CHAPTER II

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1 Realistic Setting—The Deep South

Miss Hellman is a Southerner, and a lover of the South. As she remarks: "There's nothing like the look of Southern land or there's no way for me to get over thinking so. It's home for me still." (Pentimento, p.94). Hence most of her plays are set in her native South—the Deep South, in or near New Orleans. She also attempts to pull the outside world of Southern history into the artistic orbit of her plays, often through careful research into period and economic facts. Her plays are concerned with examining and representing the lives and problems of real, contemporary human beings.

Out of her two typically Southern plays, The Little Foxes, and Another Part of the Forest, the action of the former takes place in the Deep South in 1900. Miss Hellman realistically bases her work on the rise of industry in the South which was beginning at the time to compete with the industry of New England. Thus the industrial revolution of the South is the back-drop against which the 'Little Foxes' play their human or inhuman roles.

The play tells the story of a Southern family which stems from near white-trash origins but which by hard dealing and cheating has made money and annexed both the
plantation and the daughter of an aristocratic family. They are a precious trio: two brothers—Ben Hubbard and Oscar Hubbard—and their sister Regina. Then there is Leo, Oscar's son. The only pleasant people are Regina's pathetic brow-beaten sister-in-law, her dying husband, her daughter Alexandra and her two Negro servants, Addie and Cal.

Now this base lot of Hubbards join hands with a suave Northern capitalist to set up a cotton factory at an immense profit by employing local labour at starvation wages. The Hubbards are counting on Regina's husband Horace to furnish his share of the capital needed in order that they, the original conspirators, may keep control of the stock. Horace, ill in a distant hospital, is summoned home. He refuses to invest his money, preferring to have no further part in the work of "pounding the bones of the town" (LF, p. 176), undertaken by his wife and her brothers. From this deadlock springs a powerful drama of intramural conspiring and double-crossing and theft. Leo steals negotiable bonds belonging to Horace, and when the latter learns this, he cleverly devises a plan whereby Regina is given power over the others or will be given such power after his death. In a most effective scene, Regina allows her husband to die by refusing him medicine and immediately demands and gets a lion's share of the stock. It is the amplifications and undertones, however, that together give the play its spire of meaning "The Little Foxes", "The Spoilers of the Vines", (LF, p. 1). The corrupt enjoyers of privileges have not seen that
"our vines have tender grapes" (LF, p.1). Hellman describes them as people "who eat the earth" (LF, p.182).

In the play, there is Birdie who has been accepted into the Hubbard family because of her social standing and her property, and is now a pathetic soul—one of the innumerable casualties that strew the path of the spoilers. She and Horace and the coloured servant Addie, all help Alexandra to break the bonds that hold her and at the last the child turns to her mother and tells her she is leaving home. Regina for a moment possibly begins to realize what is happening. Regina asks Alexandra, "Would you like to sleep in my room tonight?" and the latter answers, "Are you afraid Mama?" At this Regina says nothing but "moves slowly out of sight" as Addie comes to Alexandra and presses her arm. (LF., p.200).

2 The Agrarian Ante-bellum South

In Another Part of the Forest, Miss Hellman traces the family history of the Hubbards of The Little Foxes and takes them back by one generation to the year 1880. The father and mother—Marcus and Lavinia are still alive. Marcus scorns and ridicules his wife and has engaged his two sons Ben and Oscar in his business at a very low wage. However, he lavishes his money on his daughter Regina. The family has made its money during the Civil War at the expense of its neighbours by selling badly needed salt, smuggled through the blockade, for extraordinary black-market prices.
In contrast to the Hubbards, are the Bagtrys: daughter of the family—Birdie, her mother and her cousin John Bagtry. Despite their rich land and equally rich cotton, they are poor, starving on their plantation Lionnet and, because of their aristocratic heritage and manner, a thorn in the side of the Hubbards.

All the Hubbards play tricks on one another. They attempt to enslave and exploit one another, as they have done the town's people and will do the Bagtrys. Thus the play, besides depicting a struggle, is a two-hour-orgy of cruelty. The only passion for any of the Hubbards, outside of money, is sexual lust. The father's attachment to his daughter is given incestuous overtones and there is more than a hint that Ben too is a jealous rival of his father for Regina. Oscar too is in love—'deeply and sincerely', he keeps saying—with the town tart. But Ben soon breaks up that affair and sets the scene for Oscar to court Birdie Bagtry in order to bring those rich cotton fields into the family.

Regina is in love too. She has been having an affair with the penniless John Bagtry and wants him to elope with her to Chicago since she knows that neither her father nor Ben would approve of her marriage. But John, given to the twin romantic ideals of love and war practised by the feudal lords of yore, only wants now to go to Brazil to fight in a war brewing there.
The climax of the play (and the defeat of Marcus) is brought about by Lavinia, his downtrodden wife. For years she has been begging Marcus to build her a little school house in Altaloosa, where she can fulfil her mission in life—to teach black children (Not the Bible: they are too young to read about what goes on in that Book). When he has refused year after year and even threatened to send her to a mental hospital, Lavinia makes up her mind to escape and tries to persuade Ben to take her with him. Ben had been ordered out of the sight of Marcus before daybreak because, as usual in the family, he was playing a trick on Marcus—he was trying to take a loan of ten thousand dollars for Miss Birdie instead of the five thousand dollars actually demanded by her. This extra five thousand he wished to invest in Birmingham Coal Inc., Mobile. Ben hesitates till Lavinia gives him the information about Marcus's culpable criminal past. He had led Union troops to a camp where Southern boys—sons and brothers of the local folk—were training, resulting in a massacre of all of them. Marcus had saved his skin then on the basis of an alibi but Lavinia knew that the alibi was false and had kept a detailed note of the event in the family Bible she carefully keeps to herself. Ben blackmails his father to sell him the family business for one dollar and transfer all power to him to escape lynching.

Thus these two plays realistically depict the law or lawlessness of the jungle before and at the turn of the century, where only physical strength and, even more, ...
cunning prevailed. They bring home the fact that the law of jungle rules now "where there might once have been real innocence and its surrounding Arcadia." ¹

Miss Hellman in Another Part of the Forest portrays Bowden, a typical Alabama town of one hundred years old. She brings before us the South of the feudal aristocracy with its plantations, great mansions and exquisite inmates. In a mood of nostalgia, she portrays those mansions with their stalwart Greek columns, porticos, French doors and classical furnishings, dining halls, kitchen quarters, chambers and vast sprawling lawns—and the whole thing surrounded by illimitable stretches of white cotton.

In The Little Foxes too, various suggestions of the old plantation life—the men, their milieu and their manners—are found. There are innumerable suggestions of the old regime through which the plantation era is shown in a rosy perspective. In her plays, she suggests, to borrow the words of F.P. Gaines, "a resplendent age, an Arcadian scheme of existence—less material, less hurried, less prosaically equalitarian, less futile, richer in picturesqueness and festivity." ² Ben testifies to this fact in The Little Foxes:

Lionnet in its day was the best cotton land in the South. . . . Ah, they were great days for those people—even when I can remember. They had the best of everything. . . . Cloth from Paris, trips to Europe, horses you can't raise any more, niggers to lift their fingers—

(LF, p. 140)

Birdie wistfully indulges in reminiscences of that far-off opulent era:
I shall like to have Lionnet back... I'd like to see it fixed up again, the way Mama and Papa had it. Every year it used to get a nice coat of paint... and the lawn was so smooth all the way down to the river, with the trims of Zinnias and red-feather plush. And the figs and blue little plums and the scuppernongs—(smiles. Turns to Regina) The organ is still there and it wouldn't cost much to fix. We could have parties for Zan, the way Mama used to have for me.

(LE, p.145)

And here is Regina inquiring of John Bagtry:

Regina. Why couldn't you? Plantation folks giving balls again? Or fancy dress parties?

John. (Smiles) I haven't been to a party since I was sixteen years, Regina. The Bacons gave the last ball I ever remember to celebrate the opening of the war and say good-bye to us—

(APF, p.330)

Thus the social life of ante-bellum South with its pomp and pageantry, glory and grandeur, with its dance music and merry-making, is realistically suggested in the plays of Miss Hellman. They catch the true flavour of plantation life—the life of the landed aristocracy.

Miss Hellman further suggests that in this respect these up-coming bourgeois were an echo of those feudal lords whose ways they were aping. Some of the plantation lords of the ante-bellum South were justly famed for their intellectual and cultural interests. Many mansions could show creditable libraries and display rare classics in art and painting. The new rich of the New South took to imitating the ways of the old lords. Marcus Hubbard, all the time boasting aloud of his books and Sunday-study, is only one of the many examples of these nouveau ricke. He pretends to a fondness for classical lore and literature
and shows some passion for music (APP, p.335), while Oscar in The Little Foxes is a regular hunter, though he kills for the sake of killing and not for the sake of kitchen, Ben in the same play is justly proud of his horses and he intends to add further to his stable. Horses are his only passion—his only love. Says Ben:

I think I'll have a stable. For a long time I've had my good eye on Carter's in Savannah. A richman's pleasure, the sport of kings, why not the sport of Hubbards? Why not? (LF, p.145)

Miss Hellman's male characters unerringly follow in the footsteps of their plantation predecessors at least in one respect, namely, that almost all of them have a weakness for women. While Marcus and Ben have developed incestuous love for Regina, Oscar and Leo are given to whoring. While Bagtry's affair with Regina is a matter of scandal in the neighbourhood in Another Part of the Forest, suave and sweet Horace too has had some extra-marital affairs in The Little Foxes.

These two plays of Miss Hellman truly depict the plight of Southern women. Her heroines are the near relatives of plantation romance. Her Dixie girls have surpassing loveliness, the dewy freshness, the bloom, the rose odour of Southern women. The belles of the post-bellum era, like their sister plantation-belles, wear lavish costumes. Regina in Another Part of the Forest is in the tradition of her elder plantation sisters. She gets her dresses from Chicago. She is both impulsive and reserved, frivolous and inconsiderate, frank yet coquettish and heartless like the ladies of
chivalry. As a foil to her, but again a typical Southern woman, there is Birdie, tender as Cordelia. While Regina is a fascinating coquette with a lot of social cleverness, Birdie shows spiritual qualities, certain hints of idealism, a chastity, a spotlessness of thought and act.

The elderly Lavinia in Another Part of the Forest is a typical mistress of a big Southern household. She is a busy and unselfish woman, mother of her own children and mother of the black throng, a teacher of the ignorant blacks. As has already been suggested, throughout the play she has been trying to persuade Marcus to build her a school at Altaloosa where she could teach black children. Thus, like typical Southern matrons, she is a bond between the whites and the blacks. She is a real object of honour and reverence.

But all the same she is the pathetic victim of society. Lavinia in Another Part of the Forest, and later, Birdie in The Little Foxes, are typical example of pathetic victimization. They "married and found that matrimony locked a door and threw away the key, locked away a door so thick that not even the cry of pain could ever penetrate to the outer world." Lavinia is such a casualty and so is Birdie. Birdie tries to save Alexandra from such a calamity:

Birdie (her voice rising). I am not worrying about the horses. I am worrying about you. You are not going to marry Leo. I am not going to let them do that to you—

Alexandra. Marry? To Leo? (Laughs) I wouldn't marry Aunt Birdie. I've never even thought about it.
Birdie. But they have thought about it. (Wildly)
Zan, I couldn't stand to think about such a thing.
You and—(Oscar has come into the doorway on
Alexandra's speech. He is standing quietly,
listening.).

Alexandra (Laughs) But I'm not going to marry. And
I'm certainly not going to marry Leo.

Birdie. Don't you understand? They'll make you.
They'll make you—

Alexandra (takes Birdie's hands quietly, firmly).
That's foolish, Aunt Birdie. I'm grown now.
Nobody can make me do anything.

(LF, p.154)

Lillian Hellman is sympathetically aware of the deep
agony through which many a spotless Southern woman passed
as she became slowly and unwillingly aware of the loose
morals of her men. Miss Hellman renders them more conspicu­
cously pathetic by suggesting a contrast between the typically
Southern Lavinia and Birdie on one hand, and Mrs. Marshall
the Northern celebrity of society columns on the other.
(LF, p.138).

Thus her plays realistically reflect the feudalistic
structure of society before and after the Civil War and
prove to be lively social documents of considerable value.
She also makes a subtle suggestion about the condition of
Negroes:

Birdie. We were good to our people. Everybody
knew that we were better to them than—

(LF, p.140)

This remark of Birdie has large implications. It opens
up a complete chronicle of the so-called master-slave relations
in the Old South. It suggests a life in which the young
white master wanted no better friend than the black boy who 
was raised by his side. He wanted no sweeter music than the 
crooning of his old 'mammy' who held him in her loving arms 
and, bending her old black face above him, stole the care 
from his mind and led him smiling into sleep. And the old 
trusty slave slept every night at his mother's chamber door 
holding her and her children in sacred trust while the 
'master' was away at war. Thus there was a real affection 
and sacrifice on the part of these so-called slaves while 
the old 'master', though an embodiment of inconsistencies, 
was endowed with the graces of a gentleman and the qualities 
of a patriarch.

Thus Birdie's statement suggests happy and idealized 
relations between the races. The white was benign and the 
black happy in the peculiar milieu of plantation society.

As against the ante-bellum relation, the post-bellum 
one between the races was strained and caused a cleavage in 
hearts. There were innumerable race problems in the North 
but in the South, there was only one race problem. It was 
rather twenty times as serious because it went deep down to 
the heart. Here is Oscar voicing the worst sentiments of 
the post-bellum Southern Whites:

Oscar. You do a lot of judging around here, Addie, 
eh? Judging of your white folks, I mean. 

(LF, p. 156)

And again,

Oscar (turns his head to look at Cal). Cal, if I 
catch a nigger in this town going shooting, you 
know what's going to happen. 

(LF, p. 157)
At the same time, in Miss Hellman’s plays, the plantation also stands as a kind of American embodiment of the golden age. She claims for this social order, to quote Gaines again, "the philosophic tone of Greece, the dominant political energy of Rome and the beauty of chivalry softened by the spiritual quality of Christianity." Her imagination seems to dwell on the past as an era of happier things. She seems to feel that 'there hath passed away a glory from the earth' with the vanishing of the Old South.

Thus it is apparent that however violent may be the profession of political equality on the part of Miss Hellman -- however she may vaunt her democracy, her imagination is keenly appreciative of the life of the ante-bellum South, in spite of its foundation on inequality.

3 The Post-bellum South—The Rise of Industry

In these two 'Fox' plays, as the present study shows, the Old South with its ideal agrarian world and the atmosphere of enchantment, was yet a land of lingering nostalgia for her. And it was like-wise a land of vigorous anticipation.

It was in the late nineteenth century that some of the economic crusaders of the South and the North felt that the economic redemption of the South lay in industrialization. Columbia, Georgia and Alabama felt that if they could but
secure the location of cotton mills near the cotton fields, many of the economic woes of the South would be ended.\(^6\) It is with this intention of "bringing the machine to the cotton and not the cotton to machine" (LF, p. 142), as Ben rightly puts it in The Little Foxes, that the Hubbards invite the Yankee Marshall to set up a mill in Bowden. Oscar refers to this import of industrialization—this industrial rush—from the North to the South:

Oscar: My brother always says that it's folks like us who have struggled and fought to bring to our land some of the prosperity of your land.

Ben: Some people call that patriotism. (LF, p. 141)

Some of them were honest enough to admit that this New South held greater promise for commercial adventure if not exploitation. That suave Northerner readily admits it:

Marshall (amused) . . . Well, however grand your reasons are, mine are simple: I want to make money and I believe I'll make it on you. (LF, p. 142)

Now the Hubbards plan to bring a cotton factory to their town—a factory that was to prosper, not because the cotton fields would be so near and freight would be saved, but because there was cheap water and steam power. This was the main argument of the promoters, "Water power free and plenty of it." (LF, p. 171).

Besides this, the availability of cheap and unskilled rural labour was an important enticement.\(^7\) It is this point Ben is emphasizing:
(Horace smiles. Ben smiles) Cheap wages? "What do you mean by cheap wages?" I say to Marshall. "Less than Massachusetts", he says to me, "and that averages eight a week." "Eight a week! By God" I tell him, "I'd work for eight a week myself." Why there ain't a mountain white or a town nigger but wouldn't give his right arm for three silver dollars every week, eh, Horace?

(LF, p. 171)

The Southern poor whites were as poor and backward as the Negroes before the Civil War. They were tenant farmers or share-croppers on the coastal plains and plateau, and moved gradually back to the hills where they eked out a primitive existence. On the plains, the small cotton growers were victims of a cruel credit system which left them little real money.

Now to these poor farm people, industry was a new experience. It was a rescue and a release from agricultural drudgery and it brought them some cash wages. It is this migration into the Deep South of labour from the plains and hills alike that rendered them cheap and plenty by the mill side.

Besides this, many of the first mills were located by the side of the single water-power plant. The villages were built there and accommodation was provided cheap to these labourers. They were also provided with gardens, medical attention, free pasturage, wool and coal at cost. This Company-town system made the workers extremely docile and dependent. The employer meant to the workers more than a mere provider of wages. He was their religious, social and
domestic master. Consequently the workers could not protest against any working conditions. It is these conditions that have inculcated the confidence in the mind of Ben to boast:

Ben (laughs). There'll be no trouble from any body, white or black. Marshall said that to me. "What about strikes? That's all we've had in Massachusetts for the last three years." I say to him "What's a strike? I never heard of one. Come South, Marshall. We got good folks and we don't stand for any fancy fooling.

(LF, p. 171)

Thus while Lillian Hellman depicts the reawakening of the Southern industrialists to the possibilities of new and more promising economic adventure, she also brings home to us in the person of the Reginas and the Bens a relentless Capitalism and its ruthless ways:

Ben (picks up his coat, turns to her). . . . But I'm not discouraged. The country's turning, the world is open. Open for people like you and me. Ready for us, waiting for us. After all this is just the beginning. There are hundreds of Hubbards sitting in rooms like this throughout the country. All these names aren't Hubbards, but they are all Hubbards and they will own this country someday.

(LF, p. 197)

But all the same, there is a protest against this type of adventure, feeble though it may be. It had been sounded by Addie against that sort of free enterprise:

Addie. . . . Well, there are people who eat the earth and eat all the people on it like in the Bible with the locusts. And other people who stand around and watch them eat it. (Softly) Sometimes I think it ain't right to stand and watch them do it.

(LF, p. 182)
And Horace agrees to this in no weak terms. Here he expresses his sentiments to his wife Regina:

Horace. . . . I'm 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 . . . 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.

(LF, p.177)

And Alexandra, the spokesman of the new generation with its own idealism, expresses her opinion thus:

Alexandra: . . . Addie said there were people who ate the earth and other people who stood around and watched them do it. And just now Uncle Ben said the same thing. Really he said the same thing. (Tensely) Well, tell him for me, Mama. I'm not going to stand around and watch you do it. I'll be fighting as hard as he'll be fighting.

(LF, p.199)

The history of the Hubbards typifies the unimpeded enterprise of a new bourgeois way of life superimposed upon an older and more aristocratic way, or perhaps emerging from it. It was "a ruthless crude certainty out of a sensitive romantic uncertainty." to put it in the words of Frank O'Hara. Thus Lillian Hellman realistically depicts the Deep South in the period of great social change from around 1920s to 1900s. These two plays Another Part of the Forest (1946) and The Little Foxes (1939) dramatize with relentless realism the impact of a rising industrialism upon various classes of society. A few characters like Horace, Addie, Birdie, become awfully disgusted with the new way of
life. They are rather the chips of old time forced to survive out of time and out of place. As O'Hara puts it, "Birdie moves through the new way like a remembered refrain which recalls the dignity and grace and pride of less hurried days but loses its identity among the strident notes of incompassionate new industries and insatiable new greed." 12

4 The South - Decline of Agriculture

Besides this, Lillian Hellman suggests that a devastating and exhausting Civil War in which nearly all the able-minded and able-bodied white men of the South were engaged on one side, made an immediate and radical change in the social and agricultural system of that region. The planters, their sons and their comrades died on the warfield and those who could return, came back maimed and mutilated, some in body and some in spirit, poor, worn out, dispirited hopeless of the future and dazed with the collapse of their dreams. Her plays, particularly Another Part of the Forest, show that distress and desolation marked many of the older sections during this post-bellum period. The Bagtrys, the Ishams and such others are the living monuments of this sad predicament. Ben cold and callous himself, makes an impassioned allusion to this fact:
Ben. But when the war comes these fine gentlemen ride off and leave the cotton, and the women, to rot.

Birdie. My father was killed in the war. He was a fine soldier, Mr. Marsnall. A fine man.

Regina: Oh, certainly Birdie. A famous soldier.

(LF, p.140)

and again,

Ben (to Birdie): But that isn't the tale I am telling Mr. Marshall. (To Marshall) Well, Sir, the war ends. Lionnet is almost ruined and the sons finish ruining it. And there were thousands like them.

(LF, p.144)

Miss Hellman, true to the chronicle, depicts the cotton-South in transition—a South reeling under the constant failure of its staple crop and the lack of credit facilities causing mass distress and depression among the cotton growers. Here is Birdie the last remnant of the Southern gentry having come to beg for a loan from the Hubbards.

Birdie. I was going to use the first money to buy molasses and sugar. All that land and cotton and we're starving. It sounds crazy, to need even molasses.

Marcus: Every body with cotton is starving.

(APF, p.374)

Thus in presenting that economic depression Miss Hellman's plays have approached fact very intimately.

Although there is no outright condemnation of the ante-bellum South in her plays, she suggests that the wealthy plantation owners of the South had in them the germs of their own destruction before the Civil War, while its after effects completed their downfall. Neurosis or a destructive adherence to their romantic dreams is displayed by these characters who do not enter into a healthy relationship with contemporary
reality. The romantic life of the Southern aristocrats centred around two aims, like that of the medieval feudal lords, love and war. Though there is no reference to love, the constant hankering after war by John Bagtry and even his elderly aunt is typical of their temperament. Here is Birdie come to raise a loan to finance the trip of her cousin to Brazil (where a nice war, as Ben ironically remarks, is going on). She expresses her mother’s feelings about war:

Birdie: A war. He wants to go back to war. Mama says she can even understand that. She says there isn’t any life for our boys any more.

(APF, p.346)

According to Aunt Clara, ‘war’ was the only way of life left to the Southern gentry under contemporary conditions. And here is Bagtry, in a similar vein:

Bagtry. I was only good once—in a war. Some men shouldn’t ever come home from a war. You know something? It’s the only time I was happy.

(APF, p.331)

Ben and Marcus were bad because business was their religion but John was an idiot. To the Hubbards (and, to some extent to Lillian Hellman) he seems a dead man, a foolish man, an empty man from an idiot world who could not talk of anything but war. The elderly Hubbard was near the truth when he said about John Bagtry,

Marcus. A foolish man, an empty man from an idiot world. A man who wants nothing but war, any war, just a war. A man who believes in nothing, and never will. A man in space—

(APF, p.335)
Thus Miss Hellman depicts two worlds. One consists of a polite society still governed by a desire to cling to old beliefs and by an inability to recognize the kind of change which must come. The members of the other society are alert, ambitious like foxes—animals of prey, ready to jump and seize and devour anything that comes handy. Ben asserts the same attitude:

Ben. . . . (To Marshall) Well, sir, the war ends. Lionnet is almost ruined and the sons finish ruining it. And there were thousands like them. Why? Because the Southern aristocrat can adapt himself to nothing. Too high-tone to try.

Marshall. Sometimes it is difficult to learn new ways.

Ben. Perhaps, perhaps . . . you're right Mr. Marshall. It is difficult to learn new ways. But maybe that's why it's profitable. Our grand-father and our father learned the new ways and learned how to make them pay. (Smiles) They were in trade, Hubbard Sons, Merchandise. Others, Birdie's family, for example, looked down on them. (Settles back in chair) To make a long story short, Lionnet now belongs to us . . . Twenty years ago we took over their land, their cotton and their daughter.

(LF, pp.140-41)

And here is Marcus making a very biting, but not altogether unjust, statement about the whole of the feudal society:

Marcus. Well, I disapprove of you. Your people deserved to lose their war and their world. It was a backward world, getting in the way of history. Appalling that you still don't realize it.

(APF, p.368)

Besides this, Miss Hellman suggests the degeneration of the aristocracy of the Old South in one other way before socio-economic conditions brought about its ruin. Marcus
is justified in questioning the tone of moral superiority
which the Bagtrrys have adopted towards him:

Marcus. Your mother hasn't bowed to me in the
forty years I've lived in this town.

(APF, p.373)

In the Hubbards, Miss Hellman depicts the emergence of
a new class of persons—the merchant, the bourgeois—rising
on the ruins of the old feudal class—more powerful, more
menacing, who do not hesitate to assert their power and
position. Here is Regina, daughter of the new lord Marcus
Hubbard to her lover John Bagtry, the captain of the
confederate army and the remnant of the feudal order:

Regina: Your cousin Birdie's never done more than
say good morning in all these years—when she
knows full well who I am and who Papa is. Knows
full well he could buy and sell Lionnet on the
same morning, its cotton and its women with it.

(APF, p.331)

Thus, Miss Hellman faithfully represents "the persistence
of ante-bellum lines of social distinctions into post-bellum
condition too." 14

While Bowden with its Hubbards symbolizes the South with
its new capitalistic system of society, and the Lionnet of
the Bagtrrys symbolizes the feudal system, its unprofitable
cotton stands for the dwindling and declining economy of
the old feudal lords. Thus, the decline and death of Lionnet
represents the unspeakable charm that lived and died with
the Old South.
5 The Problem of Isolation

Miss Hellman's plays realistically depict the material loss of plantation and the resultant socio-economic wreck of the Southern planter. They also present the moral and physical isolation consequent on their inability to adjust with the other individuals of the society under the new economic system. John Bagtry informs Regina how lonely his cousin Birdie and aunt are:

John: . . . They're lonely, Regina, and I'm not with them much.  
(APF, p.330)

and again,

John: Things are different with us. Everything.  
This summer is the worst, I guess, in all the years. They are lonely.  
(APF, p.330)

The planters are lonely but the other class—the up-and-coming money lenders, the merchants—are more so. They suffer from a moral isolation and an inner spiritual vacuum. Their moral void is greater than that of the planters. They are members of the same society but they suffer more heavily from its defects. Although the theme of tragic loneliness is carried by Birdie of The Little Foxes, at the end it is the powerful Regina, in the same play, who pleadingly asks her daughter to sleep in her chamber because of the fear of being alone.
Miss Hellman makes it explicitly clear that the rough characters, who took over and were completely successful in the modern world, did not have a happy sense of belonging. In her two Hubbard plays, she lays emphasis upon the characters who, in a material sense, make a success of living, but who are as devoid of social or moral or spiritual values as a nest of vipers. The Hubbards, in battling with each other for the family wealth, have lost all the affection that the ties of blood should give and the family as a whole is cut off from friendly contacts in the neighbourhood.

Lavinia. . . . What do people now, curtsey or shake hands? I guess it's just about the first guests we had since the suspicion on your Papa.

(APF, p.359)

For more than twenty-five years, they have had their suspicions about him.

In this second play about the Hubbards, the author lays great emphasis on the social ostracism of the Hubbards and their impulse to get ahead financially to compensate for their loneliness. Lavinia in this play turns to the Negroes and to the Church for comfort and understanding. She is loved by them and belongs to them. Regina is anxious to have her father make the Bagtrys a loan. She wants to court their favour because she is tired of her lonely life.

Regina (Softly). Course I don't know any thing about business, Papa, but could I say something please? I've been kind of lonely here with nobody nice having much to do with us.

(APF, p.349)
And again,

Regina: Papa, I told you. I been a little lonesome.
No people my age ever coming here—

(APF, p.349)

When Ben contrives to send her lover away, she has nowhere to turn; no wonder that the Regina of twenty years later knows only ruthlessness. She has suffered from a feeling of apartness since childhood days and has known nothing to make her appreciate the warmth of human affection.

6 The Ku-Klux-Klan

This was the time when the clandestine Ku-Klux-Klan used to attack the Negroes and the Northern missionaries in the darkness of night. This band of night-riders had very high sounding aims but in reality they were responsible for countless acts of violence and lawlessness; and these acts were mostly motivated by personal grievances. Our master Oscar in Another Part of the Forest is one such case. He had attacked Sam Taylor because the latter had tried to make advances to his girl-friend Laurette, though Oscar at first gives a different reason:

Ben. Why did you beat up Sam Taylor?
Oscar (after a second, sulkily). He's a no-good carpet-bagger.
Ben (wearily). All right. Let's try again. Why did you beat up Sam Taylor?

Oscar. He tried to make evening appointments with Laurette. He tried it twice. I told him the first time, and I told her too.

(APF, p.342)

Miss Hellman shows that most of the K.K.K. raids were carried out with the intention of taking personal revenge.

Thus in Miss Hellman's plays we get a real world, discussing real problems and real situations. Some of the themes of her plays march across the surface of her plays in step with the time. This is true of her later plays like *The Days to Come* (1936).

The period from 1929 to 1939 beginning with the Great Depression and ending with World War II was such that no intellectual could live without a concern for social action—for the plight of the poor, the victims of the capitalistic system and the helplessness of the capitalists. In *The Days to Come*, Miss Hellman portrays those dark days of the Depression that followed the economic crash in the Fall of 1929 and came as a problem and a challenge.

Setting the locale in the Middle West, she shows a small one-factory town in which owners are known by their first names to their workmen and the workmen are friends of the owners. The depression has caused a fall in the market, and this has made it necessary for the owner Andrew Rodman to cut piecework wages. The workmen are bewildered but the owner is helpless. Here is Andrew the factory owner pleasing his own side to his foreman Firth—a childhood friend as well.
Andrew (to Firth). You tell me a way out, I'll take it. Seven years we were making a lot of money. (Touches the paper) I can't stay in business losing it this way. We'd be out in another year.

(DC, p.86)

And again,

Andrew. . . . I knew the cuts had to come, I tried hard to keep them off as long as I could. I thought you'd see that the only way you could stay working and I could stay working was if we took the bad times together. I couldn't do any thing else.

Firth. And I know we can't live on forty-cent piece work. I told you it was too big a cut. And I told you they wouldn't take it.

Andrew. Do you think I want to cut you that way? It's just for a little while—

Firth. And who's going to pay our bills for the little while?

Andrew (Shakes his head). I know. I don't blame you. But you mustn't blame us either.

(DC, p.86)

Miss Hellman depicts the economic condition of America during this decade of depression in which the capitalists had lost faith in themselves and the proletariat had failed to find any way out. Jobs were few and hence difficult to find. They involved more labour and brought in less money. Miss Hellman paints a haunting picture of people with blank faces and broken spirits suffering from this "invisible scar". Whalen's father is one such sad case.

Whalen (Smiles). . . . I kind of liked my father, and that four hundred bucks would have been plenty of car fare for him. He had rheumatism bad and the places where they could pay a gardener were in the suburbs and he had to walk most of the way. He'd come home at night and it would hurt him to take his pants off and he'd sit in a chair and hold them out from his legs so the goods couldn't touch the skin. He was nice.

(DC, p.157)
This play also portrays the labour movement of America in the 1930s. Earlier the Communist Party had accepted the Comintern's judgement that the development of a radical consciousness among American workers would be slow. Now it reversed itself and made every effort to penetrate and capture the labour movement by organizing strikes wherever possible to which the industrialists retaliated by engaging professional strike-breakers, resulting in a lot of violence and bloodshed. 17

In this play too Miss Hellman selects such a situation. The workers, with the ancient fellowship shattered, resort to strike; they are joined by Whalen, a smart union organizer, to lead and guide them and then begins the usual drama, the tug-of-war between hungry workers and harassed masters.

7 Neurosis—The Bane of Modern Society

Miss Hellman attempts an extension of her realism vertically also. Now it goes deep down into the mysteries of human psyche. She undertakes an exploration of what Dostoevsky calls 'the underground man', and shifts our interest to young Mrs. Julia Rodman. Bored to extinction, with the small dull town and a loveless marriage, she becomes wistfully unfaithful with a variety of men. What gives The Days to Come its point is chiefly the neurotic character of Julia who falls in love with Whalen, the
Labour organizer; and what gives this play the realistic ting is the neurosis, the bane of modern society.

This play shows Mrs. Rodman's craving for affection. It is, to borrow the words of Horney, "this neurotic need for affection with all its compulsiveness that results in her reckless promiscuity." To her this gaining of affection is not a luxury or a source of additional strength or pleasure but a vital necessity. As a result she attaches this desire to everyone without discrimination from Andrew to Ellicott, to Whalen and maybe, to many more behind the curtains. Whalen correctly sums up her character:

Whalen... You are a silly rich woman who doesn't know what to do with her life and who sees the solution for it in the first man she meets...

(DC, p. 109)

It is enough to notice that Miss Hellman is very frank and unspiring in her approach to reality.

9 The Rise of Fascism

The two later plays, Watch on the Rhine (1941) and The Searchning Wind (1944), too deal with contemporary problems. The former depicts the danger in the rise of Hitler's Germany and carries a timely warning to keep a close watch on the aggressive, expansionist Germany, rightly symbolized by the eroding Rhine. But The Searchning,
Wind is more eloquent in this respect. This play, true to its title, searches the souls of the contemporary world diplomats, particularly her native ones and performs a merciless analysis of their irresolute conduct which subjected the world to the pain and anguish of a world war.

The play flashes back and forth between Washington, Rome, Berlin and Paris. It covers a period of twenty-two years. Alex the diplomat watches Fascism become real, bold and imperious. He is actually a decent man, who is dismayed by what he sees; but he is also a wishy-washy liberal who hangs on to the hope that somehow good will come of evil. He makes every effort to maintain the status quo and thus makes out a case for appeasement. Actually he is no figure of real power himself, yet he is partly responsible—and that part is not small—for the official blunders and delays that made Munich no terminus but merely the last stop before the final open assault of Hitler.

This play, besides being an arraignment, is also a plea. It represents the feelings of the younger generation. The fiery final scene goes to Alex's crippled son with full truth spread out for the first time before him. He cries shame upon the parents he loves, demands passionately that there be no more 'fancy fooling around'—no such mistakes for any reason again.
The Lives of Quiet Desperation

This play has a sub-plot. The young diplomat marries not the serious-minded girl he loves but her more conventional best friend. Later, the other woman becomes Alex's mistress, securing a permanent place in his life. Miss Hellman mirrors the unawareness of the characters even of their own minds, resulting in their failure to take a right decision at the right moment. She also depicts their inertia.

Thus in this play, while she shows her knowledge and understanding of world events and depicts them realistically, she proves her skill in laying bare, as in The Days to Come, the inner reality.

The Autumn Garden, too, portrays the American social scene. But the waters are calm now. There is no external action—no catastrophes without, though there are crises within the characters that shake their bodies and souls. Thus this play portrays the 'inscape' of the society at large.

The play deals with a group of persons from different walks of life assembled at a summer boarding house in Louisiana. They are calm and quiet creatures, almost imperceptible in their quietness. They are neither villainous nor violent. But they are frustrated and defeated in purpose. The chief and not uncommon (and it is in this that these characters prove to be the representative of the world at large), trouble with these men and women is that they have never been able to face the truth about themselves.
Then appears on the scene a no-good, hard-drinking, girl-chasing painter Nick Denery who, twenty-three years ago, had shown affection for the mistress of this house, Constance Tuckerman, but had left, married a rich heiress and never looked back. He comes and involves himself in a scandal with the niece of the house, Sophie. This scandal, though groundless, brings out the ultimate truth of what these characters must face. There is no great dramatic action involved in this play. What gives it its power is the complicated relationship between the characters. The involvement among themselves, their unawareness of their own minds, their self-deceptions and their empty lives are clearly established in engrossing terms.

Among the characters is a benevolent drunkard who for many years has been thought of as the fiance of the spinster who runs the boarding house. In the fine and very touching last scene this amiable inebriate summarizes his whole life which, in its power and pathos, sounds the very essence of existential anguish.

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. . . . 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 somebody else's room—and that never means much one way or the other.

(AG, p.544)

Crossman is a case of utter sense of waste, with all its implications of helplessness, frustration and anguish. It all looks like a pathetic summing up of life, all the human life at that.
The last two plays, *Toys in the Attic* and *My Mother* *My Father and Me*, too deal with inner reality, but it is more pronounced in the *Toys in the Attic*.

*Toys in the Attic* depicts the routine life of a lower middle class family. In this play Miss Hellman shows the humdrum details of every day life. Here is Anna the elder of the two sisters, wistfully desiring to buy a coat for her younger sister Carrie:

Anna. We had a private sale at the store. Coats on a day like this. There was a very good bargain, red with black braid. I had my eye on it for you all last winter. But—

Carrie: I don't need a coat.

*(TA, p.686)*

And here they plan their prospective visit to Europe, which, they know, will never take place:

Carrie. As soon as we do set a date for departure, I'll have my evening dress fixed. No, I won't. Pink's no good for me now. I've kind of changed color as I got older. You, too; funny. To change color. C'est trop cher, M'sieur. I don't want to go if we have to say that all the time.

Anna. We've always said it, we always will say it. And why not?

Carrie. I just think it would be better not to go to Europe right now.

Anna (laughs): We weren't going.

Carrie. Save enough until we can go real right. That won't take long. Maybe just another year.

Anna. A year is a long time—now.

*(TA, p.690)*
Miss Hellman shows both the nagging details of everyday existence and the feeling which they evoke in those embroiled in them. She is a realist in that she depicts "the daily stuff that is the real truth, the importance", (Pentimento, p.107), 'lives of quiet desperation', as Thoreau puts it in his Walden.

These two sisters have always cherished a desire to visit Europe and saved money to that end. But they have always been deliberately postponing it because they had been spending all their money on their good-for-nothing brother Julian. This brother, always dependent on them, but presently married to a rich heiress Lily, and gone to Chicago, is expected back.

This Carrie has nursed inside herself a life-time subconscious lust for Julian and has therefore 'helped' him to remain a dependent failure. Miss Hellman, a psychological realist, lays bare this hypocrisy of this so called selfless female who substitutes her normal pleasure, quite in keeping with the tolerable norms of a permissive society, for a fiercely maintained desire and sacrifices her life for a dependent loved one. Miss Hellman uncovers the spectacle of a repressed woman, having her "vagina in the ice box" (TA, p.741), who is to ruin the lives of five people around her.

Referring to Madame Bovary, Henry James once said that it was "a revelation of what the imagination may accomplish under a powerful impulse to mirror the unmitigated reality
of life." These words are equally applicable to *Toys in the Attic*. In this play Miss Hellman resorts to that eternal realism of fidelity to nature as the basis of all art. She is true to the nature of things—the truth of things. She sees human nature with clear eyes and pictures it with deep and genuine fidelity.

Julian arrives and a crisis is born because Julian comes back wealthy and hence 'successful' and now he is no longer dependent on his sisters. Meanwhile it is made known to us that Julian had had a temporary affair with a woman in the past. This woman, in order to get away from her unscrupulous husband, Cyrus, has prompted Julian to buy a piece of swamp-land which her husband had intended to buy for his own speculative purposes. Thus Julian outwits him and gets rich. He comes home with a bundle-load of presents for his sisters.

Carrie, in the desperation with which she protects and hides her neurotic needs, contrives to deprive Julian of his newly earned wealth and gets him a rough handling at the hands of the thugs hired by Cyrus in connivance with his very pure and innocent wife.
10 The Sex-obsessed American Society

The last play, *My Mother My Father and Me*, takes us from the remote South to the cosmopolitan New York in the North, representative of the sum-total of American culture. Lillian Hellman, as a satirist of the more obvious stupidities and crudities of life, focuses her attention on contemporary American society and portrays its decay and doom.

This play deals with a Jewish family residing in Manhattan. All the members of this family, or to be exact, all the central characters in this play are neurotics. One of them, Mrs. Rona Halpern, the matron of this house is a compulsive buyer of anything that is handy. She suffers from a passion to own—a typical capitalistic trait—to accumulate to an unhealthy extent; so much so that her house could justly be called a junk house where free movement was impossible and where things could fall and crash at the slightest possible carefree movement.

Besides this, Miss Hellman depicts in the person of Rona Halpern, a sex-crazy, sex-obsessed American society where people think and talk in terms of sex; its artists and amateurs paint naked lush women; and sex-hungry, man-hunting women proudly talk of their numerous lovers. According to them, there is nothing that cannot be learnt in the arms of a man. It is a society where wives won't sleep with their husbands because they are either very rich or very poor, but they will sleep with any other man or they develop incestuous attachments.
Mrs. Halpern of the present play is such a sordid case. She feels miserable and anxious if she has no man around. She starts an affair, keeps it up or breaks it off and again feels miserable and anxious and starts another. She is a rake who, when asked to sit down, lies flat posing for 'the sacred act', and threatens her male partners if they do not satisfy her carnal desires. She does not sleep with her husband but suffers from some latent incestuous sinister leaning towards her son and won't allow other girls to visit him. She is a great impostor. She feels greatly shocked when she finds Filene, naked, in her son Berney's room. She rebukes Berney thus:


(MFM, p.776)

It is this double standard on the part of Rona that provokes this curt remark from Filene:

Filene. I tell you, there's nothing so crazy on earth as a middle-class American woman. Look, honey. (She returns to Rona, throws open her coat and is, of course, naked. Rona screams).

(MFM, p.776)

This same little hussy Filene, always boasts of changing her bed every night and pooh-poohs Berney because he sleeps in the same bed (MFM, p.775), and invites him in most enticing terms "to put a flame to her, to burn her down."

(MFM, p.776).
Then there is Mrs. Parker, a friend in true sense of the word. She is proud of being a beauty, proud of being pecked at by a variety of people. For her nothing is forbidden (MFM, p. 784). It is this worthy lady who had dissuaded her father from sending her to a university because according to her "there was nothing that could not be learnt in the arms of a man" (MFM, p. 766).

The members of the society indulge in sex orgies. The following dialogue between Rona and her paramour is revealing in this context:

Rona. We did such things. Such things. I never did such things before Zatz. Terrible things—

Dr. Katz. There is no terrible thing in the passion of a man and woman. All is clean . . .

Rona (in a gasp). Have you a wife?

Dr. Katz (sad). Yes.

Rona (let out a pained cry). Oh, Zatz. Do you do our things with her?

Dr. Katz. No, dear girl, no, dear girl.

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

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

(MFM, p. 798)

Thus, in this play we get a texture of every day life—the lawless relations of the sexes as well as the economic misery and degradation which are sometimes responsible for them.
Now in this family of the Helperns, besides the matron, there is her impotent husband. He is a shoe-manufacturer who wishes for a war so that his business may get a boost. And then there is their son, a delayed adolescent of twenty-six, who fancies himself a folksinger, a critic, a novelist, a philosopher, and what not, but who hasn't been able 'to find himself' yet. Above all, he wants to be the Messiah of the down-trodden. He, along with his pals, the sex-hungry hussies and dreamy desperadoes leading empty shallow lives, is a microcosm of American youth in general. In this context the remark of his sensible granny Jenny gives a true picture of their lives:

Jenny: You just get up from another nap. You sleep. You sleep. (MPW, p.780)

And again,

Jenny: Pretty picture. Is a pretty picture here? Sleep, eat, take a nap with a dog, the Mama, the Papa, the—

Berney (angry). Grandma, I am trying to find out What I'm about. What the world's about—

(Such is American youth with the grand aim of solving the mystery of our existence. With this hollow but high sounding idealism at his back, he only sleeps and sleeps and sleeps and does not act. His effort, whenever he takes one, for whatever reason, goes unfructified. Berney's
effort at taking a snap symbolizes the efforts of all the American Youth turning to sand and ashes:

Berney (picks up the camera). See this? I'm in the park, on a bench. Two little blonde girls, four, five maybe... got like little switch-blade knives and they're fighting like hell and using the knives like experts—(He rises) I never saw anything like it. I take my camera. The great shot of the world, unrehearsed infant murders. I click away—A man comes along to watch, a mother comes running, one kid is bleeding. The man says, "Boy, you got there pictures anybody would buy, any art mag. Boy. I envy you—" Then he laughs. Then he says, 'Next time take the cover off the lens.' The cover was on the lens and that's the history of my life.

(MFM, p.780)

Now, this is not the history of Berney, an individual, but of the American youth in general. Rejecting traditional American values of material success, self-control and achievement, American youth maintains that passion, feeling and awareness of this dark and meaningless world are the only human heritage. This inculcates in them the feeling of pessimism, that there is little chance of ever finding happiness and this fills them with the greatest bane of our modern society and culture that is anxiety. Berney expresses this anxiety while unfolding the history of his life.

This failure in life—this realization of an empty life, the American youth wants to drown in the maze of make-believe and delusion. He is the victim of wild romantic dreams—the false dreams of great feats and achievements:

Berney: Once I dug up an arrow root and boiled it and got sick. Remember? And I practised with the bow and arrow in Ashbury Park and killed that rabbit—(After a second) I didn't kill it. I missed it.

(MFM, p.779)
Thus, in Berney, Miss Hellman realistically depicts a typical alienated youth. An American youth, says Keniston, responds to the world with scorn and bitterness, anger and hate. Indeed, his anger is so corrosive that it extends even to himself. True to the logic of his position, he maintains that the consequences of self-knowledge are self-contempt and he is quick to admit his self-revulsion. Berney suffers from this sense of self-contempt. His last words "I didn't kill it. I missed it" are highly eloquent of his self-contempt and self-disgust.

Besides this, much of the explicit philosophy of the contemporary American Youth is negative. His favourite intellectual sport is to expose the hypocrisy of others. Berney makes a butt of his mother and laughs at the Biblical text contained in his mother's letter:

Berney. Chapter forty-four . . . My Mother . . .

once sent me a post card and there was a motto on it that said the eye that mocks the father and does not obey the mother, the ravens shall pick it out and the young eagles shall eat it.

(Giggles) There are plenty of ravens and eagles here, but nothing has happened.

(MFH, p.814)

Thus Miss Hellman portrays the distrust of all positive things among the young who find it impossible to agree to any statement that clearly expresses any affirmative view.

But despite the negative cast of their views, American youth show an implicit positive search in a common direction. Their philosophies emphasize the value of passion and
feeling, the search for awareness and the need to express somehow their experience of life. Here is Berney voicing the feeling of a typical American youth:

Berney (to Styron). I wish I had been born a blackman. I wish I had a chance to raise up a downtrodden people.

(MFM, p.796)

And then comes his poetic outburst, "You Find Jerusalem Where You Find Her" in which he expresses his longing 'To join my people / In the building of Israel'.

Thus, the American youth passionately concentrates on a few topics of intense personal concern. This concentration is so engaging, so absorbing that there is no distinction between 'work' and 'goofing off'.

Herman Hamburger has sufficient reason to believe that Berney's so called 'work' aims at nothing, would achieve nothing:

Berney. Let's work tonight.
Herman. What 'd you say?
Berney. I said work, work. I said the word work, . . .

(MFM, p.772)

The semi-systematic wanderings of Berney--his 'taking off' or 'dropping out' or his involvements in many artistic and aesthetic interests actually do not aim at some achievement or even escape, but at immersing himself in intense experience.
To forget his insignificant existence Berney often flies to remote, romantic places and events made famous in heroic tales:

Berney. The river of Tombigee, the mountain of Pastercene, Kamchouchee, the giant moose who wouldn't die and the misolee magic arrow that killed him; the girl, Tlingee, who braved the giant moose to save young warrior, River Black Wolf, her left breast torn open.

(MFM, p.782)

12 American Youth—Problem of Identity

Above all, a young man makes a frantic effort to establish his identity. "I'm having an identity crisis," he proudly asserts. He wants to make his presence felt. He wants to be the centre of attention in the society. Berney, suffering from a sense of neglect, presses Styron to avail himself of the opportunity of becoming the leader of his black folks:

Berney. Styron, how could you have left a land where you were needed? Why don't you go back? Think, what that would mean. A blackman coming down from the North returning to help his people? You'd walk right up, followed by thousands of admiring people. You'd be a great man, a noble man—

(MFM, p.797)

The American youth wants recognition but the tragedy with him is that he either does not work to achieve his aim or, if at all he works, his efforts go waste. The character of Berney, a typical victim of this predicament, has been justly assessed by his elderly granny.
Besides this Miss Hellman realistically portrays the cultural alienation of American youth in Berney. It is born of an utter failure to adjust to society as it is constituted. Berney in the last act expresses horror at the indifference of the people around in the face of war:

Berney (to Bar-tender): Don't they know there is a war on? Don't they? (Berney speaks to the man and woman next to him) Don't you know there is a war on?

Woman: Where?

Berney: Where there's a war on.

Woman: Outside?

Berney: That's America for you. Sitting here, waiting like doped pigeons for the bomb, knowing nothing, caring less, drinking, sexing--

(MFM, p.803)

13 The Aged in American Society

Then with the heart of a humanist Miss Hellman depicts the pitiable condition of the aged in American Society. Because of the desire of the younger people to maintain a high level of living, it is something of a strain for them to have a house and help support a parent or parents. Houses being smaller, the bringing of another adult into such relatively cramped living quarters imposes a hardship on all the three generations.24

'mona: Coffee over there, in the drawing room part of the living room.

(MFM, p.753)
Thus in this single sentence Rona refers to the fact of congested living in the urban areas; the rest of the long play gives a picture of the neglect and mental torture of the aged people. The elderly mother of Mrs. Halpern, Jenny, is one such case. Her repeated hellos go unnoticed and unresponded; but for Berney, she is a most unwelcome person in the house of the Halperns. Here is that big hoax of Rona:

Rona: Mama, we want you so much. We need you, I need you, Herman needs you.

But she immediately corrects herself thus:

Rona: But I know how it is. You'd never never leave the nest you shared with Papa. But remember if you change your mind in the years to come, you're always welcome.

(Jenny, on her way to the door, half steps, half falls, tries to keep the bird upright, manages, and stands straight, weak, before they can reach her).

Jenny: Yeah. I'm sick. I can't live by myself any more. I'll come. Thank you.

(Jenny exists. There is silence, then Jenny's words register on Rona and she screams. Then Herman screams . . .)

(NEW, p.762-63)

Thus the poor neglected aged are thrown out by their unloving children and dropped and left to the care of the managers of nursing homes. It is of particular significance that Jenny is shunted to a nursing home, ironically called The Golden Age Nursing Home. But the truth with regard to the aged and their world is brought home to us by Jenny herself:
Jenny: Many things can happen by Christmas. . . . but we leave you now. We go where there is no snow. Where there is no snow, there we go.

(MFH, p.787)

Such is the age Lillian Hellman depicts, not golden, iron or stone. Worse still, ours is an age of snow utterly lacking the warmth of understanding, love and sympathy for fellow creatures. Miss Hellman depicts a world, and sensible Jenny has rightly understood it, which is infested with vultures and whose bargain condition is death and who watch with interest and are ready to leap upon their prey at the earliest moment.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3 Cf. Ibid., p.155.


5 Ibid., p. 155.


7 Ibid., p.147.


12 Ibid.


17. Ibid., p.123.


21. Ibid., p.178.

22. Ibid., p.179.
