CHAPTER V

HER TREATMENT OF LOVE, SEX AND MARRIAGE: AN ASPECT OF HER HUMANISM

Once again, the matter of this chapter is an extension of the discussion of Miss Hellman's humanism. A humanist is least likely to have any patience with the social mores and taboos, especially those which relate to the vital area of love and sex. We have already noticed in the introductory chapter dealing with her life that her attitude was one of defiance of her so-called social moral codes which are particularly stringent in matters of sex. This is reflected also in the attitudes expressed and implied in her work.

Efficacy of Eros

We have seen that the main concern of Miss Hellman is with man—an individual, and all other structures of the social organization. she renders secondary to his needs. According to her, we have the habit of making sacrosanct many social institutions. These institutions servea very necessary purpose for some time. Because these institutions existed relatively unchanged for a long time, we assume they must become permanent and universal. Yet never at any time in the past have family, marriage and sexual patterns been
uniform throughout the world and we cannot expect them to be so now. Varying historical patterns, differing cultural demands and inevitable future changes mean that the structures of today will not serve tomorrow and ought not to be expected to. In her plays Miss Hellman assesses and evaluates these structures and helps develop those family, marriage, and sexual patterns that will best enable human beings to realize their potentialities.

Miss Hellman criticizes theism for the sins it has committed against man by presenting a perverted view of the human body. According to the theistic doctrines, the human body is impure and debased, and sex is an evil to be controlled and suppressed. The Promoter, the exponent of theistic doctrines, vehemently asserts this belief in *The Lark*:

The Promoter (shouts). You blaspheme. Man is impurity and lust. The dark acts of his nights are the acts of a beast.

(*The Lark*, p. 584)

Christianity takes such lapses to be sins which ought to be punished. But to Miss Hellman this is too narrow and trivial an assessment. She believes that this repressive theism is anti-humanistic. Sexual enjoyment, exploration and excitement are acceptable sources of experience whereas the traditional theism propounds a doctrine that breeds guilt and weighs people down with conflict.
Miss Hellman rejects dualistic theories that separate soul from body and claim that the highest morality is to keep the soul pure and undefiled by physical pleasure and desire. While she advocates high standards of conduct between the sexes, she rejects the puritanism of the past and looks upon sex love and pleasure as among the greatest of human experiences and values.

Miss Hellman believes that this repressive theism has inculcated a depraved view of sex in life. Incalculable suffering has been engendered by phobias concerning adultery or divorce. Similar repression has been aimed against homosexuals and lesbians and their sexuality likewise condemned as bestial. She has set the stage for human beings to rediscover their creative instincts as a source of happiness and enrichment without any attached feeling of guilt or fear. Without labelling it as adultery, she depicts the sexual experience between Styron and Hannah as blissful:

Styron. . . . I liked Tuscaloosa, Alabama.
I got put out.

Berney. Liked it? liked it? What kind of man are you, Styron?

Hannah. He's a man. He's a man okay. (Styron and Hannah both laugh in intimate pleasure).

(NEli, p.796)

Thus this scene marks a welcome release from the trammels of social conventions, a triumph over the tyranny of taboos. Miss Hellman here champions freedom in matters of sex expression, and challenges the official ethic that
sexuality is to be confined only to reproduction or to married partners. Thus she reveals the emergence of a new sexual attitude—a new iconoclastic love ethic appropriate to new concepts of human nature.

Miss Hellman believes that the sexual function is one of the most powerful manifestations of biological spontaneity. Lily in *Toys in the Attic* expresses this biological urge in frank terms:

Lily. . . . (She turns her hand towards Julian. He kisses it and she gently touches his face. She rubs her thigh) And last night I fell in here and hit my leg. You could cure that, too. Please make me cured, Julian. Let's get to bed and maybe you'll be pleased with me—maybe. (She puts his hand on her breast. Anna turns away; Carrie stands staring at them) And if you're pleased with me, then all the bad will go away, and I will pray for it to be that way. But if you're not, I'll understand and won't ask why—(She laughs gaily, slyly, and presses his hand on her breast). But if you are pleased with me darling—(Julian leans down to kiss her) I have missed you.

(TA, p.730)

The sexual act, Miss Hellman believes, has some curative, some redeeming function. It involves some natural mysticism, and a person under such a mystical influence enjoys some exalted supra-conscious state. Lily endowed with a completely artless and childlike love for Julian is in such a state of grace. She has no sense of guilt—no sense of shame. She blushes not as we blush. In this context the words of Alan W. Watts are worth recalling. He says: "One blushes because of shame and is in turn ashamed to blush and is thus left with no alternative but to be
covered with confusion."¹ But Lily savours sex as a normal healthy function not without its spiritual exaltation.

Lily wants to give herself up to that higher Eros or, to describe it in temporal terms she wants to give herself up to that natural spontaneous urge—to her own sublime self. According to Miss Hellman to achieve sexual fulfillment spontaneously is to be truly alive, to deny the body and its instinct is to sign a covenant with death. Her Lily is a mystic who finds joy in things earthy. Her spirituality is temporal and defined in temporal terms, is growth proper and ultimate development of one's being and sexuality, not in conflict with each other but in harmony with each other. It is Miss Hellman's prophecy that the time to come will witness not the demise of love but the triumph of the spiritual principle in man giving birth to a humanism that will affirm sexual love as the supremely redemptive form of love. Her basic assumption is that good is achieved when we realize the human potential through this power. This means that we ought to reject all those creeds and dogmas that impede human fulfilment or impose external authoritarian rules upon human beings. Sex instinct, she believes, cannot be prescribed by law or moral fiat; if it is blocked in one channel, it will find a way out in other perverted forms. Carrie with her "vagina in the ice box" (TA, p.741), is such a case. Miss Hellman insists that the full gratification of the sexual instinct would result not only in the integration of the individual but also in cherishing human values which in
their turn will establish the most human society. A sex-repressed society can go way-ward as the ensuing dialogue establishes:

Rona (Crying). But then it's unusual, what we did. You said it wasn't Katz.

Dr. Katz. The Kinsey Institute shows that eighty-five percent of Americans . . .

(MFW, p.798)

Miss Hellman proclaims this sexual instinct even in her language. She refuses to employ face-saving euphemisms like love or passion. She takes the direct dialectal expressions of the Southern plantation labour and introduces them in her dramas with all the muscle force of the robust experience. Even in his naturalistic sea-plays O'Neill had not dared to include, says Jean Gould, "the salty lines of his sailors" which Miss Hellman's characters under the particular circumstances do. Her plays are a milestone in the development of the modern theatre towards an open naturalism.

She often uses words with masculine brusqueness. She talks about the frigid unresponsive wife of Uncle Willy and refers to her "ugly dryness of the breasts" in very blunt terms (Pentimento, p.53). There is no "pussy-footing of facts" as Jean Gould rightly remarks. She has a strong dislike for pretence and circumlocution. To her toilet is toilet and no other fancy name like ladies' room (Pentimento, p.242). When Jenny said to her, "Your generation, camp and college and all those fine places, goes about naked all the time." "Yes", she said, "All the time. And we sleep with
everybody and drink and dope all night and don't have your fine feelings. Maybe that's the reason we don't always spit on people because they live with low-down wops and get in trouble. Each generation has its standards." (Pentimento, p.43). Not that Miss Hellman is making a great argument on behalf of the squalor in the standards of our times. But out of this open-hearted reference to squalor emerges that golden principle of endowing on man his due dignity and worth: 'we don't always spit on people because they live with low-down wops and get in trouble.' The puritanic manner of assuming airs of superiority over others always contributed to that hatred of others on presumptuous grounds. Miss Hellman ironically categorizes such self-elation and self-pride as 'your fine feeling.' And in her plays she sets out deliberately to protest against the outmoded limitations of Puritan barriers.

Now, according to Miss Hellman, sexual experience should not be something like an experiment conducted most mechanically, without proper emotional concern, as in a biological laboratory. It should be a soul-stirring experience. It should involve the whole man. Sex without involvement is simply unacceptable to her, whereas sexual love is a thing in itself and has a unique elating effect on the lives of the partners. It has an important role in humanizing people.

Miss Hellman deals with the soul of sex, not the flesh body and bone. She does not approve of the reckless promiscuity ofona Halpern (My Mother, My Father and Ke), or Julie
Kidman (Days to Come). Any character who deviates from the healthy and wholesome standards stands condemned in her world.

2 Lesbianism—An Anomaly

Her first play The Children's Hour (1936) was anything but a play for children. It deals with lesbianism. Though it is free from sensationalism, it is frank. The idea for the play came from a Scottish book describing the case of a malicious child who said that the two headmistresses at her school had an extra-normal affection for each other. To trigger such a situation Miss Hellman created the incisively drawn character of a neurotic adolescent girl, Mary Tilford.

At a boarding school, Mary is shown as a lonely disturbed girl with sadistic hostility, a persecution complex and feigned heart-attacks. She is about to run away from the school when she hears a bit of significant gossip from another girl who had been eavesdropping on the two women who run the school. Karen Wright is engaged to Dr. Cardin and the child has overheard the other woman Martha Dobie being accused by her aunt of resenting the marriage of Karan. The following conversation between Martha and her aunt is worth quoting in this context:
Martha. I'm very fond of Joe and you know it.

Mrs. Mortar. You're fonder of Karen and I know that. And it's unnatural, ... just as unnatural, as it can be. You don't like their being together. You were always like that even as a child. If you had a little girl friend, you always got mad, when she liked anybody else. Well, you'd better get a beau of your own now—a woman of your age.

(Ch, p.18)

Mary runs back home and tells of the unnatural relationship in the hope of not being sent back to school. Without stopping to verify the accusation, her grandmother is quick to spread it among the others; and Martha and Karen find the children being taken out of the school. Although Karen and Martha deny the relationship vehemently, Mary terrorizes another girl into supporting her. Lacking the flighty aunt's testimony, Karen and Martha lose their libel suit; they are then ostracized and deserted. Although Dr. Cardin would still marry Karen, she forces him to admit that even he is unsure and wants to know just how true the accusations were. Karen knows their marriage would never succeed with this obstacle between them, and sends him away. In a delicate and superbly handled last scene, Martha finally realizes that she has unconsciously loved Karen with an unnatural affection. Karen herself had never suspected it and is revolted now to learn it.

Martha (as though she were talking to herself). It's funny; it's all mixed up. There's something in you and you don't know it and you don't do anything about it ... It all seems to come back to me. In some way I've ruined your life. I've ruined my own. I didn't even know ... I feel all dirty and ...

(CH!, p.63)
Miss Hellman shows that it is impossible to be both, a self-accepting homosexual and live a conventional life in American society. She believes that no one in his right mind would opt for the life of a sexual deviant, to be an object of ridicule and contempt, deny the natural fulfilment and cut off from the main stream of human interests.

She narrates an experience which Dorothy Parker, a friend of hers, had with a group of lesbians in Paris. They were seriously talking of the possibility of legal marriage between them. Dottie listened most politely and clucked in agreement. They expected her friendly opinion and asked for it. Her large eyes were wide with sympathy: "Of course you must have legal marriages. The children have to be considered." (UW, p.215).

"But for me", Miss Hellman writes, "the wit was never as attractive as the comment, often startling, always sudden, as if a curtain had opened and you had a brief and brilliant glance into what you must have never found for yourself." (UW, p.216).

The material from which The Children's Hour is made, Eric Bentley rightly remarks, suggests two stories: the first is a story of hetero-sexual teachers accused of lesbianism; the enemy is the society which punishes the innocent. The second is the story of two teachers accused of lesbianism; the enemy is again the society which punishes the lesbians. Of course, Miss Hellman devotes more time to
the first story. The indignation she arouses in us has but
one source—our impression that the charge of lesbianism is
unfounded—an impression reinforced by everyone's holy horror
whenever the subject came up. Then in the last few minutes
of the drama we learn that one of the teachers has lesbian
tendencies hidden away; her heart. The guilt-ridden accused
teacher commits suicide.

Though Miss Hellman does not approve of lesbianism, she
procures our sympathies for Martha and makes Mrs. Tilford
repent on the ground that she (Martha) is innocent. Our
sympathies go out to one who is not lesbian or is at least
unaware of it. Miss Hellman's sympathy may be with lesbians
but her better sense and her judgement, her reasoned support
never went out to them. It is of particular interest to
note that in her dramatic world creatures like Martha Dobie
stand self-condemned and self-executed. As there is no
reference to the psychodynamics which are responsible for
Martha's latent inversions, Miss Hellman does not discuss
the biological or emotional causes of homo-sexuality in
general. She forces us to take this unconscious deviation
at least as a tragic flaw if not a bathsome anomaly. But,
all the same, she does not accept homosexuality as a full
and satisfying form of sexual and emotional behaviour.

Christian theology has linked sex with the institution
of family and with child-bearing. Sex is thus legitimized
for its utilitarian function. It is this view of sex as the
means of procreation that has permeated the thinking of
people for many ages. The view taken by Nietzsche is just
the opposite. "Joy", he says, "does not want heirs or
children—joy wants itself, wants eternity, wants recurrence,
wants everything eternally the same." 5

Now Miss Hellman is not a liberator. She does not
accept the seeking of sensual enjoyment as an end in itself.
The use of the body as a mere object—as an instrument of
pleasure—is revolting to her. As regards the utilitarian
view of sex held by the traditionalists, there is an
extremely strong negative attitude towards all sexual urges
other than those sanctioned by custom. But Miss Hellman
believes that sex must have more than one function and that
sensual gratification is as much its purpose as procreation.
Sex, according to her, is not an end in itself, but seen in
broad perspective where it affects the human psyche, its
importance cannot be ignored. Homosexuality, according to
her, cannot find its justification in procreation or in
religiously sanctioned marriage. It represents sexuality as
an expression of hedonism—of love-making devoid of any
utilitarian social end.

Sexual freedom, Miss Hellman believes, is not a matter
of two persons. It is not simply a discharge of physical
tension but a positive mode of human relations. It is not the
discharge of energy that is the decisive factor; but the
encounter itself, and the exaltation of communion in love it
brings about, which are of real human importance.
With this idea behind it, this play *The Children's Hour* proved to be an emotional bombshell in its honest yet sensitive handling of homosexuality.

### Sexual Maladjustment and Neurosis

Her next play *Days to Come* was about labour strife but it is also interwoven with the complicated neurotic lives of the industrialists themselves. As such it is perhaps a clearer illumination of the forces from which strikes grow than would be the portrayal of contemporary socio-economic conditions. Cora, the factory owner's sister, is a silly psychotic who acts like a child fussing with the servants, hating her brother's wife with an incestuous jealousy and knowing little of sex. She thinks that caesarian operations take place when the woman is underage (DC, p.77). Andrew's wife, Julie, too is a neurotic, unsatisfied woman who had married without love and has had an affair with Andrew's business partner Henry Ellicott. This is a loveless affair and leaves the chasm in her heart all the more gaping. Sensible Julie has come to realize that it was a purely loveless affair which had nothing to do with the integration of her personality. She frankly points it out to her paramour:

"..."
Julie (puts her hand on his arm). What did I expect you to mean to me? I don’t know. I haven’t any excuse, really. I’ve hoped for a very long time that every body or any body would mean something.

... (Earnestly) Look. Don’t let’s talk about it. You like civilized conversations about love too much, and I like them too little. One of the things that brings people like you and me together is the understanding that there won’t be any talk about it at the end.

Ellicott. That’s true. And it’s too callous for me.

Julie (violently). And for me, too. That’s why I don’t like it. I’m ashamed of its callousness. . . .

(DC, pp. 82-83)

Miss Hellman believes that love relations remain joyless and devoid of happiness if one uses the partner as a mere means of pleasure. This is a threat to all human relations. These relations do not give joy because they do not fulfill what we are and what we strive for. Julie is a sex-starved woman, whose basic needs were never satisfied by her husband or anybody else. Every man she met failed her. In the course of time, she meets Whalen the union leader and her insatiable drives and restless seeking for sensation prompt her to fall in love with him, but this too is a failure.

The Little Foxes too deals with people with their sexual lives disrupted. Oscar is such a case. He has turned a sadist and he gives an outlet to his maso-sadism by going hunting every morning, having missed only one day in eight years, but he will not permit the starving Negroes to shoot animals for food (LF, p. 157). Then his sister Regina—the vixen, but by no means little—prays at night that her husband Horace wouldn’t come near her and has refused to have sexual
relations with him for many years (LF, p.168). And then she
gives a hint of lesbianism by her curiosity over the lovely
women in Chicago (LF, p.137).

In Another Part of the Forest, the masculinity of Regina
is illuminated and so is her extraordinary attachment to her
father. But it is truer the other way round and, according
to Miss Hellman, this attachment is much more significant
than her attachment to Captain John Bagtry.

The two plays with a Nazi background Watch on the Rhine
and The Searching Wind, have the same undercurrent. The latter
play is a clear case of misplaced motives and substitutions.
In this play Miss Hellman has tried to show that to ignore
powerful undercurrents in emotional life, as in external life,
can only bring devastation upon the society and the individual.

Most of the characters in The Autumn Garden suffer from
this internal emotional disarray. General Griggs, a retired
officer, married to a scatter-brained and flirtatious woman,
is at the verge of divorcing her. Edward Crossman has loved
Constance but never married her by some strange whim of his
own. Frederick develops an attachment for a Mr. Payson. His
homosexuality is, however, on the unconscious level. And
then there is his mother who, as his grandmother knows, will
never want him to marry. And she will never know it. (AG,
p.539). The relationship of Nick and Nina is not completely
harmonious. Nick is a weak, passive, dependent man destined
always to be unfaithful, and Nina is unconsciously masochist
and requires just a man-child.

Carrie with her "vagina in the lace box" (p.741) in
Toys in the Attic is another case of misplaced affections.
It is not only that she has suppressed her desires and
channelized them in a wrong course, it also means that,
obessed with incestuous feelings for her brother Julian, she
has repulsed the amorous advances of many a young man, who
might have liked to have her for her own sake.

The last play My Mother, My Father and Me is a sordid
case of sexual orgies. It is a real life drama of sex-
repressed women, whose pastime is sex-gossip and psychoanalysis,
exploiting themselves for want of real satisfaction in life.
They are, to borrow the fitting phrases of Sievers, "what
nature abhors—frigid and frozen." Most of the characters
in this play are sex-perverts truly representing the American
society as Dr. Kartz rightly remarks (MM, p.798). In this
play, neurosis has made Mrs. Nona Halpern a frigid woman, and
her frigidity in turn has become a source of incestuous
fixation and reckless promiscuity. Given the elements of an
unhappy marriage, her frigidity has resulted in tears, quarrels
and scenes. It is her frigidity that impels her to keep Berney
tied to herself with a silver cord. She is jealous of any
affection demonstrated by him for anybody else. She is too
selfish to allow him any sexual expression as an adult and
always keeps discouraging friends of the opposite sex.
She vehemently opposes the visits of Filene to her house and
makes a scene when the latter is seen coming out naked from Berney's room (MoM, pp. 776-77). If this play is critical of the vulgarity of Mrs. Lazar, it also comes out strongly in praise of the vigour of a healthy sex life, not the guilt-ridden conscience of Berney, or the twisted desires of Katz or the recklessness of Rona but the soul-satisfying experience of Styron and Hannah (MoM, p. 796).

4 Sexual Maladjustment - Its Causes

Miss Hellman believes that any internal disharmony in a person is born of the rift between sensuality and the other dimensions of life. This rift is rooted in a misconception of the relationship between body and ego and of the role which the body plays in human life. According to her, it is a wrong belief that I and the body are two separate entities. She agrees with Adrian Van Kaam that body is nothing but one's own consciousness embodied. My body is I, it is my desire, my bodily behaviour by which I as body make the world. Thus the body is the meaning giving existence. It assumes spontaneously and actively a position to make some meaning-image.

But this behaving body does not know. Its possessor is not conscious at all what happens in and through his experiencing body. Something may have sexual meaning for him and he may have the same for some one else without each other's knowing it. Karen in The Children's Hour has this sexual
meaning for Martha. The latter has imparted a sexual-meaning image to Karen without her knowledge. The person may retire from the situation to diminish the effect of this appeal but this initial appeal will be there. The first moment of sexual appeal is the moment of the body, the next moment is the moment of response to this appeal. This next moment integrates the sexuality in the totality of our existence. The first moment, Miss Hellman believes, is temptation; and this first moment, according to her, does not originate in our free choice but it imposes itself on us as an invitation and as a challenge to our freedom. Whether or not we safeguard our integrity is dependent upon the answer that our freedom offers. If this answer, whether positive or negative, is in tune with our wholesome project of existence, it is integrative. If it is incompatible with our project, it is disruptive and leads to a feeling of existential guilt and failure. Martha has failed to integrate sexuality with her existence; hence she suffers and ultimately commits suicide.

Thus the integration of sex and existence for man, Miss Hellman believes, is also a question of the integration of his project of sexual life with the project of sexuality of his culture to which he has committed himself. If he acts against his own commitment, he cannot live with consistency and unity. Julie, Rona Halpern, Carrie, Martha and a host of other characters in the dramatic world of Miss Hellman have failed to attain this consistency and unity. As a result
their sexuality remains disintegrated and consequently disruptive. They fail to adhere to sexual discipline and embody it in behaviour and participation.

Besides this, man's libido reveals itself in all phases of his life but always in different forms which are in keeping with his age. Our sexual life must develop with growing age. If this development fails at any stage, as in the case of Carrie, then a person reverts back to primitivism. Carrie continues to be in her childhood phase in her attitude to Julian. Having centred her affections on him with a feeling of possessiveness, she fails to give a healthy wholesome outlet to her inner sexual needs. Hers is a case of repressed sexuality. It is this repression that has made her aggressive. She turns hostile when she feels cold shouldered by Julian. She takes an almost sadistic pleasure in exposing Julian and getting him defeated in his purpose and mercilessly beaten.

5 Sexual Maladjustment - Its Consequences

Miss Hellman believes that sex drive or procreative energy if not channelized in a normal course can be diverted into other "productive and group approved goals" to borrow the expression of Dr. Louis Berg. Sublimation is one. But the conflict between the reality and the desires of the ego is so great that sublimation is difficult to attain. All are not destined to become great poets. And this opens three possible
avenues: the person concerned compromises as in the case of Mrs. Prine (Toys in the Attic), who with her sexuality harmonized becomes a philanthropist in its true sense; or he takes a flight into neurosis as does Julie Rodman (Days to Come), or Rona Halpern (My Mother, My Father and We); or he becomes morbidly aggressive as is Carrie in Toys in the Attic. In the case of Julie Rodman her sexual desire has not been satisfied and it has not been sublimated. The result of this frustration is repression which has ultimately brought her neurosis in the form of schizophrenia. It is this neurotic need for affection that becomes compulsive in her. To her the gaining of affection is not a luxury nor primarily a source of additional strength or pleasure but a vital necessity, she must be loved at any cost. Thus she is in love with love, and she attaches this desire to everyone without discrimination, to any acquaintance or even a stranger, so much so that she throws to the winds all norms of conduct, and fed up with Henry Ellicott now desires the company of Whalen. She needs another man's affection for the sake of assurance against anxiety which becomes, as Arnold A. Rogow would put it, an "idee fixe". She, therefore, reaches out desperately for any kind of affection for the sake of this assurance. All that she feels is that here is some person, it may be Ellicott or Whalen, whom she likes or trusts or with whom she feels happy. But what she takes as spontaneous love is nothing but a response of hope and affection aroused by that person. That person is now invested with great importance and her
feeling manifests itself as an illusion of love. Julie takes Whalen to be her saviour who would give her his love and would redeem her from her wretched life. But this is only what Dr. Karen Horney calls "the subjective conviction of attachment." In reality her so-called love is only her clinging to Ellicott or Whalen to satisfy her own needs.

The case of Mrs. Halpern (My Mother, My Father and Me) is worse. Her vitality—her hypersexual temperament and dissatisfied sexual life—makes her case more miserable. Sexual frustration in marriage results into promiscuity which further causes total frustration. She makes unlimited experiments in sex and that makes her a permanent analysand. Her frustrated abnormal sexuality expresses itself in an unrestrained orgy, but it is without consequences; nothing really happens. One sexual encounter leads to another and that is equally disappointing. That is the story of her life.

A Thing that can Never go Wrong

Oh, life is a glorious cycle of song,
A medley of extemporanea;
And love is a thing that can never go wrong,
And I am Maria of Roumania.

"These lines from Dorothy Parker reveal her attitude to life as well as Hellman's" says J. Epstein. This lesson of love, writes Doris V. Falk, she must have learned from Zilboorg.
But her deepest lessons of love came from Sophronia and Hannah, her two black servants, her two aunts Anna and Jenny, and Dashiell Hammett.

It is wrong to assume that love, since it is connected with the libido, is nothing but sex. Sexuality is an important force or energy implanted by nature in man. But the sexual instinct, howsoever important, is not the sole or supreme passion in life. Man has never been governed exclusively by his loins. Thus physical gratification alone is not enough to make a man happy. It is this wrong notion that sends Julie Rodman (Days to Come) from one person to the other, and makes Mrs. Rona Halpern (My Mother, My Father and Me) change beds frequently. For, man, Miss Hellman believes, does not wish to be possessed by instinct; he has no desire to be equated only with body and its appetites. He wants to be loved for his own sake, for his whole sake.

Sex is not for its own sake and for the sexual act consummated, but for the sake of love, loyalty, devotion and the sacrifice of self-love. Miss Hellman does not confuse love with the sexual instinct alone which can function without it. According to her, love exists because people believe in it; it is specifically a human faculty, a vital creative effort on the part of man to transcend the boundaries of self.

It need not be too strongly emphasized that in her dramatic world the call of sex goes beyond the realm of the physical, it represents a search for human relationship—a way out of
existential loneliness and isolation. It is transformed in character when it is supported by a feeling of love and responsibility and then sex becomes something far more than a desire for momentary satisfaction; it is the principal means of escape from the loneliness which afflicts most men and women throughout the greater part of their life.

It is this type of love that Alex and Cassie have cherished for each other:

Cassie. Maybe . . . (He nods) Are you in love with Emily?

Alex. I love Emily. Very much, I think. But I—

(Takes her arm) Oh, Cassie, it's taken me fifteen years to say these words even to myself: I was only in love once.

Cassie (Very softly). Me, too.

(SW, p. 313)

7 Platonic Love - A Palaver

The experience that Alex and Cassie have had is more than merely a physical contact could promise. But all the same Miss Hellman does not recognize the Platonic or ideal love—love that is not consummated, materialized and fulfilled. She ridicules that form of love in no unclear terms. Here is Sophie, the very incarnation of wisdom voicing the sentiments of the author:
Sophie (timidly, pointing out towards room). Should I—should I say, Mr. Ned? Why is Aunt Constance so nervous about the visit of this lady and gentleman?

Crossman. Because she was once in love with Nicholas Denery, this gentleman.

Sophie. Oh. Such a long, long time to stay nervous. Great love in tender natures, and things of such kind. (As he turns to stare at her) It always happens that way with ladies. For them it is once and not again; it is their good breeding that makes it so.

Crossman. What is the matter with you?

Sophie (Laughs). I try very hard to sound nice I try too hard, perhaps?

(AG, p. 430)

For Sophie such spiritual and Platonic love exists only in the world of fools. It should not be allowed to interfere with the smooth running of life. It should not come in the way of a marriage that promises comforts and conveniences. Even 'that leaner—that sucker' Nick knows it and practises it.

Nick. I'm not sure you didn't. You could have married Ned, instead of dangling him around, the way you've done.

Constance. Ned has come here each summer because, well, because I guess this is about the only home he has. I loved Ned and honored him, but—I just wasn't in love with him, when we were young. You know that and you'd have been the first to tell me that you can't marry unless you—(He begins to laugh) What are you laughing at?

Nick. 'Can't marry unless you're in love'. What do you think the rest of us did? I was in love with you. I've never been in love again.

(AG, p. 510)
And here it comes again from same Sophie:

Sophie. Yes, Mrs. Ellis, and I agree with you. Nothing will change. If Frederick is willing for an early marriage then I am also willing.

Constance: Is this the way it is? Willing to marry, willing to marry—

Sophie. I do not use the correct word?

Constance (to Mrs. Ellis and Carrie). If that's the way it is, then I am not willing. I thought it was two young people who—who— who loved each other. I didn't even understand it—and I didn't ask questions, but—willing to get married . . .

Sophie. Aunt Constance is sad that we do not speak of it in the romantic words of love.

Constance. Yes. I am. And shocked. When Carrie first talked to me about the marriage, I asked you immediately and you told me you were in love—

Sophie. I never told you that, Aunt Constance.

Constance. I don't remember your exact words, but of course I understood—you mean you and Frederick have never been in love? Then why have you—

Sophie. Aunt Constance, I do not wish to go on with my life as it has been. I have not been happy, and I cannot continue here. I cannot be what you have wished me to be and I do not want the world you want for me.

(AG, pp. 512-13)

8 Marriage as a Matter of Convenience

Thus marriage is a matter of convenience. It has least to do with emotions, heart and love and all that romantic or imaginative nonsense that goes with it. Only a marriage has to work comfortably well for the partners. Affairs outside marriage, love as an extra-marital affair, can also be there without any scruples or feeling of guilt. But then such affairs should not go to destroy the marital adjustment
and smooth life of the spouses. Such are the feelings of Cassie here:

Alex. (turns, takes her arms). Let me come down to the country to see you. Please, Cas.

Cassie (nervously). I—er, I want to, Alex. The truth is, I've wanted to for a long time, I mean—but I don't want it to be wrong. I—I wouldn't stand it—if it worried you afterwards or you felt guilty, or Emily—or I felt guilty.

Alex. I don't feel guilty... (He puts his arms around her). Please, Cas. Let me come down.

Cassie (after a second, smiles). All right, darling. It will make me happy. I hope it will make you happy, too.

(SW, p.313)

Miss Hellman allows love a primary position and allotst traditional marriage a secondary, subservient position. She does not make any fuss about pre-marital or extra-marital affairs. She does not equate this type of chastity with character. Chastity is only a part of character and that too not very important.

Marriage to her is a matter of social convenience. It is an agreement which should be rescinded the moment it ceases to work smoothly. Wise old Moses expresses these sentiments. His statement, facetious though it may sound, is all the same packed with wisdom. Here he expresses his feelings about his trying wife:

Moses. I felt sorry when she died, but I said, to myself of course, 'Really, my dear, you didn't have to go that far to accommodate me. You could have moved across the street.' It's a bad thing not to love the woman you live with. It tells on a man.

Cassie. Falls on a woman, too, I should think.

(SW, p.295)
And then Miss Hellman brings in Birdie on whose life an incompatible marriage has told, and told heavily. Her life has been a long chain of sufferings and miseries.

Alexandra. Why did you marry Uncle Oscar?

Birdie. . . . (Wheel on Alexandra). Ask why he married me. I can tell you that he's told it to me often enough.

Addie. Miss Birdie, don't—

Birdie. (speaking very rapidly). My family was good and the cotton on Lionnet's fields was better. Ben Hubbard wanted the cotton and Oscar Hubbard married it for him. He was kind to me, then. He used to smile at me. He hasn't smiled at me since . . .

And again,

Birdie. . . . In twenty-two years I haven't had a whole day of happiness. Oh, a little, like today with you all. But never a single, whole day. I say to myself, if only I had one more whole day, then—(The laugh stops). And that's the way you'll be. And you'll trail after them, just like me, hoping they wouldn't be so mean that day or say something to make you feel so bad . . .

(LF, p. 183)

Birdie is not the only one who, 'married to her hurt and kept it hid.' There are many such unfortunate cases of incompatible matches where marriage sealed the fate of the young girls and put them behind the so-called holy wedlock to weep their life out to the bitter end. Miss Hellman takes cognizance of that deep agony through which many such women pass, and offers a scathing criticism of marriage. Her last play My Mother, My Father and Me is a sad and savage reflection on marriage as an institution in American society, which is
apparently facing a crisis. Marriage that one-hour-church-ritual, she takes to be a dead institution which is better done away with. No more sacred in our modern society, it has lost even its practical value of keeping the husband and wife together. It no more breeds understanding, sympathy and communion between the life partners. The unhappy couple in *Days to Come* are the first to recognize and assert it.

Julie. I didn't know any of that. (After a second) There are a lot of things we don't know about each other.

Andrew. I suppose so, darling. That's the way with most marriages, I guess.

(De, p.117)

Miss Hellman's long association with Hammett (he was an indispensable fact of her life as a free partner for thirty-one years) was hardly happy or passionately romantic. Romantic love could be, as she shows through Lily's love for Julian in *Toys in the Attic*, a silly, potentially destructive force, best ignored. It was Eros or sexual love that exerted the most powerful influence on personality and this lesson she learned from Bethe her German cousin. Miss Hellman says to Bethe, "It was you who did it. I would not have found it without you." We can readily guess what that 'it' is; it is love between adults of opposite sex. Miss Hellman further adds: "It was that day in the restaurant, you and Arneggio—" But Bethe silences her with a hand over her mouth thereby implying that she did not believe in a romantic everlasting attachment with Arneggio. Her approach in matters amorous was practical and so is Lillian's.
Thus her plays from the first *Children's Hour* to the last *My Mother, My Father and Me* furnish a rational view of sex. Rebelling against the regnant social order and its sexual morality, giving an insight into the psychological and moral needs, she reflects the changing mores of a culture. A humanist concerned with moral and social reconstruction, she works out a new sexual ethic appropriate to new concepts of human nature. Her views on this most complex and difficult of topics are most informed, intelligent and incisive as they are wise and compassionate and accordingly command assent equally by their truth of feeling and their truth to the facts of experience. Her views are grounded in open-mindedness, fairness and scrupulousness in the treatment of this very controversial problem of modern life with positive knowledge. Her plays stir the deep layers of thought with bold and broad insight and observation. Needless to say, Miss Hellman always pleaded for an understanding and openhearted adjustment between the partners. Marriage or no marriage, the life partners should constantly work together for a happy life, without any preconceptions coming in their way. Human happiness being the ultimate good, anything that enhances it stands boldly upheld by her. Thus we can see that in her attitudes with regard to love, sex and marriage as is visible in her work, Miss Hellman is a humanist.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3 Ibid.


15 Ibid.