CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND: LITERARY AND BIOGRAPHICAL
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1 Parentage and Early Life

Lillian Hellman was born in New Orleans to Julia Newhouse and Max Hellman in 1905. Her parents, of German-Jewish origin, had migrated to America long before she was born. In her memoirs she remembers the parents of her mother in their New York apartment, particularly her (Miss Hellman's) grand-mother, a silent, severe and powerful woman. She was feared by all except Jake, her elder brother, who, they said, managed her money and was also the richest of them all. He was a man of great force, and all the relatives deferred to him. It is he who goes into the making of Ben in The Little Foxes and Marcus in Another Part of the Forest. Both of them, brother and sister, excelled in "breaking the spirit of the people for the pleasure of the exercise." (UW, p. 4). There used to be many a Sunday dinner-cum-corporation meeting presided over by this big brother. Miss Hellman borrows these scenes from her early childhood and presents them in the family meeting of the Hubbards in The Little Foxes.

She narrates one episode of her early life of having come in direct contact with this grand-uncle Jake. He once presented her with a ring on her graduation from school. She immediately sold it, bought books and told him what she
had done, thinking that the time for a break had come. He stared at her for a long time and then he laughed, and said the words she later put in the mouth of Regina in *The Little Foxes*—"So you've got spirit after all. Most of the rest of them are made of sugar water." (UW, p.5).

In all her works, Miss Hellman displays the same spirit and courage in her fight for social and political justice. This courage reached its zenith when she was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee to name the persons seen in pro-communist meetings attended by her. She faced the Committee, told them in plain terms that she would not do it whatever the consequences be, and ultimately won the battle.

Thus, Miss Hellman has many a time faced up to battle and gone in with trumpets blowing and banners flying. Barely in her teens, she refused to let segregation rules daunt her, forced her coloured nurse to sit up front in a street car, and lashed out at the conductor with a book bag, when he ordered them to leave. "Even as a small child I disliked myself for the fear and showed off against it." she says (UW, p.3). Now this dislike of fear was not just 'showing off', it was an inborn quality in her; it was as natural to her as it was natural to all the Southerners. "Fear of consequences had nothing to do with my decisions. Whatever is wrong with White Southerners . . . we were all brought up to believe we had a right to think as we pleased, go our own possibly strange ways."—Miss Hellman remarks (ST, p.45).
The way little Lillian and her mother were treated in that New York apartment by her grand-parents, made her a rebellious child. She came to realize that an attempt was being made to hide from her their contempt for her father's lack of success, and there was a kind of patronizing pity for her. This, her father made even, by telling her: "Your mother's family are not killers of white people. Remember that and be proud. They never do more than beat up niggers who can't pay fifty percent interest on the cotton crop and that's how they got rich." (Pentimento, p.32). Miss Hellman calls herself "an aimless rebel." Her rebelliousness was grounded in the moral revulsion she felt at her mother's family which had made money by exploitation. This made her rebel not only against her mother's family, but all the people who were rich. "Not too many years later ... I understood that I lived under an economic system of increasing imparity and injustice.", she remarks in her memoirs (Pentimento, p.63). While this snobbish behaviour of her grand-parents caused in her a "wild extravagance mixed with respect for money" (UW, p.4), for its power to buy things, she developed a dislike for the distinction it created among people so much so that she hated counting money. Money—wealth and capital—is the theme of many of her plays.

Miss Hellman's mother was a sweet little middle-class woman who had not rejected the middle class. She liked a simple life and simple people, and so did the daughter. She inherited this quality from her mother and we find it
practised in her life and preached in her works. She was rarely uncharitable towards simple people and she had never been a snob. She also inherited her mother's love for the South and the Southern folks. This love and longing for the Deep South, with its agrarian life and people, is an important characteristic of her dramatic works. This remote South is the setting of almost all her plays.

The elderly Mrs. Hellman was particularly fond of black men and women who had taught her the only religion, the religion of humanity. Sometimes she attended a Baptist Church, sometimes a Catholic one and sometimes, though less often, a synagogue, believing that God could be found everywhere. While Miss Hellman inherited from her mother this religion in which all religions agreed, she inherited from her father a generosity of spirit and independence of thought that was attractive to a rebellious child. Later Miss Hellman lovingly portrayed her mother in the characters of Birdie in The Little Foxes and sweet old Lavinia in Another Part of the Forest.

When Lillian was six years old, her father lost heavily in business and had to shift to New York to begin the career of a travelling salesman. But they had to go to New Orleans to stay for six months with her father's sisters, Jenny and Hannah, who kept a boarding house. It is here that she came across the wide variety of persons whom she reproduces as her dramatis personae.
These shifts of the family location played havoc with her school life. In New Orleans, she felt superior to her classmates, hence she never cared about attending school. Instead, she would move from home, done up for school, and sit in a huge fig tree hidden from the side of the boarding house by three live oak trees. There she would study or fish in the gutter. But she enjoyed more the solitude in the arms of the large fig tree. It was here that she had the first lessons in Existentialism—"her first intimation if not illumination of sadness, a first recognition that there was so much to understand that one might never find one's way." (UW, p. 12). Then again, it was here that she was puzzled by the conflict "which would haunt her, harm her and benefit her the rest of her life." (UW, p. 12). It was in the same fig tree that she developed that inquisitive spirit. Her father tells us that Lillian "lived her life in a big question mark." Exposed to the what's, why's and how's of things she made a start from that time to solve the mystery of our existence. It is to this mystery that most of her characters are exposed.

The child Lillian was very fond of her spinster aunts, Jenny and Hannah, and they returned her love in abundance. They were both funny and generous, but Jenny, the prettier and more complex, had frequent outbursts of interesting temper. There is a little parallelism between her two aunts and the two sisters of Toys in the Attic, though the former didn't have that shade of morbidity in them.
And it was here in New Orleans with her aunts that Miss Hellman came to meet the person who exerted a great influence on her life. It was her black nurse, Sophronia. She was, as Miss Hellman affectionately remarks, "... the first and most certain love of her life." (UW, p.14). Years later when Miss Hellman grew into a dangerously rebellious young girl, her father used to say that if he had been able to afford Sophronia, she would have been under the only control she ever recognized. She was the one anchor in her life and, even as late as 1969, Lillian Hellman could write: "Oh Sophronia, it's you I want back always. It's by you I still so often measure, guess, transmute, translate and act."

Though Sophronia had left her aunts when the Hellmans had moved to New York, Miss Hellman and Sophronia wrote and met as often as possible. This went on until she died when Miss Hellman was in her twenties. And when she sent her the first salary cheque she had earned, it was returned to her in the form of a gold chain. Thus it can be seen that Lillian Hellman's liking for black people came, not simply from ideological theories of national feeling and class oppression, but from her love of Sophronia, and so too her sympathy for the poor blacks and whites.

Miss Hellman narrates an incident from her life, which is interesting in this context:

In New Orleans, she often used to leave her house and go to the back-of-town, Negro section, to put a dime in the
poor box of the Baptist Church. She did this whenever she
had an extra dime and, years later, when Sophronia had
proudly told her father about it, he said to her, "Why don't
you give it to the Synagogue? Maybe we never told you that
is where you belong." She said she couldn't do that because
there was no Synagogue for Negroes and her father said that
was perfectly true, he had never thought about that before.
(Pentimento, p.64).

Miss Hellman has been called a communist. But she is
in truth a liberal, upholding humanitarian principles. Her
so-called communist tendency is actually a violent anti-
fascism and an equally strong instinct to fight for little
people who can't fight for themselves. She is a woman who
hates to see anybody pushed around.

This so-called communist was among the first to condemn
the press censorship at the hands of Russians: "And I
thought that in the end Russia having achieved state
Socialism would stop its infringement on personal liberty.
I was wrong." In showing her resentment for the Russian
type of Communism she becomes more eloquent and even
aggressive: "The semi-literate bureaucrats who suppress and
alter manuscripts, who dictate who can and cannot be
published, perform a disgusting business."

Miss Hellman cries out for social justice and works
for it. Her philosophy is not confined only to paper plans.
She put in considerable efforts to get the Wagner Act, which
guarantees collective bargaining and the right to strike, passed. This she was doing not for herself, but for those anonymous forty dollars-a-week writers.  

Miss Hellman, a good gambler, once won £12000 in an evening and ordered two ambulances for the Spanish Loyalists, and then lost the same amount in another game that very night. But the ambulances did go their way. This kind of impulsive generosity of purpose is the hallmark of her character. She used to send presents to friends with messages which suggested that "A birthday present for Lillian Hellman is a blow against Fascism." Friends came with gifts, and she wept frank and grateful tears.

Thus, Miss Hellman may be called a progressive who is often, as Maloff rightly says, on the "right side" of the issue. She does things that any one approximately human would do and, for a person like her, such acts must have been virtually instinctive.

When Julia, her childhood-friend, beaten and broken by the Nazis, died in England, Miss Hellman was the first to plead with Julia's relatives to find the child the martyred woman had left behind her. This incident furnishes a glimpse of her character. The welfare of the people has been a matter of utmost concern to her. She was most deservingly awarded the 1976 Paul Robeson Award:
October 7, 1976. Lillian Hellman, author and dramatist will receive the third annual Paul Robeson Award tomorrow at 12:30. The award is presented by the Paul Robeson Citation Committee Actors' Equity for concern for and service to fellow humans.

Miss Hellman learnt this 'concern for and service to fellow humans' from Sophronia. Once she saw her father with one Miss Fizzy, a boarder in her aunts' boarding house. This excited her so much that she threw herself from the fig tree and then rushed to Sophronia to tell her what she had seen. Sophronia looked displeased and asked her to forget all about it and tell nobody. She said, "Don't go through life making trouble for people." (Exactly these are the feelings of Henry Sampson in the Toys in the Attic.) This remark seems to have had the force of a precept for Miss Hellman. Throughout her life she has been a liberal and a humanist practising it in life and preaching it in her works.

Again it was Sophronia who, paradoxical though it may sound, by posing a problem, solved all the problems of her life thus: "Right is wrong and wrong is right / And who can tell it all by sight?" (UW, p.239). Thus Sophronia was her friend, philosopher and guide whose no word was wasted on her ears. She narrates an incident in which two drunk whites tried to rape a young negro girl and how her Papa came to the rescue of that girl. Later she narrated the whole story to Sophronia and invited her opinion.

Papa was brave, wasn't he?
Yep.
What's the matter?
Things not going to get themselves fixed by one whiteman being nice to one nigger girl.
I thought hard and long about that, as I thought about everything she said, and by the next year's visit to New Orleans, I had decided on a course for myself.

(Where, p.238)

Thus Sophronia was one of the most important formative influences in her life.

The Hellmans continued going to New Orleans periodically until Miss Hellman was sixteen years old. She learnt many things from her aunts. She learnt the art of killing and plucking chickens without those lady-like complaints-without being over-sentimental. Above all, she learnt that if you have to give, give without piety, and don't boast about it. It had been one of her grand-father's laws that no person who asked for anything was ever to be refused, and his children had fulfilled the injunction.

It was here again that she learned to laugh a real hearty laugh. Miss Hellman describes how a girl came to seek advice about avoiding pregnancy and how aunt Jenny advised her to take a glass of ice-cold water before the sacred act and two sips during it. It was a matter of laughter years after, and when she wrote to them about her own marriage, she got a telegram from them: "Forget about the glass of ice water. Times have changed." (UW, p.17). Thus her first lesson in wit and humour she had from her aunts.
In New Orleans, she came to meet Bethe, a cousin recently arrived from Germany. She exerted great influence on her life, particularly in matters amorous. This Bethe had come from Germany with the sole intention of marrying and settling with one Styrie Bowman, a distant maternal uncle of Miss Hellman's. He proved to be a good-for-nothing fellow, a gambler and a loafer. He used to leave home without notifying his departure. When his runaway absences became long and frequent, Bethe left him and started living with one Arneggio, a mafia chief, without undergoing the rites and rituals of marriage. This type of life earned her the epithet 'common-law-wife' from Lillian's mother. The adolescent Lillian was a staunch supporter of Bethe and often defended her boldly. Having heard the term, an inquisitive Lillian Hellman rushed to a friend of hers, Christy Houghton, a girl wiser in the ways of the world, to get the term explained. When she was told that it was a fancy name for a plain old whore, she got infuriated, twisted Christy's arm and made her repeat after her, "Does love need a minister, a rabbi, a priest? Is divine love between man and woman based on permission of a decadent society?" (Pentimento, p.33). And when this very Bethe was feeling weak and lonely in the face of opposition from a hostile society and was leading the life of a fugitive seeking shelter here and there, Lillian Hellman dropped a word of encouragement. She left a chit which read: "Stendhal said love made people brave, dear Bethe." (Pentimento, p.36).
Miss Hellman identified herself with Bethe and she rather "practiced a code based on her name", (Pentimento, p. 30) so much so that she could rally courage to say to her aunts: "I know you will not approve of my living with a man I am not married to, but that's the way it's going to be." And again, when Jenny asked 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 feeling. Maybe that's the reason we don't always spit on people because they live with low down Wops and get in trouble." (Pentimento, p. 43).

Thus Bethe was one of her mentors—her guide in free and frank man and woman relations. She made her aware of the importance of sex in one's life and also that sex could be a thing of free exchange without making much ado about chastity and that love is possible without the ritualistic sanction of society through marriage. It is this approach to sex that finds place in her plays. Bethe also taught her that in a life sexually adjusted a woman could find herself. Here is Bethe the butt of everyone around her. Her stay with Arneggio and the resultant confidence could elicit such a remark: "No longer am I German, no longer the Bowman. Now I am woman and woman does not need help." "She was smiling" Lillian Hellman writes, "And I realized I'd never seen her smile before, never before heard her use so many words. But more important to me, something was happening that I didn't understand." (Pentimento, p. 23).
Then it was here in New Orleans that she met Uncle Willy (the husband of her mother's aunt), whose physical contact made her aware of the power and the influence exerted by the opposite sex even when the one of opposite sex was an uncle. She gives a very romantic but all the same a very graphic account of the feelings thus provoked: "There are many ways", she writes in her memoirs, "of falling in love and one seldom is more interesting or valid than another . . . I was never to fall in love very often but this was the first time and I would like to think that I learned from it . . . and the only thing that made the feeling for Uncle Willy different was the pain of that first recognition not of love but of the struggles caused by love; the blindness of a young girl trying to make simple sexual desire into something more complex, more poetic, more unreachable." (Pentimento, p.75).

And again when she got stuck in a swamp and Uncle Willy pulled her out, she could not but feel that surging emotion: "It could not have been easy for him to pull me out as he stood on uncertain ground with my dead weight at the other end, I watched the power of the shoulders and the arms with the sleepy admiration of a woman in love." (Pentimento, p.77).

What type of love was there between Uncle Willy and Lillian is of no concern to us; but he did teach her in language unspoken that love is nothing but an idealized and romanticized name for sexual desire and whatever attraction one has for the other counterpart is based on, and springs
from, that sexual desire. And, relevant to our understanding of Lillian Hellman as a person and as a writer, is the courageous frankness that characterizes her recording of this episode in her life.

While Horace Giddens in *The Little Foxes* has been identified as her Uncle Willy, Mrs. Prime and her 'friend' in *Toys in the Attic* are believed to be based on Aunt Lily and her chauffeur paramour.

Every year the Hellmans spent six months in New Orleans and the rest in New York. In New York the teachers grew indifferent to a student for whom it was difficult to come at par with other students due to her long periods of absence. This resulted in her establishing a widening circle of activities unrelated to formal education.

It was when America had entered the First World War that, in an excess of patriotism, Lillian and a friend of hers took to trailing people who, they thought, looked like German spies. Long-haired fellows carrying brief cases or violin cases (handy for holding machine guns or bombs), were especially suspect. Once the girls chased two men and reported them to a police sergeant who, after considerable trouble, discovered that one was a professor of Greek and the second a violinist. Now Lillian and her compatriot had a stoogie who had been detailed to eavesdrop on the conversation of suspects and report them to the two head-spy-catchers. Her reports were dull and her superiors grew bored.
"It's got to be more interesting", Miss Hellman exclaimed one day and she and her associate then twisted the stooge's arm until she managed to think up something worth hearing. M.C. Harriman, while narrating this incident, suggests that it is a version of this incident that has appeared in The Children's Hour. 13

One more incident from real life went into the making of The Children's Hour. When Lillian Hellman was fourteen, she developed a taste for sitting in a chatty group. This resulted in a romantic attachment with a Columbia University boy. She liked outings despite the clear instructions of her father to be home by eleven. Once she defied his orders by staying out until mid-night. Stern reception further inflamed her. She left home. Hours later she phoned her beau, "I have left home. Come and look after me." He came alright, but instead of looking gallant and protective he looked very bored. He took her home and shoved her in through the door and Lillian reluctantly entered to find her mother in tears from grief and worry. "Are you alright my baby?" She kept saying, and this gave her an idea. She assumed a frail look, waited for a pause and announced, "Mother, I have heart trouble." 14 Mary Tilford in The Children's Hour has this same inventiveness to meet the challenge of a crisis like the one which Miss Hellman herself had.

When Lillian Hellman entered Wadleigh High School in 1922, her dramatic instinct surpassed that of her dramatic
coach who carelessly gave her the role of a villainous female in a school play. This character actually had few lines to speak but at Lillian's final exit, the door stuck and she could not get off the stage. Pleased by the happy circumstances, she returned calmly to the panic-stricken members of the cast on the stage who were grouped about a drawing room set and, arranging herself on a sofa, proceeded to invent a dazzling scene by a number of bright remarks which saved the situation. Perhaps this made her aware of her dramatic instinct—her power to imagine and invent dialogues. 15

After graduating from school, Miss Hellman continued her studies at New York University and Columbia. During her two years' stay here (1922-24), she proved to be more advanced than educated and she showed signs of rebellion against almost everything. She paid little attention to college studies. Her main interest was Kant and Hegel, Karl Marx and Engels.

It was here in New York that she met Hal, brother of a friend of hers. This Hal, a few years later, killed himself and a male companion in a Zurich hotel room. Perhaps it was this incident which emerged later in the form of The Children's Hour. Her interest in the theme could also have arisen from her own personal experience of a similar nature.

In New York, she made friends with a class-mate Julia. They were more than friends or there was more than friendship at her end. She loved Julia and that love was "toc
strong and too complicated to be defined as only the sexual yearnings of one girl for another. And yet certainly that was there. I don't know, I never cared and it is now an aimless guessing game. It doesn't prove much that we never kissed each other; even when I leaned down in a London funeral parlour to kiss the battered face... it was not the awful scars that worried me; because I had never kissed her I thought perhaps she would not want it and so I touched the face instead." (Pentimento, p.114).

Again it was here at the age of nineteen that she had a loveless affair. This affair did not matter much to her then, but she has often asked herself if she had not underestimated the damage caused to her future by so loveless an arrangement. Miss Hellman says: "My generation did not often deal with the idea of love—we were ashamed of the word and scornful of the misuse that had been made of it."16

While still in the University, she met publisher Horace Liveright and went to work for him without getting a college degree. This was an exciting introduction to the literary market place, and "may have set the direction of Hellman's future more than she knew,"17 says Doris V. Falk. But Hellman remembered this as a period of social and sexual, rather than literary, exploration. She was as casual about sex as most of her generation, had an abortion and then in 1925 married the man, Arthur Kober, a young writer, who was responsible for her pregnancy.
3 Marriage and Divorce

After marriage, they went to Paris to be in the stream of embryonic writers. Arthur landed a job on a magazine and she attempted some lady-writer stories. For a time she wrote theatrical publicity and book reviews, reading plays for a group headed by Herman Shumlin, later the producer of her own first five plays. It is here that she showed her knack for what was dramatic by "spotting" the manuscript of Shumlin's classic Grand Hotel.

They came back to America in 1930 and both joined MGM Studio in Hollywood. A year later they were divorced, and she returned to New York because Dashiell Hammett was there.

Divorce ended the marriage but it did not affect their attachment for each other. Arthur from his side would always seek her advice with regard to a new apartment or a new play. He even sought her advice about the choice of his fiancee and Miss Hellman even stood up with the bride and groom at the wedding as matron. Lillian Hellman obviously sees marriage as a superfluous institution which has lost its value in the present social scene. During her 1945 Moscow visit, she had met a Captain K. His wife had deserted him. She said, "You will marry again?" He shook his head "No, I have not the faith." (UW, p.187).

Thus, she does not find any power in marriage to hold the two partners together. Instead she would prefer the will, the determination on the part of the couple to keep
them united. Later in 1967, she explained her stand to the same Captain K., with regard to her own staying with Dashiell Hammett, without undergoing the rites and rituals of marriage thus: "No, that turned out fine, just fine. But it didn't start fine and maybe only came out fine because I was stubborn." (UW, p.187). According to her, marriage has little to do with life and still less with love. On the contrary it curbs the spirit whereas she has always been an independent woman. She has more men friends than women friends, and a few of them have at one time or the other been her lovers. But this does not disturb the brotherhood. They come, stay for weeks, taking their works with them, and all this without the least qualms on the part of the lady. She is completely free from sham, having a strong aversion to the phony. "Rebels seldom make good revolutionaries", says Lillian Hellman. "Perhaps because organized action, even union with other people is not possible for them." 19 This idea of hers probably extended to her marriage as well. Hammett too knew it. When later she wrote him about her decision to marry the man she had set her mind upon, he immediately replied, "It was no good. It would never have been any good. The day it is good for you, I'll allow it." (Pentimento, p. 171).

The story of Lillian Hellman's life would be incomplete without the mention of Dashiell Hammett. He was, in her own words: "My closest, my most beloved friend." (UW, p.256). Hammett was to become her home-base, friend, companion, critic,
disciplinarian and mentor. He was a lasting influence on her life and helped her formulate a philosophy which she upheld in her life and works.

4 Hellman's Humanism—Formative Influences

Once, Miss Hellman tells us, Hammett had bought himself an expensive crossbow and had grown very fond of it. It had just arrived when a few friends with their ten-year-old boy arrived. In the course of the day the boy himself grew fond of the device. Before the friends left, Hammett put it in the car despite refusals. Later, when criticized by her, he said, "The kid wanted it more. Things belong to people who want them most." (UW, p.269). "People around . . ." Lillian Hellman says, "seldom are interested in anything but theory, rarely in the world around them." (ST, p.46). But it was not so with Dashiell Hammett and still less so with his disciple.

And then it was Hammett again who taught her to sympathize with the hungry of the world. In a Hollywood restaurant she and Hammett were having dinner. An Indian approached Hammett and started telling the heroic history of his ancestors. Hammett bluntly asked how much he wanted and placed the wallet on the table. The Indian opened the wallet, took out five twenty-dollar-bills and said, "Be sure I do not take it as a gift. I take it as a loan." . . .
"Sure, sure," Hammett said, "Mail it to me someday." The Indian bowed, kissed my hand, and was gone. Miss Hellman said, "He's proud, isn't he?" Hammett said, "No. He's a Negro, pretending to be an Indian. He's a no-good stinker." Lillian said, "Then why did you give him the money?" And Hammett replied: "Because no-good stinkers get hungry too." (UW, p.277).

Once when Horace Liveright, the first employer of Lillian Hellman was sick and broke, she thought to help him out with money. She was about to bring it to him when she first asked Hammett if five hundred dollars was enough. "Enough to make you feel noble." he answered and told her to find someone else to take the money to Liveright. Thus the modesty, honesty of motive and the utter hatred of exhibitionism which was natural to her, came to be perfected at the hands of Hammett. And these qualities are revealed in her life and works.

"We have done fine, haven't we?", in a fit of enthusiasm Lillian Hellman remarked one day.

"Fine's too big a word for me, why don't we just say, we've done better than most people." (UW, p.278). These words were later put by her in the mouth of Henry Sampson in Toys in the Attic.

Thus he taught her modesty; he taught it by being modest himself. When she said she would write his biography, he said that she was not to bother writing it because it would
turn out to be the history of Lillian Hellman with an occasional reference to a friend called Hammett. 21

5 Dramatic Career and Contemporaries

In New York, Miss Hellman collaborated with Kronenberger on a comedy called The Dear Queen. The play proved to be no good and she never collaborated with any one later.

It was Hammett again who, having seen her flair for drama, suggested to her to choose a situation for her play from real life. He had been reading a book written by a British writer about little known law-suits. He selected one under the title of Closed Doors and asked her to adapt it for the theatre. The result was The Children's Hour, her maiden effort that put her on the dramatic career ultimately winning her the title of "America's Number One Woman-playwright." 22

When Lillian Hellman entered the field of drama, towering personalities like Eugene O'Neill, Phillip Barry, Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson and Clifford Odets were looming large on the American scene. Of these, the career of O'Neill was a pretty long/distinguished one. Between his first plays written under the title The Moon of the Caribbees (1918) and the last, Moon for the Misbegotten (1943), there appeared classics: The Emperor Jones (1920), The Hairy Ape (1922), Strange Interlude (1928), Mourning
Becomes Electra (1931), Days Without End (1934), Ah, Wilderness (1934), The Iceman Cometh (1946) and The Long Day's Journey into Night (written 1940-41 and produced 1956). To us these plays, particularly the ones belonging to the 20's, are of interest more due to their technique than to their themes.

Philip Barry with his extra-ordinary sense of comic realism comes next. Leaving aside A Punch of Judy and two autobiographical comedies, his You and I (1923), The Youngest and White Wings (1926) had been received very warmly. But his masterpiece was Hotel Universe (1930), a psychoanalytic drama. His next two, Tommorow and Tommorow (1931) and Animal Kingdom (1932), dealt with marriage, in which Miss Hellman might have found the thematic clues for her future plays.

Robert Sherwood was another prominent figure. He had begun with his anti-war plays, The Road to Rome, and Waterloo Bridge. His Reunion in Vienna, an autobiographical, and Petrified Forest (1935), were considered as classics. Besides Robert Sherwood, there was Maxwell Anderson. His anti-war play, What Price Glory (1924), had created a sensation though his two historical plays—First Flight, and The Buccaneer had failed. Clifford Odets too with his Waiting for Lefty, Awake and Sing, and his epoch-making play Golden Boy, was another name to reckon with.

These were the playwrights of the time and the bulk of the plays written during this period were mainly political. Thus, critically, the 1930's can justly be called a decade
of political theatre. The plays of the 1920's were less concerned with the intellectual problems of the day than those of the 30's, and the playwrights, O'Neill, Elmer Rice and the like were more eager to explore the possibilities of a dramatic medium than to challenge the political status quo. The propaganda theatre of Russia, coupled with the rise of Hitler in Germany, provided material to the contemporary writers. To cap it all, the Great Depression came. The result was the political play-writing in America and its exponents were Clifford Odets with his *Waiting for Lefty*, and *Till the Day I Die* (1935), which were often performed by the very people it was about, for instance, the taxi drivers at a strike meeting. *Stevedore* (1934) by Peters and Sklar, and *Marching Song* (1937) by John Howard Lawson dealt with the same theme of labour and strikes. Elmer Rice too moved from his expressionistic fantasies of the twenties like *Adding Machine* (1923) and *The Subway* (1924) to a realistic picture of New York tenement life in *Street Scene* (1928), and *We the People* (1933). Civil rights were defended by John Wexley in *They Shall Not Die* (1934). These playwrights were dedicated to the formula that drama should proclaim the brotherhood of man and, by exhibiting the evils of capitalism, hasten the overthrow of the current bourgeois social order. Thus, by the mid-thirties, almost every aspect of contemporary life was crowding on to the American stage reflecting the three great problems of the decade: the Depression, the rise of Fascism and the possibility of another war.
Besides Elmer Rice, Maxwell Anderson too had discussed the economic aspect of the Depression in his *Saturday's Children*. He also wrote an indictment of Congress in his *Both Your Houses* (1933), though most of his plays, *Night Over Taos*, three historicals—*Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, Anne of the Thousand Days*, two monumental plays of American history—*Valley Forge*, and *Winterset*, three fantasies—*High Tor, The Masque of Kings* and *The Star Wagon*—and *Kinnerbocker Holiday*, a great comedy were nontopical.

It was during this period that *The Children's Hour* (1934) was produced. When the final draft of the play was finished and given to Herman Shumlin, much to her surprise it was accepted for immediate production and proved to be an instant and complete success. The play ran, unexpectedly, for 691 performances, perhaps because of the stir it had caused by being banned in Boston and by being refused to be seen by Pulitzer Committee judge William Lyon Phelps.

Besides this, the plays of "social significance", as Barrett H. Clark rightly calls them, written during 1930-40 were mostly mechanical in structure; nearly all of them were inspired by their authors' desire to protest against injustice or to plead for some new type of utopia. No one showed an impulse to set forth in human terms some basic concept of human value, without argument over and without concern for its political concepts. But *The Children's Hour*, with its theme of lesbianism and with its
passionate appeal for compassion and tolerance, promised something new—something away from the beaten path.

In 1934, Doris V. Falk tells, out of 145 modern plays only nine were non-realistic and non-conventional. In form Lillian Hellman may be conventional but in content she was different. She challenged the convention of society, that destroys those who deviate from its mores, in this instance sexual. Thus it was a pioneer effort along with O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* and Susan Claspell's *The Verge*. It proved an emotional bombshell in its honest yet sensitive handling of homosexuality though by implication. It also opened the way for other writers to write on the same lines. As a result came Miss Clare Booth's first play *Abide with Me* (1935) and the *Women* (1936).

Her social consciousness and a sense of responsibility to the masses immediately brought Miss Hellman to the fold of other compatriots who were hitting at the social evils from the stage. In 1936 she wrote *Days to Come* dealing with labour strife. It was a complete failure and she went sailing to Russia and Europe to forget it. But then there was one more reason, perhaps much more important for this trip abroad. It was in 1936 that the Spanish Civil War began. Public feeling was so great in favour of the Republican cause that Archibald MacLeish and Lillian Hellman suggested the making of a documentary movie about the war. Besides this, she herself paid a visit to war-torn Spain. She visited Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona which were
being bombarded every minute. With the anguish of a humanist she describes the sick, the wounded, the dying, lying in the base hospital. While she lay in her hotel room, the bombardment continued throughout the night. By the morning many people had been killed and many buildings hit. But one casualty particularly attracted her attention. In the kitchen at the back of her hotel, a blind woman with a bowl of soup, was shot dead. Afterwards an Englishman told her that this reckless shooting from German planes had a purpose. "They're practising. They're testing, testing the guns. They're finding the accuracy of the guns, they are finding the range." "Finding the range on a blind woman eating a bowl of soup is a fine job for a man." Lillian Hellman half pathetically, half bitterly remarks.

This anti-Nazi attitude had travelled from Europe to America. The American dramatists took up this cause like crusaders and they wrote plays before any one else could. As early as 1934 had appeared Elmer Rice's Judgement Day and S.N. Behrman's Rain from Heaven. Clifford Odets' Till the Day I Die followed in 1935. Miss Hellman had witnessed the sadism of the Nazi regime in Spain; this realization, along with the literary influences at home, came out in the form of a powerful expression, Watch on the Rhine (1941), "the best of the anti-Nazi drama" as remarked by Joseph Wood Krutch. This play was presented for a kind of command performance before President Roosevelt for the benefit of the Infantile Paralysis Fund. It was also invited to Washington for a Sunday night early in 1942. (Pentimento, p. 193).
Miss Hellman's 1937 visit to Moscow had come as a result of an invitation to attend a theatre-festival there. From Paris she informed her childhood friend Julia, who was studying medicine in Vienna then, that she could visit her while on route to Moscow. Instant comes the reply with a request to do a mysterious job. And in that connection comes one Johann who, when invited to take something, eats the food so greedily that Miss Hellman could not help depict that first passion, hunger, in her play Watch on the Rhine. The way these mysterious missionaries send help to their compatriots, too, is depicted in the same play.

But even before her Watch on the Rhine (1941), she had written her masterpiece The Little Foxes (1937), after coming back from her Europe tour. This play "is not the kind of political harangues that flavoured the playwriting of the radical wing"27 says John Gassner, and may at first seem right outside the stream, but it is just another aspect of the same new vision. Addie strikes at the same problem when she says that people ought not to allow the foxes 'to eat the earth.' (LF, p.152). This play with Biblical overtones appears to be a study in evil, and the Hubbards of stage-fame appear in this play. In content as well as in craftsmanship, it is superb. On its 1967 revival it was called an American classic and the playwright a revered institution. 28 Miss Hellman wrote nine drafts before she could fashion the final one.
The largest single group of her serious plays was that which dealt with the imminence and the advent of the Second World War. They reflect accurately the changing attitude of America in the late thirties. The picture was getting gradually clearer and clearer, and the horror of the full intentions of Nazi Germany becoming more and more apparent. While Germany was growing hostile, the rest of the world was adopting a weak-kneed policy of appeasement. Archibald MacLeish attacked it in two very effective plays: *The Fall of a City* (1937) and *Air Raid* (1938). The former showed a city falling to a dictator simply by appeasing him, by refusing to believe in the reality of his threats and by having no positive way of life to set against him. In *Air Raid*, the men are shown nervous and flustered but the women show great external calm though they are all machine-gunned in the end.

After this the contemporary American plays suddenly became full of the values of Americanism, of certainty and of resolve. They became "the rituals of reassurance subtly celebrating American goals, characteristics, identity and potency." Robert Sherwood's dramatic career is a case of amazing progression from passivity to active militarism. He had once written the anti-heroic *What Price Glory* (1924) and *The Road to Rome* (1926), and tried to show that any sacrifice made in the name of war was a big waste. These were followed by the pacifist *Idiot's Delight* (1936) and then the nationalistic *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1938). And finally he wrote *Key Largo* (1939) and *There Shall Be No*
Night (1941), showing that some action must be taken to resist evil. The Eve of St. Mark (1942) was written in the same vein. Sinclair Lewis's anti-fascist play It Can't Happen Here opened simultaneously in twentyone cities in 1937. Philip Barry contributed to this feeling in his Liberty Jones (1941) and Without Love (1942), dealing with the future of the world, though his comedies, The Joyous Season (1934), Bright Star (1935), Spring Dance (1936), a fantastic psychological play Here Come the Clowns (1939) and his superb comedy Philadelphia Story are non-topical. And so are Clifford Odets' Rocket to the Moon (1938), Night Music (1941) and Clash by Night (1941). They are genuinely human plays dealing with psychological aspects of the characters. But Miss Hellman's The Searching Wind (1944) is most topical. Apart from exposing the evils of Hitlerism it made a panoramic investigation of the errors that had brought the World War and denounced American indifference and passive complacency in the face of these evils.

Directly afterwards, late in 1944, Miss Hellman was invited to Moscow on a kind of cultural mission. It was at this time that The Little Foxes and Watch on the Rhine were being produced there.

Miss Hellman narrates an episode about how she went to collect the royalty money for these plays and how she refused to count it and the lady at the counter insisted. Later, Miss Hellman says she wondered why she had made such a fuss over a trivial thing. It is, she adds, because "I like
that money buys but I don't like handling it and won't and that's that." (UW, p.175).

After coming back from Russia she attempted another play, which, though written later, is a sort of prologue to The Little Foxes diggng into the antecedents of the Hubbards, the foxes. She called this play Another Part of the Forest (1946), taking the title from Shakespeare's As You Like It. This was followed by Montserrat (1949) an adaptation of Emanuel Robles' novel of the same name.

Montserrat truly represents the spirit of the age. The World War was going on in its full frenzy. Once decision had been taken, people were fighting with determination. But the first enthusiasm was not there. A feeling of scepticism had crept into their minds as to whether their means could justify the ends. It is this dilemma, says Gascoigne, that shows itself in the plays not only of America but of Europe too. Camus's The Just Ones (1949), Sartre's The Flies (1943), and Men Without Shadows (1946), and Salacron's Nights of Wrath (1946) pose this problem about how far action and responsibility can be separated.

Exactly this question is discussed by Lillian Hellman in Montserrat. Can Montserrat be justified in getting six innocent citizens tortured physically and mentally and killed, just to save the life of one native revolutionary leader Bolivar, just for the victory of his ideal? How much evil is justifiable to achieve how much good, is the exact
problem that was being weighed in the nice balances of her mind. The analysis of the implications of action from the point of view of the protagonist is the main theme of the plays of 1940s.

6 The Dark Days of McCarthyism

These were dark days of McCarthyism in which the critical dissent had been suppressed and freedom of expression had been curbed. The writers fearful of the ubiquitous investigating committees remained silent or were silenced. Miss Hellman too stood blacklisted though unofficially. She wanted to make movies with William Wyler, but an executive of one of the large companies told Wyler that she could not be hired. A contract offered by Columbia Pictures could not be accepted because it carried a 'lulu', a condition against the dignity of a writer.

Besides this, with the unprecedented prosperity after the Second World War, the theatre of social protest lost its appeal. A public enjoying a booming economy preferred not to be reminded of the Depression and the rise of Fascism. Hence, says Allan Lewis, plays dealing with the results of economic dislocation gave way in a society of affluence to dramas of personal dislocation. Now the dramatists concentrated on light comedies, lush musicals and case studies of psychological frustrations. Now they did not call people to
action as they did before the War—nor did the people suffer from scepticism as they had done during the War, now the playwrights laid emphasis on the individual and his inner world because the external action and the need for it had either passed or they dared not discuss it. If anything, the individual's problem was now that of inaction. With no great causes left, he is now pictured by the playwright as a creature heavily pressed upon by family ties, by broad social forces and more so by a nagging sense of futility. Arthur Miller, a direct disciple of Clifford Odets and Lillian Hellman, with his Ibsenian themes deals with such family problems. In his Death of a Salesman (1949), and All My Sons (1947) the personal and the social are tightly woven. But for The Crucible (1953) with clear echoes of McCarthyism, his A Memory of Two Mondays (1953), an autobiographical and A View from the Bridge (1955), are powerful passionate human plays. Lillian Hellman's Autumn Garden (1951), a progeny of post-war theatre, deals with the same human problem. This play proved, as Harold Clurman had judged, "a poignant reflective drama, most deftly constructed, the most scrupulously written play." She also wrote a musical Candide (1955) based on Voltaire's work of the same name.

Same year she wrote The Lark (1955), an adaptation of Jean Anouilh's L'Alouette, paying tribute to the fighting spirit of the French during the Occupation. This play has some autobiographical tinge too. The trial of Joan before
the Inquisition closely resembles the appearance of Miss
Hellman before the House Un-American Activities Committee
in her bold defiant attitude. Maxwell Anderson also wrote
with the same mission in Barefoot in Athens, Candle in the
the Wind and to some extent in his Truckline Cafe.

Clifford Odets' The Big Knife, The Country Girl, . . .
Golden Boy are comedies though his last The Flowering Peach
is a topical play showing his love for peace in this world.
Besides Clifford Odets, there was William Saroyan, who
earned name with My Heart's in the Highlands (1939), The
Time of Your Life (1939), Love's Old Sweet Song (1940), and
The Beautiful People (1942). His one-acter Hello, Out There
was a touching short dramatic piece.

Thornton Wilder, a novelist turned playwright, had
written his first full length play, The Trumpet Shall Sound
in 1920 and a collection of short plays entitled The Angel
That Troubled the Waters in 1929. In 1931 came his The Long
Christmas Dinner and Other Plays in One Act. Next came
Lucrece, an adaptation in 1932. His classic Our Town came
out in 1938. With The Matchmaker (1954) produced previously
under the title of The Merchant in 1938, his reputation as
a playwright grew. It reached a point with Skin of Our
Teeth (1957) beyond which it was not to go.

William Inge's output is small but significant. Barring
his first Farther Off from Heaven, most of the remaining
plays such as Come Back Little Sheba, Picnic, Bus Stop, and
The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, are great plays though his last A Loss of Roses, Natural Affection and Family Things, etc., were not successful.

Tennessee Williams stands shoulder to shoulder with O'Neill in quality if not in quantity. His first play The Glass Menagerie (1945) and also the next A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) remain his best though his later Summer and Smoke (1948), The Rose Tattoo (1951) and Camino Real (1953) too are classics and open new horizons in the field of symbolism and treatment of sex. His last plays Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955), Orpheus Descending (1957), Suddenly Last Summer (1958) and Sweet Bird of Youth (1959) too are written in the same vein.

Just then the House Un-American Activities Committee subpoenaed Dashiell Hammett. A trustee of the Civil Rights Congress, he had provided bail for a few writers with communist leanings who had subsequently jumped bail. The House Un-American Activities Committee asked for the source of the bail Fund. Hammett flatly refused and was sentenced to six months in jail. Miss Hellman used all her influence to get the case into a higher court; but the appeal failed. This summary trial finds an echo in the working of the Inquisition in her later play Candide.

Again, after two years, Hammett was subpoenaed and so was our author. Nothing happened to Dashiell Hammett, but Miss Hellman's case was hopeless. She was asked to name the persons she had seen in any of the communist meetings.
If she refused to do so, she would be cited for contempt.
Miss Hellman took a very bold stand and sent a letter to the Chairman of the Committee which will ever inspire the revolutionaries the world over:

I am most willing to answer all questions about myself. . . . I have nothing to hide. . . . there is nothing in my life of which I am ashamed. . . . I am not willing, now or in the future, to bring bad trouble to people who in my past association with them were completely innocent of any talk or any action that was disloyal or subversive.

But to hurt innocent people . . . in order to save myself is, to me, inhuman and indecent and dishonorable. I cannot, and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashion even though I long ago came to the conclusion that I was not a political person and could have no comfortable place in any political group.

I was raised in an old fashioned American tradition and there were certain homely things that were taught to me: to try to tell the truth, not to bear false witness, not to harm my neighbor, to be loyal to my country, and so on. In general, I respected those ideals of Christian honour and did as well with them as I knew how. It is my belief that you will agree with these simple rules of human decency and will not expect me to violate the good American tradition from which they spring.

(ST, p. 108)

Miss Hellman strictly follows these 'simple rules of human decency'. She did not even let her lawyers inform the Committee about the past attacks on her work by the Communist press: "In my thin morality it is plain not cricket to clear yourself by jumping on people who are themselves in trouble."33

Miss Hellman has always been too independent to be the member of any party. At best she could be described as a person with an active conscience, believing in and fighting
for justice and civilization and decency. "My belief in liberalism", writes Miss Hellman, "was mostly gone. I think I have substituted for it something private called ... decency ... but it is painful for a nature that can no longer accept liberalism not to be able to accept radicalism." (ST, p.113). This decency is the hallmark of her character, the beacon light that guided her during the dark days of trial. In her own words, "just make sure you come out unashamed. That will be enough." (ST, p.102). With this feeling she wanted to come out of the hearing room. One may recall Emerson's classic statement: 'Absolve yourself to yourself ...' for that is what she precisely did. She was excused from any further attendance.

While many renowned people, the great movie-moghuls and dramatists—Clifford Odets and Elia Kazan among them—had compromised and confessed to the sins they had never committed, Miss Hellman's letter created a furore in the hearing room. Some one from the Press benches spoke out: "Thank God. At least one person was there who had the guts to do it." (ST, p.109).

Jail life had greatly affected the already bad health of Dashiell Hammett. He led the life of a recluse in a farm house of Martha's Vineyard bought by Miss Hellman, and died in 1960.

Meanwhile Miss Hellman was working on Toys in the Attic (1960), a play as good as The Little Foxes or Autumn Garder (1951). Through this play, says John Gassner, Miss Hellman
once more prevailed in a theatre so largely given to moral and mental flabbiness. While her other compeers had fallen victim to the universal malady of melancholy, she successfully mastered it. She succeeded in overcoming the temptation of fashionable enervation and negativism. Her last and most typical play is *My Mother, My Father and Me* (1963) based on Burt Blechman's novel *How Much?*

True to the spirit of the time, this play depicts modern man's misery, doubt and sense of futility with his mood of pointlessness and despair. Here all the virtues—all the values stand dismissed as cant. Besides this, the problem of good and evil which has been central to most of the plays of Miss Hellman in which the good are destroyed by the foxes who are always around to eat the earth, is taken up again. The evidence of a satirical touch, says Allan Lewis, which is so rare in our contemporary theatre, has been reinforced by Miss Hellman in this play.35

Edward Albee's whole dramaturgy centres around these themes. His *Zoo Story* (1957) deals with one's desire to have something to deal with. His *Sand Box, The American Dream, The Death of Bessie Smith, and Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* too are classics. Miss Hellman's other contemporaries, but not in any way minor, are writers such as Gore Vidal, James Baldwin, Frank Gilroy, Arthur Kopit, Jack Gelber, Le Roi Jones, Alan Davis.
Miss Hellman had edited *The Letters of Chekhov* (1955) and also an anthology of Hammett's short stories *The Big Knockover* (1966). She has also written her autobiography modestly calling herself *An Unfinished Woman* (1969). It won the National Book Award as the best book of the year in the category of Arts and Letters. *Pentimento* (1973), a book of portraits of persons who came in contact with her in her life, came next. This became a Book of the Month Club selection. She has also written *Scoundrel Time* (1976), a book narrating her experiences with the House Un-American Activities Committee. It stayed on the best-seller list for twenty-three weeks. The same year she received Edward Mac Dowell Medal for her contribution to literature. Miss Hellman has written a good many screen plays. Besides the adaptations of her own plays *These Three* based on *The Children's Hour*, *The Little Foxes* and *The Searching Wind*, and a few adaptations of other authors, she has written *Dark Angel*, *Dead End*, *The North Star* and *The Chase*.

And then Miss Hellman has been a teacher. She began a long teaching career at Yale University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University from 1961 to 1968. She has won many an award and honour during this period.

Recently (1977), the episode 'Julia' from *Pentimento* has been made into a film, thus keeping the persona of Lillian Hellman, the legendary lady, still before us.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Quoted from S. Maloff, "Jewel Without Price", Common Weal, 103:438 July 2, '76.


6 Ibid.

7 Cf. Margaret Case Harriman, "Miss Lily of New Orleans", New Yorker, 17:22-26 Nov. 8, '41.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.


15Cf. Margaret Case Harriman, "Miss Lily of New Orleans", *New Yorker*, 17:22-26 Nov.8,'41.


18Ibid.


20Ibid.


