Along with many American writers of the 1930s, Lillian Hellman addressed the Great Depression in her plays of the period. She reflected in her plays on the aftermath of this and revealed her own political and social awakening. She shared with other thirties writers, the writers of the "red decade," a belief in collective action and the socialist ideal. She offered a condemnation of fascism and a critique of the capitalist personality. As Marxists say, her work's "manifest content" is the same as theirs — strikes, industrial expansion, class warfare, opposition to fascism. But her plays are much more complex variants of their thirties counterparts. Her Days to Come is much more than a strike play. It unfolds a social history to a far greater extent than Black Pit or Marching Song or even Waiting for Lefty. Plays like The Little Foxes and The Autumn Garden offer not only an indictment of the dominant social structures but show an intricate artistic design matched only by Awake and Sing! and Paradise Lost. Addressed more deliberately to the mainstream audience, plays like Watch on the Rhine and The Searching Wind, belonging to the anti-war genre, present facets of fascism.
Heilman wrote for Broadway and often achieved success there while most of the other engaged writers wrote for the Group Theater, a company of like-minded artists whose political affiliations extended into the radical fringe. Unlike Miller's plays, Hellman's plays do not address a historical period or politics very directly. Written in the realistic mode, as distinguished from the "theatricalist," Hellman's plays (except a couple of her adaptations) follow the pattern of the "well-made plays." Hellman asks the question, what if the play is contrived, as long as it is convincing? While saying that the realistic form interests her most, Hellman demands that the playwright "trick up the scene." She uses the conventions of the "well-made" play to lure her audience into a confrontation with unpleasant truths by her refusal to overlook moral bankruptcy or to romanticize evasions of reality.

Brechtian in her approach in certain respects, Hellman expects her audience to correct social ills by exhibiting an urge for political action and she simultaneously indicts them for their complicity in the perpetuation of these social evils. Her conviction is that the theatre is an instrument of transformation of the unethical, unjust, venal world. And this she demonstrates by making use of Ibsenite social realism and giving us a
novelistic technique and multiple character analysis which reminds us in plays like *The Autumn Garden* of a Chekhovian strain.

A major force on the Broadway stage, Hellman has produced plays which are described by epithets such as "melodramas of social protest," "comedies of greed," "sombre Elizabethan comedies," "Jamesian comedy of manners." Unfolding American history of a particular period and focusing on family and capital, "two consuming obsessions," Hellman's plays are a major contribution to the American theatre. Exciting as the diverse critical responses to these plays are, I have not only benefited from them but drawn on the insights provided by them. My indebtedness to Hellman criticism is acknowledged in the dissertation at various stages.

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