CHAPTER VI

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The plays of Miss Hellman can roughly be divided into three groups, namely the plays of action, the plays of character and the plays of ideas. The Little Foxes, Another Part of the Forest, Watch on the Rhine and Toys in the Attic can be considered her chief plays of action. In Watch on the Rhine and The Little Foxes, we have some ideas of social reform too revealed in addition to forceful characterization. The plays of character are The Children's Hour and The Autumn Garden. The rest of the plays like Days to Come, The Search Ing Wind, Montserrat, The Lark, Candide, My Mother, My Father and Me are plays of ideas. This classification is chiefly based upon the predominating tendencies. Otherwise, in all the dramas of Miss Hellman we have action, characters and ideas in appealing aesthetic proportion.

1 The Plays of Action - Their Plot Construction

The plot of The Little Foxes consists of a series of crises, each one only partly resolved so that the audience is kept waiting for the final resolution, only to be surprised or shocked by a sudden reversal leading to a new crisis. Thus
each subsequent incident is logically dependent upon the
foregoing one. The climax is reached in a quarrel and a
death. Then comes the final denouement in which a few
strands still remain unresolved. Thus the drama maintains
a life-like open ending, with all its incidents taking their
birth and origin in the circumstantial necessities of the
earlier context. It is this quality that makes this a well-
made play.

In its story, the bad characters of a Southern family
work out their cruel plots for their aggrandizement. Their
suspense-packed action begins with a conspiracy to cheat in
an investment by stealing some bonds. The villain is
discovered but temporarily protected, though exposed again
through the sudden death of the man who spared him. We also
see the good members gradually revealing to themselves and to
the readers the depth of evil in the villainous characters.

That this play pleases is partly owing to our delight
in seeing something happen. In addition to the balancings of
family power, there are denunciations, intimidations, embezzle-
ments, threats and a near-murder.

Structurally, the play is a beautiful example of stage
economy. The whole show is managed with one set, a wheel
chair and a cast of ten. Its plot has been so conceived that
with the right kind of stage imagination we could study the
heightening effect of the off-stage quarrel becoming terrible
because the man is dying or the absurd music of the piano
falling over his harsh striving.
The entire first act is an outstanding example of perfect dramatic exposition. We come to know about its theme—the shift of Northern mills into the quieter regions of cheap labour. The revelation of the past too weaves naturally and unobtrusively through the opening dialogue. From the moment of Birdie's breathless over-gay entrance and Oscar's sadistic smashing of her pleasure, the strains of personal antagonism become immediately clear. In front of their guest the vicious clan display their ignorance, their hypocrisy and their greed, while Marshall, the outsider, serves as a catalyst to bring out details the readers must know. The remaining acts maintain this well-built structure, as each scene further intensifies what has already been established. There is not a single loose end throughout the play to distract or mislead.

The plan of Toys in the Attic too is carefully worked out. Though the basic material seems to be borrowed from Chekhov's The Three Sisters—there is a lot of parallelism between the characters, situations and dialogues of these plays—yet there is one major difference. The action of Chekhov's play is most casually developed. It covers a period of almost four years. But Toys in the Attic is very tightly plotted and covers less than twenty-four hours—the briefest time, it is worth noting, in any of Miss Hellman's plays. This effect has been achieved by showing incidents related to the peregrination of one character that is Julian. And then the unity of action has been maintained by restricting the drama to a single occurrence, that is, Julian's coming into property.
and the critical moments it entails, with its causes and immediate consequences. The third unifying device is the singularity of locale. It is the New Orleans house of the Berniers. As in *The Little Foxes* we have all the visible action in one location, thus observing the old principle of unity of place.

Miss Hellman effects dramatic unity through one more device, that is, through what Albright calls the "device of articulation",² by having one or more characters from an episode remain on stage through the succeeding episode so that all the episodes within each act are linked by characters carried over from episode to episode.

The plot certainly has some artificialities to satisfy the classical rules of unity of time and place. It is absolutely necessary that Julian should carry his unearned gains around in cash. It is equally necessary that even though he has been in New Orleans a week completing his deal without coming home, he should come home the night before the final step in the deal is to be carried out. It is also necessary that Anna should stay out of the room for a long time—long enough for Carrie to work Lily up to the telephone call.

One can question the artistic validity of Julian's carrying a hundred and fifty thousand dollars around in his pocket or leaving a deal dangerously unfinished. And then the sheer coincidence of Carrie's hearing the fatal conversation—
-tion and Anna's staying out of the room seem equally arbitrary. It can be said in Miss Hellman's defence that the more natural gradualness would not do for her tightly constructed kind of play. And it is in this that the plot of this play can be called a simple one. It represents a direct and quick progression of events from an accepted starting point to the predictable ultimate end with no major deviation from the expectation. Even when she, as in the case of Julian's arrival declared but delayed, she does so to arouse suspense. The same amount of suspense is created when Anna faces a dilemma till she makes the impending choice of bursting the boil in Carrie's life; and till then the progression is suspended and interest intensified.

Thus the plot of this play is highly startling and artificial. But despite its arts and artifices it is a great attempt at realism which fails not, because of this artificiality. Its technique is "not realism but realism stylized", 3 says Adler. It is contrived but not without compensating stylization. Thus it is not "a puppet show" 4 as characterized by Tom F. Driver. It is mechanical; but then its mechanism is so perfect that it appears true more to life than to theatre. The point it makes is universally true and the characters she gives are true to life. They display genuine human feelings. Miss Hellman, a thorough professional as she is, concocts a play that maintains sustained interest, quickens the pulse and provides good reading.
In construction, *Watch on the Rhine* is a cliche of the well-made, drawing room drama. In the plush setting of a mansion in suburban Washington one group of characters is anxiously awaiting the arrival of another group. In expressing anticipation and anxiety, they provide the audience with details about the new arrivals. When the guests arrive we have a fine family recognition scene of the good people—after twenty years—full of happy surprise and further information. This is followed by an ominous scene of suspected recognition between two old enemies. And then a direct conflict starts between the Count and Muller. The act concludes with evil just about to get the upper hand over good, in which we, the readers, do relish the suspense. This mechanical structure continues in the subsequent act through a series of confrontations, crises and resolutions between various characters ending in a climactic confrontation and final denouement which brings catastrophe, but all the same on a lofty note.

*Another Part of the Forest* has a complex plot in which the outcome is different from the expectation, the normal progression. The play progresses towards the expulsion of Ben at the hands of Marcus but the revelation of Lavinia about the complicity of her husband in the massacre of the Southern youth comes as a surprise-element and gives an unexpected shift to the direction. This surprise becomes more dramatic because it is also consistent with the events which precede and follow it. Thus it becomes an integral
part of the progression and becomes all the more dramatic when it occurs at an especially opportune and critical moment. And this change—reversal of fortune—though abrupt, is dramatically and aesthetically logical and satisfying.

2 The Plays of Character.

The incidents are not ends in themselves nor do the plot devices further the action in her social plays. They are rather used as indirect means of focussing our attention on the inner lives of the characters. Her plays dealing with social relationships render the conflict intelligible because she presents it in action which has logical unity and which is based on knowledge both of the individual's psychology and of the social forces which condition the situations of individual characters. Days to Come with its compound plot shows on the one hand the strikers pitted against the capitalists and their hirelings; and on the other hand, it shows the disrupted emotional lives of the rich people. The sub-plot dealing with the Julie-and-Whalen-affair has no effect on the main plot that is the labour-strife, but it adds to the reality of the play and serves to mirror the causes of this conflict.
Thus action in Miss Hellman's plays usually springs from the character as, for example, in the case of Julian (Toys in the Attic). It might have been driven forward by the unstable equilibrium between Carrie's will and her environment or it might have been made devious by various complications like Julian's pre-marital affair with the mulatto, but here it mainly springs from his love for unearned income. This is more so in the case of Montserrat (Montserrat) who by nature is just and is at odds with his own countrymen for perpetrating atrocities on the Spaniards. The same is the case with Kurt in Watch on the Rhine. His nature suggests conflict with external forces when placed in a particular social setting.

This play is rather faulty in structure. The exposition is slow and the sub-plot is slightly cumbersome. The main issue comes up only in the second act and there are many lapses from the probable. Yet with all these faults, the play in its authentic passages, has so successfully translated a fundamental human ideal into dramatic terms that its shortcomings are forgotten. It shows the struggle of man for liberty and for a decent way of life. Kurt is a rounded and appealing character. He is at once heroic and human, brave and fearful—a man, by nature, thoughtful, peaceful loving, gentle and compassionate who proves his ideals in the crucible action. At first he proves quiet and unobtrusive, drifting to the climactic moments when he attempts to put into words the driving forces that motivate his life. His performance mounts continuously in its emotional impact and its wide-flung implications. He shows greater stature than the incidents
demand, bringing to it overtones of meaning beyond the actual content of the words spoken and deeds done. His manner is quiet and restrained. He does not talk much, still he is successful in conveying that sense of anguish and preoccupation, the fear that haunts him, his desolation at the necessity of going back into a way of life against which his whole self revolts. By virtue of his character, Kurt Muller, like Hamlet, revolts against the cursed spite that calls upon man to set matters right by violence. He also represents men who hate violence whose minds are repelled by brutality but who, all the same, act for that illusive idea—liberty.

Miss Hellman has expressed this issue in terms of character-in-action. Whalen (Days to Come) is another such character. He too comes in the category of those who work for others. So do Montserrat (Montserrat) and Joan of Arc (The Lark). They all live and die for others.

The plays of action are strongly plotted around a philosophical idea or a social problem. Characters in such plays oppose or react to each other in a series of confrontations moving towards a climax. But her plays of character, The Autumn Garden for one, emphasize complex moods in the plays. The form of these plays is not an imitation of action, it is rather an expression of a condition or a state. It progresses not through a predetermined subject and plot but through an increasingly intense and revealing series of emotional states. Any summation of the plot of The Autumn Garden is the summation
of its characters. It is its characters that are the autumnal leaves in the autumn garden "those faded flowers clustering together for protection in a boarding house—a summer resort." The unity in the play is maintained through the frustrated moods of these characters.

Besides this, in plays of action the characters are revealed from without. There are external incidents and speeches from other characters which throw light on them whereas in her later plays of character the author invites them to be self-revealing. "Their plight", says J.M. Brown, "does not raise general ethical questions. Her characters like the characters of Chekhov are the victims of themselves, wandering ego, frustrated and despairing who lived in a constant state of spiritual cross-ventilation." Here is Crossman, that amiable inebriate who, outwardly sardonic and sophisticated, is inwardly much baffled and bewildered by life. In the fine and very touching last scene, his following speech is typically self-revealing:

Crossman (stares at Constance; then slowly, carefully).
I live in a room and I go to work and I play a game called getting through the day while you wait for night. The night's for me—just me—and I can do any thing with it I want. There used to be a lot of things to do with it, good things, but now there's a bar and another bar and the same people in each bar. When I've had enough I go back to my room—or some body else's room—and that never means much one way or the other. A few years ago I'd have weeks of reading—night after night—just me. But I don't do that much any more. Just read, all night long. You can feel good that way.
The characters in this play, as well as in her other character-plays, are so consistent in their behaviour and reactions that they behave like flat characters deviating not a bit from their original stand. Thus the author establishes and maintains the emotional confidence of the readers. But despite their flatness, she adds a richness to these portraits; she depicts them with many facets to their personalities, with many interests and enthusiasms, sympathies and prejudices. That strange and beautiful Mrs. Prine and her pale Negro lover Henry Sampson in Toys in the Attic are among such interesting characters. They are so delicately and yet candidly presented that their relationship has enormous power and meaning.

The drama like all other forms of literature is an emotional art and the first job a playwright has in the theatre, says Lindsay, is to engage the emotions of the audience favourably to one or more of the characters. And Miss Hellman has successfully done so in these plays so much so that she almost identifies herself and consequently we identify ourselves too— with these creatures of imagination. This happens in the case of Joan in The Lark, and Horace in The Little Foxes. Though these characters are tragically defeated, we are rewarded by developing a pity and compassion that is in itself satisfying. No play, even that perfect piece of existentialism The Autumn Garden, ends in frustration; and the central character is an unsympathetic study. Even when Miss Hellman does it, as in the case of Regina, she does it in a superb way. Regina is a part with teeth in
it—a part with a vicious bite of its own. She has a vixenish beauty and a harsh will of steel; she radiates ruthlessness; she is seductive and dangerous. She sits motionless and menacing in the last act while her husband dies in front of her eyes. What renders her character interesting is the vitality she exudes. She becomes the most impressive character, not because she is as alive as those around us but because her vitality distinguishes her from the human beings we see and hear in our daily lives.

Then there is Birdie the victim of a sadistic husband and a predatory family. She is the most lovable character with all her weaknesses and follies along with her nobility and sweetness.

Thus the characters in this play as well as the other plays are highly appealing and memorable. They have become household words. Some of these plays have been adapted for films and their film incarnations have become part of the American consciousness. These characters—Kurt and Cassie, Anna, Albertine and Addie etc., are so superbly done that, says Alex Szogyi, "they have etched themselves into our collective, theatrical consciousness."
3 The Plays of Ideas

The emphasis on character as a thing in itself leads to the fatal weakness of the characters turning something meaningless. These characters can only be understood when we understand what they are up to. "A play lives by its logic and reality", says John Gassner. "Conceptual confusion", he further adds, "is the disease that halts its pace, dulls its edge and disturbs its balance."

Now Miss Hellman never suffers from any 'conceptual confusion.' She writes with the clear purpose of stirring an audience to overt action on behalf of some social or political cause. The Little Foxes and The Searching Wind are of this type. While the former acquaints us with the evils of industrialization, the latter foretells the dangers of Nazism. But all the same these plays are not simple propaganda pieces. Composed and developed according to the principles of theatre-art, they tell a story and entertain.

Her plays of ideas are no propaganda plays. They can better be described as social dramas. As against the propaganda plays which deliberately propose a general solution, in her social plays the solution of the general problem always remains particular and particularly personal. Her Days to Come is a play of this type. Even when it gains in propaganda value on behalf of the largest social good, it doesn't lose its artistic value.
In her plays, characters are not forced to fit into a thesis; that would have rendered them unreal, and subordinating her thesis to life-like characters would have rendered the thesis confused and insignificant. Miss Hellman is an idealist and a philosopher; but she is also an artist, a playwright who invariably and skillfully integrates her message into art. She writes with fervour, the protest in her voice was strong; but this protest she puts in the mouth of her characters to whom these sentiments came as naturally as leaves to trees.

4 Miss Hellman - A Conscious Artist

Miss Hellman didn't have any theory of the process of creation. But she had proved her worth in this craft by using suspense in building up a climax, by clear handling of plot and subplot, to the effect that she was pronounced a champion of the well-made plays. However, she objected strenuously to this doubtful reputation. "Survival won't have anything to do with well-made or not well-made or words like melodrama", she said, "I don't like labels and isms. You write as you write, in your time as you see your world. One form is as good as another." But all the same, as Hammett had rightly judged, she "was far too held up by how to do things, by the technique." And this technique came to her instinctively and intuitively after a lot of perseverance and not from books.
Although her next play *The Little Foxes* established her as a sure-fire playwright, she continued to give each manuscript to friends and anxiously awaited their opinion. She took criticism uncomplainingly and prepared four to ten drafts of the manuscript. The script which finally went into rehearsal or print seldom needed any correction.

Thus she works on her material with a missionary zeal so much so that she elicited this remark from Dorothy Parker, a fastidious critic and creative artist herself, "Lily does things the hard way." (*Pentimento*, p. 178).

We are told that she wrote *The Little Foxes* and gave it to Hammett for reading. She had composed lengthy dialogues of local colour between two Negroes, Hammett reacted to it strongly. "Missy write blackamoor chit chat. Missy better stop writing blackamoor chit chat" he scribbled this note and left. It took Miss Hellman ten months of writing and rewriting to complete this play.

She used to keep what she called a writer's book and she noted down in it whatever came to her notice and whatever she found appealing (*Pentimento*, p. 13). This raw material collected in these books subsequently went into the making of her plays.

Her notebooks for a play are monumental, Margaret Harriman informs us, running into two or three volumes of four or five hundred single-space typed pages, each containing data on contemporary history, local customs, factual anecdotes,
political events, celebrities of the time and long lists of likely names for characters. In one of her notebook for *Watch on the Rhine*, Harriman adds, three pages are filled with German first and last names—Kathe, Werner, Maxl, Pillar etc. etc.—all of which she examined and discarded before she decided to name the German, Kurt Muller and his wife, Sara. Other pages carry details of the age, life and background of the characters. Frequently there are notes about their career, profession and way of life.13

5 On-the-Stage Violence

Miss Hellman generally avoids violence on the stage. In *Toys in the Attic* the man-handling of Julian by the hired thugs is reported, not enacted. But when she does it on the stage in *Watch on the Rhine*, the action is tense and entirely justified. It has meaning and consequence. Violence is there for a purpose, not just for a sensational effect. In her *Introduction to Four Plays*, she makes this distinction:

> I think the word melodrama in our time has come to be used in an almost illiterate manner. By definition it is a violent dramatic piece with a happy ending. But I think we can add that it uses its violence for no purpose, to point no moral, to say nothing in say—nothing's worst sense... But when violence is actually the needed stuff of the work and comes towards a large enough end, it has been and always will be in the good writer's field. 14
While writing the murder scene in *Watch on the Rhine*, Jean Gould informs us that the playwright consulted Dashiell Hammett as to what technique to employ for the best effect. Hammett objected to on-the-stage violence. But for once she didn't listen to him and the success of the scene proved that her instincts were right. Kurt Muller and his family had become the chums of American audiences, and the Count's death at his hands showed something like triumph of good over evil.15

6 The Artistic Use of Flashback and Lighting

Miss Hellman has resorted to flashback and lighting—methods not new to the American stage (Elmer Rice was the pioneer of this technique in *On Trial*)—to unfold the action of her plays more effectively. In *Candide* her problem was pretty difficult. Its span was long, its world spacious, and action at times too crowded. It was more so in *The Searching Wind*. This play was not only to resolve a puzzling twenty-two year old triangle story, but also to expose the ignorance and irresoluteness of two generations simultaneously. And to convey all this, the play flashes back and forth between Washington and Rome, Berlin and Paris, and between past and present.
More or less the same method is adopted in *The Lark* and *My Mother, My Father, and Me*. Here the light changes its focus from one part of the stage to the other suggesting the shift of scene in quick and kaleidoscopic succession. In these plays the playwright does not resort to the employment of scenery. She uses drapes as well as an effectively-lit cyclorama which gave more flexibility and fluency to her interpretation of history. It pointed out the timelessness of the tragic situation in the play, which implied that, regardless of the century in which it occurs, prophets and pioneers will be burnt at the stake.

When the curtain rises in *The Lark*, the stage is filled with many a projection and platform. On one of them Joan sits pale and still but with the grace and beauty natural to an inspired one. She is surrounded by her tormentors consisting of the English and the French alike. The tableau breaks, the trial takes its course and the action moves on.

For her judges Joan plays out the great scene of her life: the coming of the Voices, the rendezvous with angels and the thrashing she got when her father thought they were men, the political rehearsal with a rural winesack, Beaudricourt the advent at Chinos, the armed confrontations and the militant spirit of fighting France and then Joan gaining victory after victory. Thus the action moves. But in between, the light focusses on the court scene, thus reminding Joan, as well as the audience, of her present predicament. Thus scene follows
scene, past follows present, and present follows past. As Joan proceeds through her story, the stage light suggests her mood and clothes her in whatever colours she needs, as vividly as any scenery could—it may be the drab glory of a court room or the gloom of a dungeon night—it may be the awe-inspiring Visits of the angels or the pathos of a girl facing the cruel and cunning British. While she played her life out on the stage, the beauty of holiness emitted from her and beat upon the faces of the crowd like great white wings of the lark that she was.

Miss Hellman who had dedicated herself to realism in technique at the beginning of her career, left it only in a few adaptations: The Lark, Montserrat, Candide and My Mother, My Father and Me. In all other plays the setting was real South. Besides the realism of the setting, far more convincing is the reality of her standard interior—the huge over-furnished living rooms, the looming stairs the eaves-dropping verandahs and the like. All those with their disorder and dirt and unscheduled activities are authentically Southern. No playwright trailed so many mops and pails across the centre of his stage or gave so many pointless home-keeping chores to authenticate the background and behaviour of her characters.
7 Her Suggestive Language

In her language and dialogue, Miss Hallman has moments of exaltation and moments of depression. Her characters do make petty utterances in their uninspired moments such as "Damn you" (CH, p. 43), or "You have been in my house long enough. Get out" (CH, p. 45), or "You have already done a terrible thing," (CH, p. 43). But the moments of exaltation are innumerable. Here are impassioned speeches, the speeches of Joan for example, which soar to great heights:

Joan (after a long silence). For that which is of the Faith, I turn to the Church, as I have always done. But what I am, I will not denounce. What I have done, I will not deny. (The Lark, p. 584-90)

Or that impassioned, soul-stirring experience of that poet-soldier Warwick:

... The girl was a lark in the skies of France, high over the heads of her soldiers, singing a wild, crazy song of courage. There she was, outlined against the sun, a target for every body to shoot at, flying straight and happy into battle. To Frenchmen, she was the soul of France. ...

(The Lark, p. 580)

Or that passionate fiery plea of Horace:

... I am sick of you, sick of this house, sick of my life here. I'm sick of your brothers and their dirty tricks to make a dime. Why should I give you the money? (Very angrily) To pound the bones of this town to make dividends for you to spend? You wreck the town, you and your brothers, you wreck the town and live on it. Not me. Maybe it's easy for the dying to be honest. But it's not my fault I'm dying. I'll do no more harm now. I've done enough. I'll die my own way. And I'll do it without making the world any worse. I leave that to you.

(LP, p. 177)
And this is how Regina reacts:

Regina (looks up at him). I hope you die. I hope you die soon. (Smiles) I'll be waiting for you to die.

(L.F., p.177)

There couldn't be any more powerful substitute for Regina's above utterance. In her cruel calm tone she out-does even that fourth witch of Shakespeare.

Thus Miss Hellman creates oratorical miracles with the words that are spoken, living words that move, immediate expressions inseparable from action, unique phrases that cannot be changed to any other and belong to a definite person in a definite situation.

From The Children's Hour to My Mother My Father and Me Miss Hellman's style has grown richer and more expressive. While in the earlier Another Part of the Forest we get the rural idiom of the South, her last play My Mother My Father and Me smells and savours of the metropolis. In her Candide a brilliant musical, we get a rare and magical combination of poetry plus theatre. Thus Miss Hellman eminently justifies Cocteau's definition of drama "as poetry of the theatre as well as poetry in the theatre".16 It is more so in The Lark. In Candide, it is verse, in The Lark it is pure poetry. It is poetry in the mode of action and she makes us experience the real ecstasy on an exquisite plane—a state of heightened emotional experience. The vultures like hotz and Lazar too speak poetry in My Mother My Father and Me. But like Ferdinand
of Duchess of Malfi, they speak poetry of human rotteness, death and decay. Katz's proposal to strip the dead of their day-to-day garments and Mrs. Lazar with death as her bargain-condition create such anti-aesthetic feelings. Their poetry too affects our feelings and emotions, our imagination and spirit. It lifts us off the ground.

In Toys in the Attic and the latter My Mother, My Father and Me, she tones down the poetry of The Lark and uses "the genuine language spoken in real life."17 She resorts to realistic dialogue because she had certain characters in mind who could not express themselves in the language of the elite. Her use of prose in these plays gives them the verisimilitude and effects of authenticity, and she succeeds in building her plays more logically and convincingly. Thus she resorts to a flaccid humanistic middle style which is neither prosaic nor full of "verbal pyrotechnics"18 as John Gassner would put it.

In her plays the dialogues are short. They are curt and telegraphic. "Yes, I. Lonely" thus says Andrew Rodman (DC, p.98). There is an intensity of emphasis. We have definite economy and infinite implication. Sophie in The Autumn Garden points out that people "take many words to say simple things", (AG, p.491), which Miss Hellman never does.

In Watch on the Rhine Miss Hellman has a fighting message to deliver, but she is content to give it by implication and by emotional impact rather than by argument. For her it is sufficient to state that Kurt Muller is an 'Anti-Fascist';
"We are all Anti-Fascist" (Wk, p. 222), Kurt's American hostess remarks. But Kurt's wife is quick to point out the difference. "Kurt works at it" (Wk, p. 223), she exclaims with a sort of anguished pride. This working at it carries many implications. It may be persecution, torture, the constant threat of death and the like. Thus no compliment could be more eloquent and expressive than the one paid through these four mono-syllabic words: 'Kurt works at it'.

This play has many such subtle suggestive expressions.

"The speechless enchantment"\(^{19}\) of Kurt Muller is most apparent when he refers to the cheerful house of his in-laws by implying a comparison with one in dark murderous Europe. "This is a ... fine place to be" (Wk, p. 216). Equally eloquent are the short but meaningful propositions of Kurt and Count de Brancovis:

Kurt: Fanny and David are Americans and they do not understand our world.

(Wk, p. 254)

And Count speaks in the same vein:

Teck, ... We are Europeans, born to trouble and understanding it.

(Wk, p. 256)

"Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost degree,"\(^{20}\) says Pound. Miss Hellman's plays are great literature because they fulfil this condition. She never indulges in rant and rhapsody. She is governed by a sort of self-imposed control which never allows her to say more than what is utterly necessary.
On May 16, 1967 in Leningrad she went to witness a Gorki play. "Awful, just awful, decorated and ornamented with direction that can leave nothing unsaid, with actors who can leave nothing undone", she exclaimed (UW, p.209). She on the other hand, adheres to a style which may justly be called elliptical. She sometimes withholds information at one time to release it later for dramatic effect, or she leaves it with an unanswered question, or a tentative suggestion of an answer. But more often, she leaves the readers with the sense of a mysterious under-current of meaning. And then the mysterious under-current generally emerges out, giving some new meaning to the events.

[8] Her Symbolism and the Magic of Names

This restraint of language is compensated with the motions and gestures that express the thought. In The Little Foxes Ben makes threatening boasts about cheap labour and no trouble. At this place the Negro butler silently closes the door. While the Negro symbolizes the cheap labour—the black and white trash of the South—his silently closing the door symbolizes the silent unresisted exploitation of these poor at the hands of those foxes. Thus suggestive symbolism in Miss Hellman, to borrow the expression of Wheelright, strives towards a still unrealized future possibility yet to come, yet to be effected. Her symbolism is highly expressive. It
awakens insight in and through the emotions which it engenders. "Symbolism" says Charles F. Delson Jr., "broadens the possibility of drama as literature." and it is in this that her symbolism 'broadens the possibility of her drama as literature'. It defines atmosphere, environment or a whole complex as interpreted by the modern imagists.

Anna in *Toys in the Attic* is greatly attracted to flowers. She repeatedly keeps on pouring water on the camellia plant. She keeps this plant of faith alive. This act of hers is symbolic of her remaining faithful to the house and its inmates (TA, p.685). And then the author tells us "the garden has a table and chairs that have been painted too often and don't stay together very well."(TA, p.685). The pieces of furniture are a misfit among themselves and also in the surroundings. The same is the case with the inmates of the house. "Berniers live in a house", she says, "lived in by poor clean orderly people who don't like where they live."(TA, p.685). "All this symbolizes the forced humdrum existence of the Berniers in particular and the whole of mankind in general. In this connection, the title of the play too is highly suggestive and symbolic.

The titles of many of her plays are symbolic in tone and meaning. The title of her very first play, *The Children's Hour* is highly suggestive. It deals, if not with children's hour, with the child's hour since we know that it was the hour of triumph for the evil child Mary. It is she who had the last laugh.
Another Part of the Forest symbolizes the world as a forest—no more the Garden of Eden—where prevails the rule of jungle. The Little Foxes too has the same connotations. These little foxes are the selfish corrupt despicable Southern traders "that spoil the vines" (LF, p. 131), the corrupt enjoyers of privilege have not seen that "our vines have tender grapes." (LF, p. 131). Equally symbolic is The Searching Wind. This play searches the souls of the contemporary politicians, who had allowed the world to fall into the conflagration of a world war. In Watch on the Rhine, the Rhine symbolizes the growing Fascism which was eating away the roots of the world and humanity like the eroding inundating Rhine.

Sometimes her symbolism is such that the symbols do not only express the idea they stand for; it rather lays a bridge between the object (symbol) and the subject (the idea). It does not entrust the reality to sensory experience but to thought as well. The Greek busts and Greek books of Marcus Hubbard do not stand for his learning. They reveal him in his true light. Now he appears to us affected and artificial, a big hoax and humbug. This becomes glaringly apparent when we become aware of the irony behind his name, Marcus, reminding us of the contrast between the Marcus of the classics and the present Marcus.

Thus her symbolism opens the inner world of her characters. These symbols—Greek busts and a few books on Greek philosophy—expose Marcus and perform a sort of anatomy on his mind and character. They are not merely signs for something—one object
representing the other object or idea—they contain reality in their fullness. There is a subtle link between these symbols and the reality they stand for. They help us to grasp the hidden idea and see the truth in all its nakedness. Sometimes, there is no direct relationship between the symbol and the idea. The reader is expected to exploit his full store of knowledge—implicit and explicit—that has been furnished to him about the things and the people in order to understand the full implication of a symbol. "Vagina in the ice box" in the case of Carrie (TA, p.741) is such a symbol. Here a reader is expected to take into consideration the past and the present life of Carrie as well as her relations with the characters around her. It is this knowledge collected from external sources duly added by our powerful intuition that can help us conceive the idea and create the object in its true light. Only with such a knowledge at our back we can know the true meaning of this 'vagina in the ice box'.

Thus Miss Hellman makes a subtle use of symbolism. It has the property of being more in understanding than it is in existence. It points beyond itself, means more than it is. It is to borrow the words of Wheelright again, "ideally self-transcendent." 23

The repeated movements of Ned Crossman from the porch to the sitting room and back with a bottle of brandy in his hand is highly suggestive. It symbolizes his wasted, unadventurous, indoor life drowned in wine. All his outdoor activities are limited to the Tuckerman House with no other
place to go to. The title of the play *The Autumn Garden* too is suggestive in this respect. It is characters like Crossman and Griggs with their wasted faded lives that people our world—the autumn garden.

Thus it is her subtle symbolism that renders her style more real than real—rather impressionistic. She records, not with the camera's eye, but with some more intuitive sense of the nature of that which she describes.

9 Characterization - Age Spectrum

Miss Hellman is well aware of the magic of names. Her characters bear names that are highly suggestive in themselves. Moses, Sophie, Regina, Alexandra, Birdie, Constance are only a few of them. The irony behind the name 'Constance' is all too apparent.

Miss Hellman seems to use certain character types repeatedly in her plays. This concentration on certain characters serves to show her innermost convictions. There are broadly three categories: the old, the young and the middle aged midgets. These last have nothing but a ruined and wasted life to look back upon. From among the old ones whom we readily recognize are persons like Moses Taney, Grandma Jenny and old Mrs. Ellis. They speak for the author. Moses Taney finds himself in the midst of the broil of Mussolini's
capture of Rome. He says: 
"I knew most of this years ago. But I
should have known before that and I did. But I didn't know
I did. All night long I've been trying to find out when I
should have known." (SW, p.284).

This is the heart of the problem Miss Hellman has sought
to elucidate if not to solve. Why have the men of good will
and courage and intelligence allowed the destroyers of the
freedom and dignity of man to get the upper hand and how has
it come about that little or nothing was attempted besides
appeasement? How many of us knew what was happening and what
prevented our killing the evil before it took root and spread?

Sam Hazen in the same play, representing youth voices
the feelings of the author. Sam, who is heir to the mistakes
of his predecessors, cries out upon his parents and grandparents,
who have caused him to fight in another war and to lose a leg
in the process: "I don't want any more of my father's mistakes.
. . . I am ashamed of you both, and that is the truth. I don't
want to be ashamed that way again. I don't like losing my
leg. . . ." (SW, p.324). And again: "I love this place",
(SW, p.344), says Sam. 'This place' is of course America or
perhaps all the countries in which our way of life is based on
love, peace and justice.

The remaining three characters in this play, Alex Cassie
and Amelia, are held by Miss Hellman in pitiful contempt.

Miss Hellman uses this same arrangement of characters
along, says Doris V. Falk, "an age spectrum"—the old at
one end, the young at the other, affecting, or commenting on, the action of the characters in *The Autumn Garden*.

The only two characters who have any vitality in this play are a tough-minded old woman who will never wither until she dies and an equally tough young girl who knows what she wants and gets it when she hears the loud knock of opportunity. For the characters of middle age, Miss Hellman has more scorn than pity. There is Nick, the toucher. Old Mrs. Ellis rightly sums up his character: "You are a toucher. You constantly touch people or lean on them. . . . There are many of you the touchers and the leaners." (AG, p. 509). The others like Griggs or Crossman or Constance are no better. They are an ignorant lot who do not know even their own minds. They are, to borrow the fitting phrase of Altman, "the aging boys toddling down the vacant road of nothingness." 25

And then there is Sophie, the young girl, fully justifying her name. She is the most sympathetically drawn character. Thus these are the only two characters in the play who have not lied to themselves, who have powerful practical ideas about love, marriage and money. Sophie is building her fortune by taking proper action in the present; the old lady had built a triumphant past in the same way.

There are a host of other youths like Whalen, Ladvenu, Kurt, Alexandra and the like, who work for others. Alexandra, true to the spirit of her name, wins the final fateful battle against her evil mother. Before the play is over she asserts
herself and earns the right to be called a heroine. The young Julian in *Toys in the Attic* is a case of tragic affirmation. He has been beaten by hired thugs, and this is how he reacts:

Julian. . . . (With violence) Nobody ever beat me up before. Nobody's ever going to beat me up again.

( *TA*, p. 750)

And again,

Julian. . . . Well, I've had the bad. Maybe I got a little good luck coming to me. Other men make it easy. Plenty of room in this world for everybody. Just got to fight for it. Got to start again, start again.

( *TA*, p. 751)

It is not a sad confession of defeat but a tragic affirmation or rather a courageous declaration of carrying on the crusade.

10 The Role of Negroes

There is one more category—the Negroes. Hellman's blacks have on the whole worn well. These are the characters who endure in Hellman's world and who live their lives according to the inner rules of decent behaviour. They do not make trouble for other people and face the truth when others are deluded. They are often a helpless minority but they tacitly affirm their existence in the face of evil. They are a type which has become fixed or conventionalized. Their representation is usually through repeated duplication in almost all Hellman plays. They are the copy of a copy—an imitation of a type.
These characters who began with Agatha in The Children's Hour, appeared in some form in every play ending with Gus the black iceman in Toys in the Attic. These blacks, invariably servants in her dramatic world, are really the masters and mistresses of their situations. They are treated as members of the family. Though Miss Hellman pays them no sentimental compliment, she shows how the Negroes represent a set of moral and social values.

Addie (The Little Foxes) who, in a way, speaks for the Negro, is carefully, sparsely and beautifully sketched. She is divinely at peace with some inner faith that the present unjust order of things will ultimately be destroyed. At the end of the play, she laughs derisively because she comes to realize intuitively that every victory of the exploiters is demonstrably a step towards their ultimate defeat.

It would have been easy for the writer to make Addie a mouthpiece for the oppressed but thereby she would have ruined the surface reality of the play and at the same time weakened the plea she wanted to make. The special pleading for which Addie was introduced is resolved into a simple, almost a casual line of dialogue. When Horace tells her that he is going to leave her something when he dies, Addie answers laughing, "Don't you do that, Mr. Horace. A nigger woman in a white man's will. I'd never get it no-how." (LP, p.184).
The Negro servant Gus in *Toys in the Attic* with his cool penetrating insight looks into the working of the mind of Carrie and is unabashedly outspoken in laying bare her aberration. Thus he speaks more truth and wisdom than ever entered the heads of other characters. These Negro characters with the age-old wisdom of their fathers behind them are something like Hardy's philosophers' party. This earthy insight, which Miss Hellman shows through these blacks, came to her again from the blacks—her two coloured maid-servants—Sophronia and Helen.

11 Characterization—Realistic and Sympathetic

Joseph Wood Krutch refers to a very hostile criticism levelled against the characterization in *Another Part of the Forest*. The criticism goes that it was only Miss Hellman who could imagine such cunning and crooked characters with such dirty tricks and nasty speeches. Comparing the ugliness depicted in this play, it further goes, "*The Little Foxes* will have to be ranked as an idyl and *The Children's Hour* be dismissed as mere prentice work before its author had learned how to get along without the disturbing intrusion of goodwill. There is total depravity depicted for too long and completely without foil." 26

This scathing criticism is undeserved. This play rather clarifies the history of the family already introduced in
The Little Foxes. We shall have to admit at the outset that the head of the family is a rare scoundrel who reads his Aristotle and hears chamber music when he is not fore-closing mortgages or bullying his poor insane wife or taunting his two black-hearted sons, with the helplessness he has imposed upon them. He behaves like a sadist. He subtly enjoys refusing loan to the poor needy Birdie. He behaves like a villain with all except his daughter. And though at the end he suffers defeat at the hands of his eldest son Ben, we do not feel happy for long because we know that Ben is equally villainous and though one villain is foiled, there is no virtue to triumph.

But all this has a meaning. It is, according to Miss Hellman, a Marxian study of the decline of the Southern feudal aristocracy and the rise of the capitalist exploiter. There are no admirable characters in the feudal class, because by the accepted rules of natural game there couldn't be any. The dying aristocrats must be foolish because, otherwise, the historical process could not have taken place as it did. Even the fact that the scoundrels seem somewhat more likable than their victims, is precisely according to the accepted formula, since Capitalism though evil in itself, advances this dialectic process one stage beyond feudalism and satisfies the natural law of change.

This play proves to be honest and pointed because of its realistic characterization. This quality is much more conspicuous in her preceding triumph, The Little Foxes.
In outline, this play, *The Little Foxes* might be called a psychological horror story, so virulent is its contemplation of a hateful and rapacious people. It is essentially concerned with the story of one family, the Hubbards, allied against the outside world and hating each other bitterly. It is the tale of apparently pious sardonic old Ben Hubbard, who sneered at his brother and sister as he did at all the rest of the world; of brother Oscar, petty, mean, cruel, a tyrannical persecutor of his gentle wife; of his son Leo, thief and coward; chiefly, though it is the story of the beautiful and realistic Regina, a single-handed lady *Macbeth*, slyer and more cruel than either of her brothers.

As a foil to these evil characters, there is Birdie, sweet and noble in her silent suffering. Equally good are Horace and Alexandra to whom is extended our unqualified sympathy and who save the play from being a horror play. Both of them compete for our sympathy not merely by virtue of their contrast to the others but by a strength equal to the forces of opposition.

Thus this play is not just a deliberate attempt at manoeuvring a plot. Her characters talk and move in a believably realistic fashion, without seeming to be mechanically led like wound up machines to fill a certain gap. They are depicted as belonging to a historical period where material fortunes were the sole criteria of success in life, regardless of means. They live in a geographical locale where polite society is still torn apart by a desire to cling to old beliefs.
and by an inability to recognize the kind of change that must
come. Thus the characters are conceived and remain as a
natural part of the society in which they live. Their existence
is true historically and geographically.

Moreover, the Hubbards are in complete control of their
destinies. Nothing around them, in them, physical or social,
would compel them to act as they do. As opportunists, vicious
and without conscience, they proceed entirely on their own,
make their own decisions and have no one but themselves to whom
they must render account. The drama of their ugly lives is
believably real.

The nineteenth century would have demanded a full-scale
melodrama complete with punishment of the evil planners and
victory for the defenders of justice. A true realist, Miss
Hellman needs none of this. She knows and we know that
respectable society will always have Reginas, Oscars and Bens
to fight and that there are also Horaces and Alexandras to
fight them.

Equally real are characters in Toys in the Attic. Carrie
is interesting in her own way. Her appeal springs from her
individuality representing her unusual quality of character;
and as against Carrie, Anna is 'feminine' as Albright would
put it, because hers is a character which is true to life in
general. It represents more than one woman of one place and
time. It represents not only a woman but woman-kind.
Thus Miss Hellman creates convincing characters. They may be individual characters like Carrie or they may be typical like Anna, they are authentic and aesthetically acceptable.

Miss Hellman has an eye for public taste. She knows that the readers or the audience are more curiously and keenly interested in a character at his first appearance. Hence she gives greater weight to the earliest actions of the characters. In the very first scene of *Toys in the Attic* we come to know what type of characters Carrie and Anna are. We get a glimpse into the character of Carrie with her preference for open air and storm. She becomes aesthetically acceptable because she maintains that consistency of characters: consistency of type and consistency given at the starting point. All the characters of Miss Hellman maintain that consistency. They may begin with an emotion or impulse as in the case of Carrie, Julie or Mona, with their sexual abnormalities or they may begin with an ethical motive based on some faith or principle as in the case of Montserrat, Kurt or Whalen, but they are consistent through and through. This does not mean that her characters are static. The characters develop in the course of action. Julian changes, so do Crossman and Griggs. The playwright reveals them gradually so that the interest increases.

Miss Hellman is neither a carping critic nor is she a sentimentalist shedding tears on the sad fate of her lovable characters. Critics who found her mode of attack quite rasper
sometimes voiced the suspicion that Miss Hellman was a misanthrope. This can, however, be easily dismissed. The young Birdie in *Another Part of the Forest* and middle-aged wreck of Birdie in *The Little Foxes* and also Regina's husband and daughter in the same play and all but one character in *Watch on the Rhine* were conceived with sympathy and understanding. Even the characters who would appear on the surface villainous like the thug-chief in *Days to Come*, the German diplomat in *The Searching Wind* and the town-tart in *Another Part of the Forest* are drawn sympathetically.

The fact is that Miss Hellman does things with a heavy hand. She portrays her characters in strong colours projecting their typical features sharply, hence this over-effect. She herself admitted: "I had meant people to smile at and to sympathize with the sad weak Birdie. Certainly I had not meant them to cry... And I had meant the audience to recognize some part of themselves in the money-dominated Hubbards; I had not meant people to think of them as villains to whom they had no connection." Thus she creates her characters, like Charles Dickens. The cruel are made extra-cruel, and the pathetic extra-pathetic. In any case it must be conceded that although she forced her dramatic action a little too much, piling evil upon evil and grief upon grief, she carried on the traditions of Ibsen and the other native social realists like O'neill and *The Importance of Being Earnest* with due consideration for both the logic of character and the logic of situation.
In her later plays, particularly *The Autumn Garden*, the characterization becomes complicated and intricate. Threads running through them and knitting them and also the external world to express their inner relationship grow more intricate. In drama in general, destiny is what confronts man from without. In ancient drama one could easily distinguish between man and his environment—between hero and his destiny. But in her plays these lines of division have been blurred. "So much of the vital centre", remarks Eric Bentley, "streams out of the peripheries and so much streams from there into the vital centre of man, that the concepts which distinguish man from his environment, flesh from spirit, free will from circumstances, hero from destiny, character from situation" are nearly deprived of meaning in the face of the complexity of constant interaction.

In her *Toys in the Attic* the action springs from the characters. It is the hero who is the enactor of his action; whereas the characters in *The Autumn Garden* are more passive than active; they are acted upon more than they act for themselves; they defend rather than attack. Their heroism is mostly a heroism of anguish, of despair, not one of bold aggressiveness. Since the conscious will is absent and the inner man has fallen prey to destiny, the conflict is wholly subjective. But these characters win our praise because the inner powers of resistance upon which the spirit can depend become greater and more intense in direct proportion to the greatness and intensity of the opposing forces. And since
these characters, Crossman and Griggs for example, are confronted now not only with many more external factors but also by actions which are not their own, the struggle in which they engage is heightened into anguish. Something drives them into it, which they cannot resist. It is not for them to decide whether they even wish to resist. These characters are but pawns. Their will is but their possible move and it is what remains for ever alien to them, "the abstractum"\textsuperscript{30} as Bentley rightly says. General Griggs, the great war veteran, suffers from such a predicament. He is unaware of his own will. It is all mist. His significance consists only of this that the game cannot be played without him.

Miss Hellman is a realist and her urge for realism is so great that being a woman playwright and knowing more about women, she prefers women to men for her character-portrayal because she can write more authentically and authoritatively about them. "I can write about men", she said talking about the characters in \textit{Toys in the Attic}, "but I can't write a play that centres on a man. I've got to tear it up, make it about the women around him, his sisters, his bride, her mother . . ." (\textit{Pentimento}, p.242).
Her Characters Composed of Remembered Realities

Her affinity for characters from real life is so great that a good many of her characters have got some autobiographical importance. They are, as Marya Manners rightly remarks, "composed of remembered realities."

Miss Hellman put something of her friend Cowan in the making of Crossman in The Autumn Garden. In her own words, "I was what he wanted to want, did not want, could not ever want and that must have put an end to an old dream about the kind of life that he would never have because he didn't really want it" (Pentimento, p.31). The hero of The Autumn Garden suffers from this same predicament of unawareness. She also seems to have modelled Kurt and Whalen on Dashiell Hammett. They worked for others and so did he.

The memoirs contain many hints about characters and situations. There are many toys in Hellman's own attic. Sometimes, she said, they appeared in the plays without her conscious knowledge: she had not realized, for example, until it was pointed out to her, that her great aunt Lily whose mulatto chauffeur had been her lover, had provided the seed of the character of Albertine Prine (Pentimento, p.53), though there is little similarity between Aunt Lily of the memoirs and Albertine of Toys in the Attic. But her real life aunts—Anna and Jenny, without doubt, go into the making of Anna and Carrie of the same play. And Horace Giddens, in The Little Foxes too is without doubt Uncle Willy of real life. Willy
had been refused bed by his wife Lily on the ground of his syphilis and so has Horace Gidden been by his wife Regina.

_The Little Foxes_ was the most difficult play I ever wrote. I was clumsy in the first drafts, putting in and taking out characters, ornamenting, decorating, growing more and more weary as the versions of scenes and the acts and then three whole plays had to be thrown away.

Some of the trouble came because the play had a distant connection to my mother’s family and everything that I had heard or seen or imagined had formed a giant tangled time-jungle in which I could find no space to walk without tripping over old roots hearing old voices speak about histories made long before my day.

(Pentimento, p.171)

And again:

I grew restless, sickish digging around the random memories that had been the conscious, semi-conscious material for the play. I had meant to half mock my own youth, high class innocence in Alexandra, the young girl in the play, . . .

(Pentimento, p.180)

Probably the most puzzling and incredible of the characters in _Toys in the Attic_ is Lily, but so is our Lily—Lillian Hellman. She too grew panicky and jealous for the fear of losing love. She too had that ambivalent attitude towards money; she too had that foolish fanatical allegiance to what she called truth; all were stages in Miss Hellman’s own adolescence. She too became incoherent under stress, and prone to self-injury. While the incident of the knife of truth (_Toys in the Attic_) does not appear in the memoirs, it is typical of the kind of adventure young Lillian had in her pursuit of truth in New Orleans.
Doris V. Falk tells us that Miss Hellman saw of Mary the enfante terrible in herself and her early experience. She quotes her as having said: "I reached back into my own childhood and found that day I finished Mlle de Maupier; the day I faked a heart-attack; the day I saw an arm get twisted and I thought again of the world of the half-remembered, the half-observed, the half-understood which you need so much as you begin to write."\textsuperscript{32}
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Miss Hellman sometimes writes the drama by way of reviving the old classics as in the case of The Lark but here in her Toys in the Attic the influence of Chekov is only a matter of Russian authors' influence on the American dramatists of our century.


11 Ibid., p.75.
12 Cf. Margaret Case Harriman, "Miss Lily of New Orleans" New Yorker 17:22-36 Nov. 8, '41.

13 Ibid.


17 Ibid., p. 64.


19 Quoted from "Watch on the Rhine", New Yorker 17:32 April 12, '41.


Ibid., p.425.
