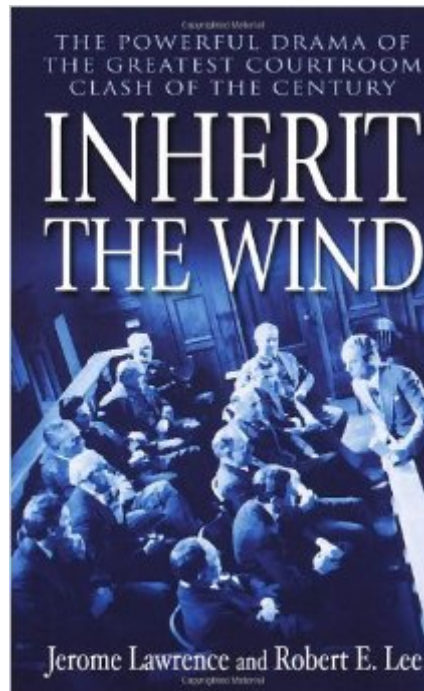


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Inherit The Wind: The Powerful Drama Of The Greatest Courtroom Clash Of The Century



Synopsis

The accused was a slight, frightened man who had deliberately broken the law. His trial was a Roman circus. The chief gladiators were two great legal giants of the century. Like two bull elephants locked in mortal combat, they bellowed and roared imprecations and abuse. The spectators sat uneasily in the sweltering heat with murder in their hearts, barely able to restrain themselves. At stake was the freedom of every American. One of the most moving and meaningful plays of our generation. "a tidal wave of a drama." -- New York World-Telegram And Sun

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Customer Reviews

Though it is based on the Scopes Trial, which took place in Tennessee in 1925, INHERIT THE WIND is essentially a work of fiction; even the names of the principal characters have been changed (John Scopes is now Bertram Cates; Clarence Darrow is Henry Drummond; William Jennings Bryan becomes Matthew Harrison Brady). In addition, the setting of the play is non-specific: a certain southern town, "not long ago." IDEAS are what the play is about, and like most great works of art, INHERIT THE WIND does not offer simple answers. Just as Drummond argues for "the right to think," so does the play allow the reader/audience member to consider many possibilities. For instance, in the play's final moments Drummond places both a copy of Darwin's book and a Bible in his briefcase, then leaves the courtroom. This suggests the possibility that science and religion might be compatible. Because he is willing to consider both theories, Drummond is very unlike both Brady, who believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible, and the cynical reporter E.K. Hornbeck

(originally H.L. Mencken -- the "Greek chorus character," or commentator, who speaks in free verse), who completely rejects Brady's ideas. It is in fact Brady who emerges as a true tragic figure; it is also Brady who undergoes change and is therefore the most complex character in the play. INHERIT THE WIND has everything: a tragic hero, colorful characters and dialogue, gripping courtroom scenes, and a skillfully foreshadowed, climactic death. Also recommended: the 1960 film version, starring Spencer Tracy as Drummond and Frederic March as Brady.

On a number of levels, this is a great story. Some people see it only as a take on the Scopes trial. The characters are fictitious, but the story is largely based on facts. The readers that only see this as a book about the monkey trial miss the point. Those who view this book as promoting evolutionism, see Christians portrayed as narrow-minded and intolerant. This is no more of a stereotype than a Middle Easterner playing the role of a terrorist in a James Bond film. In the Scopes Trial, the Christians were intolerant of evolution being taught. Tolerant Christians, which still comprise the majority, would not exactly play the role well. The point of the story is clearly laid out in the final pages of the book. The agnostic defense attorney Henry Drummond (who represents Clarence Darrow in the actual Scopes Trial) is talking to the arrogant reporter E. K. Hornbeck. Hornbeck assumes Drummond agrees with his view that the people of Hillsboro are backwards and ignorant in their Christian beliefs. Drummond lashes out at Hornbeck, telling him the people of Hillsboro have every right to have their beliefs. In the same way, people have a right to believe in evolution. The 1st Amendment provides freedom of religion, or freedom not to subscribe to any particular religious beliefs. This book is a powerful statement not about evolution, but the right to think. Whether you fall on either side of the argument for evolution or have compromised between the sides, the story is a lesson worth noting.

"Inherit the Wind," the play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, premiered on Broadway during the 1955-56 theater season. But the play's genesis (no pun intended) lies in the events of 1925. In that year, a high school teacher named John Scopes was put on trial in Tennessee for violating a law that forbade the teaching of Darwinian evolution. With William Jennings Bryan for the prosecution and Clarence Darrow for the defense, this became one of the most important trials in United States history. The trial remains a key battle in the ongoing war of biblical literalism versus science and reason. The play freely adapts the details of history. The authors even change the names of the principal characters involved: Bryan becomes "Matthew Harrison Brady," Darrow becomes "Henry Drummond," etc. But the core events of that historic trial remain firmly embedded

in the play. "Inherit" is an excellent play that is very readable in book form. Lawrence and Lee write superb dialogue, and create vivid characters in Brady, Drummond, and the rest. The play is an effective satire of religious fundamentalism. With the continuing efforts of religious fundamentalists to force their views on the general public (both in the United States and elsewhere), "Inherit the Wind" remains as relevant as ever. Highly recommended.

Everyone should be aware that this is a play script, not a novel. The plot involves the battle between creationists and evolutionists and takes place in the 1920s-1930s era. Without becoming political, it's fascinating to me that the debate between these ideas that was so bitter nearly a hundred years ago has reared its head again in the 2000s. In fact, I bought this for my step-daughter who was frustrated in biology by some of her classmates interrupting the teacher with creationist rhetoric. In any event, the play itself is fast-moving and has dynamic, interesting characters. The dialog is a bit old-fashioned and hard to read at times, and the characters - especially Mathew Brady - are somewhat over-the-top. My step-daughter didn't read it because of the dialog, but I found it as compelling as the first time I read it several years ago.

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