as "HFC" (Horton Foote Collection).

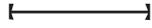
A literary biography is a life in the context of literary works.<sup>2</sup> This book uses letters and works of a well-known playwright. There is no closure to a literary biography if the subject is still alive. A balance exists—

between friendship and a professional spirit. When I said I would need to be “objective,” Foote remarked, “Of course.” Leon Edel in “Literature and Biography” says that the literary biography that deals with externals is incomplete: “The biography which looks also to the writings for its truth is more useful.”<sup>3</sup>

This literary biography examines Foote’s life, career, and best plays in a single volume. I begin with chapters on Foote’s early life, then move to plays written for the New York theatre. Next I examine his teleplays composed during the Golden Age of Television in the early 1950s. A biographical chapter based on his letters follows. After noting his screen-writings in original works and adaptations for the movies and television, I recount his triumphant return to the theatre from the 1970s to the 1990s. Foote’s life provides the framework for analyzing the development of his art and thought in the leading plays.

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HORTON FOOTE



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