CHAPTER III

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Dramatic Art—A Source of Human Fulfilment

Miss Lillian Hellman believes in art for truth's sake; and truth for her is always human truth. As an artist, she emphasizes life as lived by people, and humanity as reflected in the complex human relations. She is essentially a humanist committed to the task of clarifying the complex human relations. She puts the welfare of human beings first, makes people supremely important and adopts their good and bad as the ultimate criterion for right and wrong.

Most of Miss Hellman's plays are built around two factors which control human affairs at large: family and capital. While the Searching Wind, Toys in the Attic and My Mother, My Father and Ie concentrate upon the domestic relations, The Days to Come and the two 'Fox plays' show the mischievous part played by capital in the human relations at various levels. But in all probability, real human interaction on social and domestic planes occupies the most prominent place in almost all her dramas. It is all as Richard Peary rightly remarks a "family theatre". There is really nothing in her plays that gives back the Hellman of that ideological importance and fame; Hellman of the far-left that went to Spain and Russia; Hellman the socialist.
anti-fascist who was a near-casualty of the McCarthy era. Though large public concerns do appear sometimes in her plays, the exact emphasis is always upon the domestic and domestically melodramatic surroundings, which go to contribute to the immense interest of the reading public. Her dramas of domesticity are more real and appealing as they are genuinely personal, without any deliberate references to public trappings.

Living in an age of science, grounded in reason, relativity and rationalism through logical analysis, she has come to recognize and depict in her plays that the universe has no special human meaning or human purpose as such, and, that man in no way is a special product of creation. Thus, in her plays, to borrow the words of Paul Kurtz, "Anthropocentrism has been laid to rest." She accepts man as he is and urges him to live by what he comes to know out of his authentic personal experience. Her reluctance to differentiate between what man is and what he should be, forbids her from defining man or his purpose in terms of universals or generals. This in itself is her own manner of acknowledging the uniqueness of man as a particular and not in any way a general; and this conviction of hers endows upon man the rare felicity of self-containment by way of recognizing his dignity as a Being. "Man is not important for his relative merits; he is rather significant because of his uniqueness as a being-in-the-world." Miss Kellman is thus opposed to all the theories of universal determinism; fatalism and pre-destination...
Miss Hellman believes that human beings possess genuine freedom of choice in making decisions. This is by no means because of any complacency about man and his centrality in the universe. Though she has hope for man and faith in his essential goodness, she does not take for granted that one can live a perfect life, the chief stumbling block being the society itself, with its peculiar institutions very often giving no scope of freedom to man as a being-in-the-world. According to her, no one can do justice to his powers and gifts completely. This is the elemental human tragedy. And it is revealed most in our failure to achieve greater fulfilment in and through our relationships than what is circumstantially fabricated. This sense of partial fulfilment is conveyed by the central character in her Candide thus:

(With force) No. We will not think noble because we are not noble. We will not live in beautiful harmony because there is no such thing in this world, nor should there be. We promise only to do our best and live out our lives. Dear God, that's all we can promise in truth.

(Candide, p.678)

Candide's own characteristic mood, his open and unhesitating acknowledgement of the fact that we are not noble and there is no such thing as harmony in this world speaks for itself his intellectual honesty about society as such.
Thus, there are no utopias and there are no saints. But Miss Hellman has a sensitive regard for each man as his own end, and for man as responsible for man. This notion of human responsibility is the central idea in her humanism. She believes that either man would save himself or he would never be saved. He had altered his environments, had made his own problems, created his great moments, and all these are of his own making. She bears a conviction that it is through the knowledge of his own self, his strength and weakness, his capacities and potentialities, his ability to challenge the best that is within him that man can hope to gain a better world for himself.

The most celebrated play The Autumn Garden has a collection of Southern types who lead meaningless lives and are forced by the catalytic presence of Nick Denery to recognize their failure and their responsibility for it. Toys in the Attic is the story of two sisters who live on dreams unfulfilled and who, one of them at least, must destroy the brother whose new success threatens to remove his dependence on them. Even in her early plays of social concern, like The Little Foxes, with its implicit anti-capitalistic theme, and Watch on the Rhine and The Searching Mind with their explicit anti-fascism, she is more concerned with the mutual personal responsibilities of the character, although all these plays indicate that personal action has inevitable public consequences.
Thus for her, determinism, as *Autumn Garden* shows, is never an excuse. Always the moralist and always the humanist, she is usually intent on pointing a critical finger not only at the eaters of the earth but at those who, in Addie's words, "stand around and watch them eat it." (LF, p.182).

Miss Hellman takes man to be a free agent—"the creative model". To be more precise, human existence is open-ended rather than predetermined. It is characterized primarily by choice and contingency and chance rather than by compulsion. What makes Miss Hellman a humanist is that she makes man distinct by his power to choose the freedom to say 'yes' or 'no' to the universe.

3 Importance of Human Endeavour

As against a built-in pattern of perfection and the pessimistic determinism of the naturalists, Miss Hellman believes, besides in freedom of the will and possibility of moral choice, in inexhaustible human effort. According to her, value lies in what we try to be and try to do and what happens to us in the striving. Perhaps, she believes it is man's fate to strive even though he knows that he will never fulfil his dream of self and his dream of society. Man makes his own hell or heaven; but he makes it here and now through his choice and performance.
Thus Miss Hellman's humanism promises the vision of partial fulfilment and the important process of man's striving for the fulfilment of his own dimensions would be that, as a by-product, he will have greater inner security, greater self-esteem, greater dignity and freedom and also the knowledge that man can shape his own destiny.

Miss Hellman is a humanist also in the sense that she is for man; her central concern is for man, his growth, fulfilment and creativity in this world. According to her if man is a product of evolution, one species among others in a universe without purpose, then man's option is to live for himself and to discover new areas of significance and achievement in that process of existing. Thus she makes an effort at infusing life with immediate meaning and purpose in so far it concerns with the present. According to her if man is aware of what he is and what he is not, and is devoid of illusion about his ultimate destiny, then his chief option is to create an authentic life in the context of which some measure of enjoyment and happiness is possible. Hellman's Candide comes to attain a rare self-realization with the result he starts leading an authentic life. Says Candide to Cunegonde:

You've been a fool and so have I; 
But come and be my wife. 
And let us try before we die 
To make some sense of life. 
We're neither pure nor wise nor good; 
We'll do the best we know. 
We'll build our house, and chop our wood, 
And make our garden grow. 

(Candide, p.678)
Candide's stress on starting afresh, without maintaining any illusion of purity as man and wife, explains for itself the necessity of illusionlessness in human relations. Hellman's point lies in the fact that we must give up our pre-conceived notion in order to achieve maximum happiness out of marital togetherness. Here marital togetherness is a suggestive and symbolic instance. It stands for all human relations.

Montserrat too attains this state of creative self-realization, with the result he starts judging institutions and values and organizations and societies by whether or not they deaden, denigrate, destroy or undermine life. He is opposed to all anti-human and dehumanizing forces that threaten to intrude upon the quality of his experience.

While Miss Hellman places faith in man's infinite possibilities, her faith is coupled with a realistic recognition of man's infinite limitations, of his susceptibility to sin, for falling short of the highest achievements according to his choice and action. Thus she does not lose sight of human weaknesses though she is convinced that, despite all failures on this earth, man's life is great. "If the plot of a drama", says Eric Bentley, "is an edifice then the bricks from which it is built are events and occurrences."\(^5\) In Miss Hellman's plays no great drama in the sense of spectacular is visible. The events and occurrences in her plays are seldom very profound. She presents the littleness, the insignificance of the lives of her characters, but all the same, she manages to suggest the largeness of every day
life, as in the case of those fantasies which spring from the mysterious minds of a Carrie (Toys in the Attic) a Crossman or a Griggs (The Autumn Garden). It is through such stoical characters as Kurt (Watch on the Rhine), Whalen (The Days to Come), Crossman and Griggs (The Autumn Garden), that Miss Hellman has attempted to create new values and lay down a code of courage that has enabled man to endure a violent and absurd world and confront the nothingness, the 'nada' of our existence. She shows how great human beings are in putting up with the meaningless world, and that too with a pinch of human courage. The sap and substance of this courage comes for man in living an authentic life without any fear of losing the game of life.

Upon her arrival in Spain, Doris V. Falk tells us that Miss Hellman was briefed on the political intricacies of the revolution, the atrocities and the number of casualties. But this is not how she learns things. She has no concern with the 'political intricacies'. Her learning took place in her encounters with human beings as they endured the bombing, the hunger and all the losses of war. From young wounded soldiers in the International Brigade, from Julie and Hammett, she learned that imprisonment and suffering death itself are not too much for some people to pay in the service of something for which they whole-heartedly stand. Miss Hellman sees the greatness of the human being in what it is capable of surviving. Montserrat is such a case. He becomes one of the blessed ones because he has outgrown all that inhuman mental torture he was subjected to. Kurt
(Watch on the Rhine) and Whalen (The Days to Come), suffer on the material-physical plane; they transcend that type of suffering. But in the case of Crossman and Griggs (The Autumn Garden), they transcend spiritual suffering, an inner disorder and meaninglessness; and this too has a moral value. They simply grin and bear. They survive by easing the burden of existence to the last point that it may be borne. Thus their endurance signifies courage.

It is in this sense that Miss Hellman's plays exist as an incarnation of a philosophy, a metaphysics, one that wishes, to borrow the words of Richard Gilman, "to rediscover or reinvent man, to bring him again to his place between dreams and events, to test him and put him under new obligations, to provide him with truer gestures and a less cowardly speech." In a similar vein, Alan Downer comments: "Humanely, her plays reveal the nature of our life, of our means of grace." 8

To sum up, Miss Hellman's humanism is both prescriptive and unprescriptive. It is prescriptive in the sense that it recognizes man's many limitations in the face of various odds posed by Fate, social system and its hostile circumstances—most of them of his own creation. And it is unprescriptive because despite all the odds a man faces—all the weaknesses he has, it affirms that man is a master of vast potentialities; there are infinite possibilities of happiness open to him; he can avail himself of the same and
make this world still better and his life still more enjoyable. Thus it is, to borrow the words of Colin Wilson, "an affirmation of man as spirit", and therefore, capable of salvation and damnation.

4 Religious Dimensions of Her Humanism

Miss Hellman's humanism in a naturalistic frame is validly religious, in the sense that religions are pursuits of the ideal of the quest for a good life. All religions are the efforts of men who aspire to be better than they are. They invariably involve faith, aspiration, hope and love. "Humanism . . . is religion without revelation" says Julian Huxley. Thus Miss Hellman's humanism is religious in being a passionate devotion to human good. It can even be narrowed down to Christianity. Like a typical Christian she recognizes "a superior or transcendent order of values of which the supreme value is love." She also believes in the absolute unchanging reality, the absolute unchanging validity and the absolute binding force of these values upon man's conduct. She rejects the tricks and tactics of the Hubbards (The Little Foxes), and the sly strategies of a Francovis (Match on the Rhine)—the infernal perishable values by which the day-to-day world is governed.
She is a humanist in that the transcendent values, which she cherishes and upholds and brings indirect contrast to the values of this world, include all the great virtues required for the salvation of mankind: charity, a loving kindness, humility, the desire to serve our fellowmen, the readiness to forgive those who have done us injuries and above all the belief in the power of love to transform. While Henry Sampson and Albertine Prime (Toys in the Attic), preach this loving kindness—this care for the feelings of others, and her Kurt (Watch on the Rhine), and Whalen (The Days to Come) are the ones "who work for other men." Karen (Children's Hour) establishes herself as the very symbol of Christian charity by forgiving Mrs. Amelia Tilford. As regards love, it is the chief emotion in most of Miss Hellman's plays. Julian marries a ninny to get a dowry in order to facilitate the surgical operation for his beloved sister (Toys in the Attic).

Thus she is a humanist because she believes in a religion which advocates an ethic or a morality that grounds all human values in earthly experiences and relationships. She holds her highest ethical goal in the worldly happiness, freedom and progress—economic, cultural and material—of all mankind irrespective of nation, race, religion or sex.

Miss Hellman affirms with the same fullness of conviction as any Christian, the three great Christian virtues—faith, hope and charity: faith in the capacity of all men, hope for the final salvation, and charity as the universal means by
which the faith and hope are practised and sustained. She believes that man cannot live without hope, cannot live without faith and the quest for faith. Her hope has to do with a sense that something better is possible. Her hope includes a desire and a wish in the midst of uncertainty. But the faith she propagates has more strength than hope. It is this faith that Kurt reveals:

Kurt. Well, . . . The world is out of shape we said, when there are hungry men. And until it gets in shape, men will steal and lie and—(Slowly) and—kill. But for . . . (then gaily) But perhaps you will live to see the day when it will not have to be. All over the world there are men who are fighting for that day. (He picks Bodo up, rises) Think of that. It will make you happy. In every town and every village and every mud hut in the world, there is a man who might fight to make a good world. And now good bye.

(WR, p.263)

His faith is a call to commitment, a readiness to strive, to sacrifice, to stake a life on an outcome and a fulfilment. To have faith, according to him, is to have a sense of values worth living for, to try to be faithful to a practical ideal or a vision of definite possibilities. And his faith depends on his attitude that men do not give up, do not yield to the darkness. His faith requires that men assume that they may have the capacity to think through their difficulties and overcome their obstacles through insight. It is a quest for clarification of purpose and meaning which will give focus to life. It is a process by which men grow through seeking and striving.
5 Her Sense of Justice

Her religion is an ethical humanism having a focal interest in integrity and justice in the treatment of persons and groups and shows herself a crusader against oppression, exploitation and totalitarianism. In this world of suffering Miss Hellman extends an ethic of compassion. She suggests constructive paths towards non-exploitive relations, and towards freeing people for mutually supporting growth. This is her message in *The Little Foxes*, *Another Part of the Forest* and the recent one *My Mother, My Father and Me*. In the treatment of her characters she combines human sensitivity with an incisive but forgiving intelligence.

In *Toys in the Attic*, Miss Hellman has picked up the sword of justice and wields it with vigour, but her hand nevertheless is guided by an unfailing compassion. She sees human nature (*Carrie* with vagina in the icebox), not as a problem but as a mystery. She looks at this mystery with a reverent charity of heart, with a ritualistic awe, rather than the inquisitive inquisitorial microscope. The neurosis of Mrs. Malpern (*My Mother, My Father and Me*), or Mrs. Julie Goldman (*The Days to Come*), she sees as bordering upon psychosis. They are fit cases for pathological probing. This is the religion—the ethic, which governs Miss Hellman—the ethic of compassion. Even when she performs critical surgery on her characters, instead of decapitating them, compassion guides her hand and she gives some heed too to
the pathos of misunderstanding and the power of circumstances. The reach of compassion in the play, *Toys in the Attic*, extends even to an unseen character, a woman whose hatred for an unscrupulous husband and desire to get away from him at all costs leads her into a shoddy scheme for mulcting him of a small fortune in exchange for a piece of swamp land he needs for one of his speculations. This woman, who never appears on the stage, although she is in league with the young hero of the play, Julian, is made as real as any character on the stage.

In this play, the sisters fear the possibility of their brother getting independent of them; and his neurotic wife suspects him of infidelity. There is indeed a profound pathos, as well as an ironic judgement of petty lives, in the misunderstanding, and entanglements that produce the catastrophe. In the play Julian's life is ruined by his over-protective spinster sister, one of whom unconsciously cherishes incestuous desires towards him. And the catastrophe that results in his disfigurement is brought about by his frantically jealous child-wife, who also wrecks her mother's life.

It is the special merit of Miss Hellman's work that dreadful things are done by the on-stage characters out of affectionate possessiveness rather than out of ingrained villainy. Actually speaking there is no villain at all in this play. Miss Hellman takes no sides; she urges no action
or attitudes. But she displays compassion and detachment in the process of revealing characters and demonstrating universal uncontroversial truth—the truth, for example, which kind and generous Henry and sweet and simple Albertine exchange among themselves:

Albertine. (rises, goes to him). So many people who make things too hard for too little reason, or none at all, or the pleasure or stupidity. We've never done that, you and I.

Henry. Yes, we've done it. But we've tried not to. (TA, p.729)

It is this truth, this wisdom and vision of life that Miss Hellman shares with us. This wisdom dawns and stays with us but for a short while, but its meaningfulness proves a contrariwise when we consider the meaningfulness of life. Thus she plays serve as life-belts to rescue us from the ocean of meaninglessness. Miss Hellman performs this service at a time when religion and philosophy prove less and less able to perform it. She reduces our pain and enlarges the areas of love.
Although the author's corresponding view of life is ironic and is trenchantly expressed, there is no gloating over human misery, no horror-mongering, no traffic with sensationalism. Miss Hellman shows that she can deal with human failure without herself falling in love with failure as such. She remains admirably sane in the midst of the ugliness and the confusion which she unerringly exposes. Although she looks at life steadily and unsentimentally, she does not advertise herself as a cynic or a hopeless nihilist. She is a humanist who does not show intolerance or hatred of injustice and an impatience with the errors and foibles of ordinary human-beings. George Jean Nathan has very adverse criticism to offer on this point. Nathan particularly refers to *Another Part of the Forest*, and suggests that the play consists of a stageful of Simon Legrees of both sexes minus only the bloodhounds. Their explosion of venom moreover addedly suggests the whimsical Herman the Hermit in George M. Cohan's *Seven Keys to Baldpate*, who every once in a while galloped to the footlights, fixed the audience with a glowering eye and yelled "I hate people."¹

This is an exaggerated view of the matter. Miss Hellman is essentially a realist. "Realism", according to Friedrich Engels, "implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of characters under typical circumstances."² The characters as conceived and created by Hellman behave
in a most convincing way in their situations. In this play (Another Part of the Forest), she suggests that the wickedness of all the principal characters is the outcome of the social system. If Ben was bad, well, business was his religion. If the way of Marcus was the way of avarice, of robbing and cheating, well, he had not lived by the labour of others, nor had he inherited wealth or land; he had stood in the best American tradition of ruthless capitalism on his own feet. He is "merely villainous rather than villain."¹⁵ And then Miss Hellman redeems him from unalloyed villainy by providing him with some aesthetic sense. He reads Aristotle and listens to chamber music.

Miss Hellman had thought of writing the last part of the trilogy about the Hubbard family. In 1949 Marc Blitzstein had composed an opera Regina based on The Little Foxes emphasizing the evil of the central character above the others. Miss Hellman, although a close friend of Blitzstein, did not collaborate with him on the opera. She did not see Regina in that light.¹⁶ She did not believe in the theory of absolute evil. Besides this, according to Downer, The Little Foxes was effective in part because of the innermost human impulses of its inhuman characters.¹⁷ There is no denying that Hellman's dark world is infested with those who triumph through a calculated disregard of moral values; it is grim and full of fear. But then these characters are portraits of people as they are. They are not abstract symbols of evil in the manner of the old Moralities.
7 No Theorist-Reformist

What is seminal in Hellman's humanism is that it does not hold that one can save man from degradation merely by reforming him or making him rational or by espousing ideals of justice and virtue. This can be attained by a radical change in the social system, not by a conversion of the individual, that the human condition can be ameliorated. The existing social classes must be destroyed if mankind is to recover its humanity. Whalen realizes this and exonerates Andrew Rodman of the crime of killing:

Whalen: (to Firth) He didn't kill your kid. Don't start that or you'll get the wrong answer again. He hasn't much to do with it. He's got to go his way, and you've got to go yours. And they're not the same way.

Firth (softly): We used to be good friends.

Whalen: I know. And you're as good as he is. Until the time comes.

8 Anger-Care-Love Theory

Even when Miss Hellman takes a grim view of humanity she does it due to her ingrained capacity for moral indignation. Referring to The Autumn Garden, Harold Clurman had remarked that the author had failed to reveal the quality in her characters' weaknesses which still makes them great; love, the love of the author for the characters. "Miss Hellman is a fine artist she will be a finer one when she melts.," he concluded. Now Miss Hellman often indict individuals and
puts the blame of failure on the weakness of character, but her anger is born of that anger-care-love theory that works in her plays. A humanist as she is, she gets angry with her wayward children of imagination because she cares for them; and then with the reformatory zeal of a crusader or rather possessed with the feeling of oneness with her characters she attacks them. She does so because she loves them. It is in this that she is a humanist. It shows the niceties of humanism.

Sometimes Miss Hellman seems to begin with a group of hateful persons and proceeds by pulling through their fateful pace. Mary in The Children's Hour is such a case. But the malice of the so called fiendishly corrupt girl is not purely for its own sake. The broad aim of Miss Hellman the humanist was to show how fallible we mortals could be and to evoke sympathy.

In this play Miss Hellman poses two problems. The first one is whether or not the accusation brought forth against the two teachers is true. Although there is no reference to psychodynamics which may prove Martha's latent inversions except her own confession, The Children's Hour, according to David Sievers, is nevertheless a daring step forward in the theatre's humanizing power to create understanding and empathy for unconscious deviation as a tragic flaw rather than a loathsome anomaly. 19
The other problem is Mary Tilford and the question whether or not Lillian Hellman had in mind the creation of a character purely evil. No is the emphatic answer. It is not, as Joseph Wood Krutch says, "... a study in malice as disinterested as that of Iago." The child's malignity cannot be compared with that of Iago. Mary's act is not vicious in character. It proved to be vicious in result. The whole action had a small beginning—a small lie coming from an unconscious girl pushing against nothing. Mary is slightly abnormal and unable to adjust but she does not have any murderous intentions until her back is pushed against the wall and then too she acts without an awareness of the implications involved.

9 Ethos of Life—Compassion

Fact is that Karen Wright's treatment of Mary Tilford has never been sensitively evaluated. No one has noticed that immediately preceding their initial confrontation, Hellman suggests, Karen is perhaps not as compassionate as a teacher of young children should be. For when Mrs. Mortar complains that one of the students does not appreciate Fortia's plea for mercy, Karen replies: "I don't think I do either." (21, p.19). The harshness of her discipline will demonstrate the truth on a far more literal level than that of her remarks.
Mary Tilford's offence is a minor one. She attempts to excuse her tardiness by saying that she was picking flowers for Mrs. Mortar. The flowers, Karen knows, were picked from the top of a garbage can, and Mary's stubborn refusal to admit the truth convinces Karen that she must be punished. First punishment—taking recreation periods alone, then her friend Evelyn will no longer be her room-mate and that she must now live with her enemy Rosalie. Mary is also ordered not to leave the grounds for any reason. Miss Hellman emphasizes Karen's harshness by adding details—Mary is specifically forbidden participation in hockey and horseback riding—and by one further prohibition. Mary hopes that Karen's rules apply only to weekdays; if so she may still be able to attend an event she has been looking forward to; the boat-races on Saturday. Unfortunately she is told that she cannot attend them. While these restrictions might not be extreme deprivation for an adult, they are so for a child.

Mary feels and rightly that she is being persecuted. From working to tell her grandmother, "how everybody treats me here and the way I get punished for little thing I do." (CH, p. 11), she moves to a sense of her inner agony, objectified in her hysterical 'heart problem' and finally to a rebellious attitude. "They can't get away with treating me like this and they don't have to think they can."(CH, p. 25). She sets out to take her revenge. She accuses Karen and Martha of lesbianism and persists in her lie. Her behaviour
is ugly, but has been provoked by Karen's earlier ugliness; she seeks an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

Now this rancorous structure—this victim victimizer syndrome is visible not only in Karen Wright-Tilford relationship, this can be traced in two more relationships, two more pairs, namely, Martha Dobie-Lily Mortar and Amelia Tilford-Wright/Dobie. In order to assert the fact that mercy is the only solution to the moral dilemma which is created when we deal justly with each other, Miss Hellman reverses the situation in these victim-victimizer syndromes.

Karen's inability to deal compassionately with Mary Tilford is paralleled in Act I by Martha Dobie's attitude towards her aunt Lily. Karen and Martha decide that she must be relieved of her teaching duties and literally thrown out of the school. Their decision is just, for, Mortar is a nuisance and an incompetent teacher, yet they do not consider for a moment the effect such a dismissal may have on an old woman whose life has been the school. Again justice is tempered with mercy and again Hellman emphasizes the rigidity of the decision of the administration. Martha not only tells Lily that she must leave, but makes a harsh fun of her—"We don't want you around, when we dig up the buried treasure." (Ch, p.16), and threatens that "You ought to be glad I don't do worse."(Ch, p.17). Mortar pathetically attempts to save face. "I absolutely refuse to be shipped off three thousand miles away. I'm not going to England. I shall go back to
the stage. I'll write my agents tomorrow, and as soon as
they have something good for me"—(CH, p.17). This is
essentially a plea for mercy cast in a manner that will
allow her to retain some semblance of dignity. The old
crone is finished on the stage, her agents are imaginary
and if she does not leave until they find her a part she
will never at all, which is her wish. Her suggestion is
brusquely rejected. As Karen isolated Mary, Martha exiles
Mortar, Lily's reaction is the same as Mary's, "You always
take you spite out on me."(CH, p.17).

As she exits, she casts towards Martha a malicious
half smile and the malice of revenge is realized when she
refuses to testify on Martha's behalf at the libel trial.

In Act II, Karen and Martha suffer an ironic reversal
of fortune; the victimizers become victims themselves.
Amelia Tilford, an influential figure in the community of
Lancet, misuses her authority over Karen and Martha just
as surely as they had taken advantage of the weaker position
of Mary and Lily. When Mary tells Amelia that her two
teachers are lesbians, the dowager immediately phones the
parents of the children who are enrolled at Wright-Dobie
and repeats the charge, thus destroying the school. When
Karen and Martha come for an explanation, Amelia makes it
clear that she does not want these two lepers in her house.
"I don't think you should have come here. . . . I shall not
call you names, and I will not allow you to call me names.
It comes to this; I can't trust myself to talk about it
with you now or ever." (CH, p.42). Her condescension and her revulsion in the face of her visitors' suspected abnormality pervades the scene: "This—this thing is your own. Go away with it. I don't understand it and I don't want any part of it." (CH, p.43). Incidentally, Karen and Martha now suffer from the same humiliation and ostracism they so rigorously inflicted on others.

To make the ironic parallel—and thus the lesson—even more explicit, Hellman shows Karen and Martha reacting just as Lily and Mary had. Both think that they are being unjustly persecuted "What is she (Amelia) trying to do to us? What is everyone doing to us?" (CH, p.42). Both feel spiritual agony, "You're not playing with paper dolls. We're human beings, see? It's our lives you're fooling with. Our lives." (CH, p.42). Finally they feel the need for revenge: "What can we do you (Amelia)? There must be something—something that makes you feel the way we do tonight. You don't want any part of this, you said. But you'll get a part. More than you bargained for." (CH, p.44).

In Act II, then Hellman presents a change in relationship, but not a change in the structure of relationships. The rancorous victim-victimizer syndrome is as pervasive in this act as it was in the previous one, the difference being that relationships have now come full circle; those who mistreated others are now mistreated themselves. Clearly Hellman implies that when one treats another he plants the seeds of his own destruction. This insight is made even more explicit in the third act.
Martha admits to herself that she has always been physically attracted to Karen. Her attitude towards herself is just as harsh as it had been towards others—or as Amelia Tilford's attitude had been towards lesbianism. Indeed Martha's rancorous attitude towards the imperfections of others is but a reflection of her own self-condemnation. Miss Hellman is making this crucial point that he who hates others must be hating himself.

As in the other two acts, there is a parallel action, but this time it is the difference that is instructive not the similarity. Martha's self-condemnation is matched by a new-found disgust in Amelia Tilford. She discovers that Mary had lied about her two teachers and realizes that her hasty phone calls have destroyed two people who are innocent of the charges. Her discovery propels her into the same kind of guilt and self-laceration that we have just seen driving Martha to suicide. Amelia begs Karen to allow her to 'do something' for her so that she can in part expiate her sin. Karen extends mercy.

Thus Karen lets loose the pent up tension and destroys the vicious circle that has characterized human relations in the play. She has extended compassion and has gained no material gain; but she has gained something much more important, her peace of mind—the state of grace—the salvation. She has found the secret—the ethos of life, the compassion. She is compassionate. Miss Hellman is a humanist who does not show any impatience with the errors and foibles of
ordinary human beings. It is fit to recall here one of the meditations of William James, "Is life worth living?" he asked and answered it himself: "It depends on the liver." Miss Hellman too believes that life depends on us living together and how we live together, how we help each other, feel about each other. She has shown in this play, in and through our relationships we can hurt or help. We can create relations and connections which foster good will or otherwise.

Thus, in the hands of Miss Hellman, drama enjoys a place where it helps mankind to a better human understanding, to a deeper social pity and to a wider tolerance of all that is life.

10 Miss Hellman—A Moralist

Miss Hellman has a positive message for the moral and ethical uplift of man which could provide meaning and direction for the good life. She is so much obsessed with moral that her major weakness by her own confession, is "the obvious addition of the moral, either by an all too obvious explanatory speech or through an arranged solution." After a few lines she hastens to add: "There are, of course, many things wrong with The Children's Hour. The play probably should have ended with Martha's suicide: the last scene is tense and overburdened. I knew this at the time, but I could not help myself. I am a moral writer often too moral a writer, and I cannot avoid, it seems, that last summing
Thus this play could have ended with Martha's suicide. The visit of the grandmother which follows and the hammering away by Karen that she has come to relieve her conscience are superfluous and aesthetically disturbing. But if this summing up had been omitted, most of the irony of the play would have been lost. The author shows simply that there is an irony in things as they happen and *The Children's Hour* is ironic because it suggests that here is evil and make the best of it. Though, it is here, Miss Hellman seeks to intensify the human element by causing Karen to say to Mrs. Tilford, "You want to be 'good' woman again, don't you?" (*CH*, p.67).

Referring to her next play, *Days to Come*, Miss Hellman wrote, "I knew a woman like Cora and I hated her and that hate had to go into the play." A reading of all the Hellman plays will show how the author's particularized hatred of this or that individual is attenuated or merged into what closely resembles pity or reserved compassion in the last three plays, with one or two minor exceptions. It is this compassion that governs the portrayal of characters in *The Autumn Garden*. Miss Hellman makes them her equals—our equals only in what we do not respect about ourselves. She loves them though she refused to be metaphysical, poetic or soft. She does not embrace these people; she does not believe they deserve her love but all the same it is present. "Love is present only through the ache of its absence."
Watch on the Rhine is the most human of all the Hellman plays, the warmest and the most understanding. Kurt, the hero, is one more man, in the long line of Hellman-heroes, who works for other men. He gives up his work, his wife and children and is ready to give up his life in order to crush what threatens all we believe in.

Miss Hellman, the moralist, shows that moral success or failure of her characters seems to her the most important thing in the world and that it is by their moral success or failure that she judges them. It means that despite her criticism of social institutions she never shifts the burden of responsibility from the individual to social condition or economic pressures.

Her view is that men are made not by the society in which they live but that society is made by the men who live in it and that the defects of man's institutions are the results of defects in him—not the other way round. If this is a hypocritical, unjust stupid and cruel society, it is such because it has been willed by hypocritical, unjust, stupid and cruel men. If it is ever to be better, it will have to become so only when better men go to make it.

Thus Miss Hellman's humanism is born of her conviction that modern man is responsible in a large measure for his own destiny and he cannot look outside himself for salvation. His future, if he has any, is within his control. It is he who can create a new and better world with vision and daring, or destroy himself in the process.
After her return from Spain, having seen the brutality of Fascism, Miss Hellman summed up her attitude in a few sentences, "I am a writer. I am also a Jew. I want to be quite sure that I can continue to be a writer and that if I want to say that greed is bad or persecution is worse I can do so without being branded by the malice of people." Miss Hellman is opposed to authoritarian or totalitarian forces that dehumanize man and preaches an active—a militant resistance against it.

11 Miss Hellman—An Active Moralist

When Kurt's American mother-in-law remarks, "We are all Anti-Fascist" Kurt's wife is quick to point out the difference, "But Kurt works at it." (WR, p.223). She exclaims with a sort of anguished pride. For working at it in and near Germany during the Hitler regime had meant persecution, torture, misery and the constant threat of death. The most human concerns of Kurt's wife are readily reflected. Her anxiety at Kurt's role speaks of his active humanism.

Miss Hellman does not spare the readers the shock of actual violence. She has the courage to point out quite ruthlessly and logically that it is sometimes necessary to kill even when that killing is the personal, individualistic kind called murder and not the abstract mass type called war. Kurt cries out in agony, "I have a great hate for the violent."
They are the sick of the world. (Softly) Maybe I am sick now too." (WR, p.261). But when he has to kill, he kills with repugnance, with deep seated disgust, but without illusion. He does it for the ultimate good of mankind.

Hellman's militant humanism is clear, though implicitly, in her very first play *The Children's Hour*. William Roughhead the author-editor of *Bad Companions*, the source of Lillian Hellman, had declared emphatically "My interest in the case resides in the fact that the charges were false." Roughhead was apologizing for handling such a distasteful subject. But this is just the kind of statement that would inspire Hellman to react in the opposite direction. What if the charge was not false? What if, after all, one or even both women had abnormal attachment towards each other consciously or unconsciously? But the whole point of Hellman is—Would the guilty deserve destruction at the hands of society? She does not give the answer. She only states in clear artistic terms as to what happens in our societies. We are in a world where scoundrels kill men, that too ruthlessly.

Miss Hellman is all out for the world's downtrodden. Her liking for black people came not from ideological theories of national and class oppression, but from her overall sympathy for the poor—both black and white. She had such a soft corner for the Southern Negroes that they find more-than-what-art-could-allow place in her plays. She does so because she finds pleasure in working with some sympathy for them. She wrote *The Little Foxes* and before giving it a final touch
she showed the draft to Dashiell Hammett. She got a note in reply. "Things are going pretty well if you will just cut out the liberal blackamoor chitchat." Thus she cannot resist displaying her love for the blacks even at the cost of her art.

Her sympathies for the world's poor had made her quite an active member of the Theatre Act Committee formed to help Spanish loyalists. She campaigned in presidential election and has visited Russia twice. She has signed petitions, contributed money and attended many rallies and meetings so much so that she calls herself "the greatest meeting-goer in the country." Thus she has been a progressive, always siding with the "right side" of the issues. She calls herself an aimless rebel, but a humanist as she is her rebelliousness was grounded in the moral revulsion she felt at her mother's having made money by exploiting Negroes. The rage, which seems to dominate her, is genuine; it seems to have its source in world's injustice. Her humanism is not born only of her anti-fascism; in equal measure she combines her socialism—her anticapitalism and her fight for social justice.

In her The Little Foxes, she destroys the myth that family fortunes are founded on sheer ability and hard work. She sees the characters of this play as typical capitalists. Here indeed, is the free enterprise for the few through the exploitation of many. As she implies in The Little Foxes and also in its later sequence Another Part of the Forest,
that the ruthless exploitation in the economic world—even so small a world as Bowden—brings exploitation into the family circle. Both, Lavinia and Birdie, are pathetic women who lose their identities among the more strident greedy industry-minded Hubbards and the conclusion resolves itself into a triumph for the wily slate-hearted Regina. But a humanist Hellman won't allow Regina to go completely triumphant. In her world if virtue fails, so does vice.

Naturally, due to the threat of money-hungry brothers' machinations, a cloud appears to be darkening Regina's future.

Besides this, Miss Hellman shows, a reaction gets vociferously voiced against this satanic system. In The Little Foxes fittingly characterized by George Jean Nathan as a "parable of boiling acid", there emerges the disgust and defiance, most characteristic of a new young generation, that throws into the face of the mankind the challenge of human decency, fairness, equity and honour. It asserts that this economics of the capitalistic system of our modern society which inculcates Mammon worship and allows the strong to amass wealth at the expenses of the weak, is in the words of V.K.R.V. Rao "a false and dismal science." It spells death and destruction.

Miss Hellman professes the rightness of economic equality. She equates private property in excess of the basic needs of human existence with exploitation. Little Bodo, the mouthpiece of Miss Hellman, represents the wisdom of the wisest. His words are sounder than any contained in any book.
of scripture or economics:

Bodo (pointing to bag). Man has learned to make man comfortable. Yet all cannot have the comforts.

(WR, p.229)

And again,

Bodo (to Teck). As I was wishing to tell you, Count de Brancovis, comfort and plenty exist. Yet all cannot have them.

(WR, p.229)

12 Socialism Tempered with Humanism

"Politically I am liberal." says Miss Hellman, and adds: "that means that I believe more in the rights of working man than I believe in any other right." But she is not enough of a political person, however, to ally herself with any political group or to allow politics to creep into her plays. Her Days to Come, an artistic failure, shows that her central interest was social. It shows a direct confront between employees and the employer and she is condemning the capitalists, at least some of them, identifying them with evil, for their seeking the support of brutal physical force to break the strike of starving workers. Still Miss Hellman successfully shows that in the ranks of each of the opposing forces there are neither villains nor heroes. She rather lays little emphasis on the proletarian masses and too much on the bourgeois.
wrote this play about labour strife more from the industrialists' point of view than that of the unions. Miss Hellman more of a playwright than of a propagandist, and still more of a humanist, keeps in view the noble aim of capital-labour compromise. She shows the horrors of strike-breaking as a profession and its psychological influence on both, the employer and the employed.

She is aware of the class struggle, the strategy that socialists and communists believe in, of generating and accentuating class hatred. She is, however, opposed to the use of either hatred or violence for bringing social change or to settle industrial disputes. "The violent are the sick of the world", her hero asserts in Watch on the Rhine (p. 261); and again:

Kurt. Well... The world is out of shape we said, when there are hungry people. And until it gets in shape, men will steal and lie and—(slowly) and—kill. But for whatever reason it is done, and whoever does it—you understand me—it is all bad. I want you to remember that whoever does it, it is bad.

(WR, p.263)

Thus Miss Hellman recognizes the fundamental equality of the capitalist and the labourer. She does not aim at the destruction of the capitalist. She rather strives for his conversion. She believes that it is possible to transform the existing relationship between the classes and the masses into something healthier and purer. She comes nearer a Gandhian in her preference for passive resistance—in her disinterestedness to call on the readers to revolt.
A humanist as she is, her social drama like that of Miller, does much more than analyse and arraign the economic network of relationships. It delves into the nature of man as he exists, to discover what his needs are so that these needs may be amplified and exteriorized in terms of social concepts. In this play Miss Hellman depicts the existential problem posed by a love-less marriage and also the efficacy of sympathy and understanding to bridge such emotional gaps.

Even in *The Little Foxes*, much has been made of the sociological aspects such as the historical picture of the coming of industrialism to the South and the implication that the modern capitalistic world is full of Hubbards, great and small. Although these elements are present, the argument against Capitalism is actually peripheral to the story and not perfectly sustained. It can be questioned whether the Hubbards would not be Hubbards in any kind of society and whether modern big business does not operate in the crude ways that the Hubbards favour. Then Miss Hellman has included such capitalists as Horace Gidden, Regina's husband and William Marshall the industrialist from North who show no affinity with Regina's brothers. Besides this, her Ben, the eldest brother of *The Little Foxes*, is a great humanist himself. It is he who says that there should be a harmony between vocation and profession:

Sen. . . . (To Marshall) I am a plain man and I am trying to say a plain thing. A man ain't only in business for what he get out of it. It's got to give him something here (puts hand to his breast). That is every bit as true for
the nigger picking cotton for a silver quarter as it is for you and me. . . . If it don't give him something here, then he don't pick the cotton right. Money isn't all. Not by three shots.

(LF, p. 141)

This statement of Ben may sound out of context and out of place, but it represents the faith and philosophy of Miss Hellman.

Miss Hellman suggests that the good life is attained by an individual's combining the personal satisfaction with significant work. But in the capitalistic society the product ceases to be the objective embodiment of the individual's own personality and the distinctive expression of his creative powers and interests. On the contrary, it is not at all distinctive and has no relation to his personality and interests. He does not choose to make it but is rather directed to do so. He does not even choose how to make it; he is compelled to suppress all individuality in the course of its production. And when its production is finished, it is not his, to do with as he pleases. In reality, it never is his product at all; he is merely the instrument of its production. In a word it is alien to him.

Thus Miss Hellman has a dig at the mechanized industrial labour system and its essence, the division of labour, in which ways are sought to make work independent of the workers' capacities and qualities. To this end work is organized according to 'production outlook' which is "objective, superpersonal and independent of the employee's character."
Thus the worker loses emotional touch. He does not put his personality into the product. He expresses his personality somewhere else—in strikes, for example. It is of particular interest to note that Thomas Firth, the foreman in the brush factory, keeps on repeating this point "We were so close to each other." (DC, p. 121).

13 Religion Rationalized

At the bottom of Miss Hellman's humanist attitude lies her belief in the power and importance of human reason. Science is defined as "the embodiment of the rational attempt to solve problems posed by nature or by human beings." In this sense Miss Hellman has a scientific attitude. And with this scientist's bent of mind, she makes a critical assessment of even the Scriptures. Lavinia in Another Part of the Forest, is voicing the sentiments of Miss Hellman:

Lavinia. I'm not going to have any Bibles in my school. That surprise you all? It's the only book in the world but it's just for grown people, after you know it don't mean what it says. You take Abraham: he sends in his wife, Sarah, to Pharaoh, and he lets Pharaoh think Sarah is his sister. And then Pharaoh, he, he, he. Well he does with Sarah. And afterwards Abraham gets mad at Pharaoh because of Sarah even though he's played that trick on Pharaoh.

(APF, p. 391)

More vociferous about this trick of Abraham is Mrs. Lazar in My Mother, My Father and Me. Referring to this incident in the Bible, Mrs. Lazar says:
Mrs. Lazar. I'm going to find him in heaven, where he don't belong, and when I do, I'm going to say, so you go into Egypt and you're afraid they will kill you, so you tell Sarah to say she's your sister, not your wife, and so Pharaoh fucks her and treats you fine. Then you and the Lord decide that ain't kosher all of a sudden, so the Lord sends plagues to poor Pharaoh, and poor Pharaoh done nothing but suck what he thought was a sister. Abraham, you tricked Pharaoh, you old shit.

(MFM, p.805)

Thus any theistic interpretation of the universe, Biblical incidents and events, is rejected because they are logically meaningless and empirically unverified. She offers a scathing criticism of such Biblical beliefs:

Berney, Chapter Forty-four. . . . My mother was wild when I left and made all kinds of threats of suicide and all. She once sent me a postcard 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's happened.

(MFM, p.814)

Miss Hellman holds this Biblical lore and literature to ridicule because it is couched in phobia and taboo.

As a humanist, Miss Hellman tries to show that the religious institutions are committed to certain theologies and psychologies, whereas she regards herself as necessarily anticlerical. She belongs to those militant moralists whose righteous indignation and confessed reasonableness prompt her to confront organized religious bodies. According to her all religions work for formalizing man and thus stunt his natural potential for insight and perspective. Father
Corowil's flimsy logic that king takes his authority from the All-Powerful, hence he should be supported, is such an example. (Montserrat, p.449).

Traditional religion does not permit the development of rational courage. It encourages cowardice and dependence. Instead of resoluteness and boldness, bravery and confidence in man's power, it extols masochism, whereas Miss Hellman extols man—the natural man who is much feared by religion. The ecclesiasts, the spokesmen of the Church and the traditional religion preach acquiescence and awe before the grandeur of the universe; they declare pride the great sin but Joan is proud of the human powers. Miss Hellman shows this fear of the natural man together with his pride, in the celebrated speech of the Inquisitor in The Lark. Says the Inquisitor:

...I have spoken of the great enemy, but not even now do you know his name. You do not understand on whom you sit in judgement nor the issue of the judgement... We know the name of the enemy. His name is natural man... Can you not see that this girl is the symbol of that which is most to be feared? She is the enemy. She is man as he stands against us: Look at her. Frightened, hungry, dirty, abandoned by all and no longer even sure that those voices in the air ever spoke to her at all. Does her misery make her a suppliant begging God for mercy and for light? No. She turns away from God. She dares to stand under torture, thrashing about like a proud beast in the stable of her dungeon. She raises her eyes, not to God, but to man's image of himself.

(The Lark, p.590)

With this pride Miss Hellman couples the age-old question of the responsibility of God for the human predicament. According to her, God entrusts us with the power and
freedom of choice; yet He punishes us if we stray from Him.

Why did He not condition us during the act of creation so that we could not avoid knowing Him and following His guidelines? Since it is He who creates us, why does He condemn us for satisfying our natural inclinations which He has implanted in us? Joan, in *The Lark*, voices exactly these sentiments:

Joan (softly). I know that I am proud. But I am a daughter of God. If He didn't want me to be proud why did He send me His shining Archangel and His saints all dressed in light? Why did He promise me that I should conquer all the men I have conquered? Why did He promise me a suit of beautiful white armor, the gift of my king? And a sword? And that I should lead brave soldiers into battle while riding a fine white horse? If He had left me alone I would never have become proud.

(*The Lark*, p.555)

Even if we interpret the Voices heard by Joan as the dictates of her own ego, there is an implicit questioning on the part of Miss Hellman that if God is all-powerful, why doesn't He co-operate with the virtuous? Why does He subject virtue to the trials and troubles? Thus the inescapable inference is that God permits evil. Why does He not stamp it out? Why should not God be merciful and loving? Is He like us merely limited in powers? Then why worship another finite being?

Thus according to Miss Hellman, the hope of mankind lies in the furtherance of critical scientific intelligence, in testing claims to truth by logical consistency and
experimental confirmation. The overriding need according to her is not to retreat into a new irrationalism but to apply the method of critical intelligence to grave social problems. This free thought is also seen in her view of men as having a self-made destiny. According to her, present injustices cannot be related to a divine plan or future hopes to a heavenly consummation.

These basic humanistic attitudes of Miss Hellman lead her, almost inevitably, to the existentialist position in her general outlook on life, since existentialism is an open-ended, non-restrictive view of life.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Note: Miss Hellman wrote *The Little Foxes* (1939) and *Another Part of the Forest* (1943), to show the rise of ruthless industrialization in the South. The two 'Fox' plays refer to them.


15 Quoted from *Common Weal*, 45: 201 Dec. 6, 1946.


23 Ibid.
24 Quoted from Barret H. Clark, "Lillian Hellman", College English, 6:127-133 Dec.'44.


29 Quoted from "Lillian Hellman: Meeting Goer" Time 59:74 June 2, '52.


