MORAL QUESTIONS IN THE LIFE AND WORK OF LILLIAN HELLMAN

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This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Grant, and our children, Rebecca, Zachariah, Gabriel, and Rachel, without whom this effort would have been nearly impossible. Their willingness to pitch in and help out, their love, support, and encouragement all contributed to the creation and completion of this project.

ABSTRACT

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This study renders an analysis of Lillian Hellman's moral code as seen in selected plays and memoirs. Hellman's morality is a large and changing entity, open to the effects of such agents as the passage of time, aging, the influence of associates, of key epiphany-like crossroads or turning points. There are two major components of her moral system, which help to comprise its whole: truth and courage.

Much of the conceptual basis for the organization of this material emanates from a model referred to as a "continuum." By this term I refer to a line, much like a number line in mathematics, along which lie various points pertaining to some aspect or character of Hellman's morality, be it truthfulness or her commitment to courageous activism. The end points of the continuum theme represent the extreme positions of the subject of

any given chapter, with subsequent points living and sometimes changing as non-static stops along the way from one end to the other. We can utilize these points along the continuum as a means of ascertaining the nature of Hellman's moral code and her commitment to it, and through it we can examine many of her ideas that focus on struggle, dichotomy, and tension.

The plays chosen for examination are The Children's Hour, Watch on the Rhine, The Little Foxes, The Autumn Garden, and Montserrat, for they best illustrate Hellman's ability to combine the worlds of moral vision and artistic endeavor. Where applicable, selections from her memoirs illustrate and give voice to my perception of her moral positions, particularly as they have expressed themselves in her works as well as in her daily life.

PREFACE

This work focuses on the interplay between Hellman's moral conscience, and her display of that conscience in her dramatic compositions. I've always been impressed with Hellman as a strong woman, and her reputation as a literary figure complements her inner strength. This particular chapter discusses the inter-disciplinary model as a useful critical tool, defining the conceptual ideology of this approach while introducing the theme of the "continuum" as one which is well-suited for analyzing the complex and seemingly contradictory elements of Hellman's moral code. There follows an examination of several of the key aspects of Hellman's early moral development, a preliminary and necessary component in any attempt to study and understand the nature of her ethical commitment.

I think it's particularly important to think in inter-disciplinary terms when examining the work of Lillian Hellman, for so much of the content of her plays and memoirs is deeply rooted in her personal philosophy of life and her activism. In writing this work, I want to focus on the union of her personal moral code and her public, artistic self, both with respect to her artistry in the dramatic form as well as her commitment to and involvement in various movements as well as social and political causes. Hellman's strengths in these areas are models

for emulation, and in those places where we might find ambiguity or complexity there are examples of the ways in which Hellman dealt with struggle and strife that merit our consideration. Additionally, through an examination of Hellman's life and works, we might ascertain such elements of direction that might be worthwhile in our own lives as we face challenges of a moral nature.

As an inter-disciplinarian, I have long been fascinated with the ways in which connections between seemingly disparate cultural, political, and social elements exist and interact with one another. I like to envision the planet Earth as a whole entity, whose peoples with their art, music, and other creations and needs live in common with each other, sharing basic human qualities, such as the need for food, shelter, love and warmth. An equally essential need is the desire to express oneself as an individual living in the world, to make sense of, to understand, the nature and purpose of one's existence. One might question the ways in which any given culture's political disposition is related to its art, for example, or the ways in which economic considerations determine the quality of life. The similarities between art and music seem obvious, yet perhaps more ambiguous is the relation between art and politics.

Certainly much can be gained by studying any society's different parts in isolation from each other, segment by segment. Yet I prefer to view these seemingly fractional elements as connected and inter-related, primarily due to the fact that each citizen lives under and helps to create, acts upon, the

conditions, both positive and negative, that determine the nature of her existence, and I believe that we do well to try to understand the ways in which the parts work together. Hence, I lean towards the inter-disciplinary method of looking at things, generally speaking, in a wholistic attempt to analyze and assimilate the data of daily life and thought.

We ourselves are the end products of many interactive factors and influences beginning with our parents, our peers, our educators, etc. We are shaped by social structures and institutions; governmental, religious, and educational facilities form our thinking and often our characters. We accept or reject new information as it becomes available to us, and we are known to change our opinions when warranted. If, then, we are complex and unique human beings who are the results of many factors and their ability to interact within and upon us, how useful is it to view our surroundings, each other, our thoughts, in terms rife with departmentalization and fragmentation? All things are of a whole in the mind of the inter-disciplinary thinker, who seeks to make connections between herself and her world in all its richness, ambiguity, complexity and detail.

In attempting to understand the notion that we influence and are influenced by our worlds, I wish to draw upon Ken Macrorie's idea of the Moebius strip (Ken Macrorie, Searching Writing [Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Co., Inc., 1980], pp. 12-13). He had his writing students take a strip of paper, about one-and-a-half inches in width, and twist one of the ends, so that when the ends were secured with tape, there would be a twist

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or a "warp" which would then form the sign for infinity rather than a circle. He had them write the word "Observer" on one side, and the word "Observed" on the other. He wanted them to see that when they observed the world, the material being analyzed had an impact upon the one conducting the investigation. The observer had an increased understanding of the interaction between herself and the world through a consideration of this model, and it was this mode of interaction that Macrorie wanted most to demonstrate. It is likened to the concept of infinity for the flow of direction is continuous, and the divisions between the observer and the observed become blurred, indistinct at best.

Out of this circular model comes another kind of "strip": the continuum. Used by philosophers to identify, place, and illustrate dissimilar yet related concepts, it looks much like a line segment with definite end points. These ends points are not always absolute and unchanging in nature, but they do usually exist as opposites or extremes in the concepts they seek to represent. For example, when one discusses temperatures within a discussion about the climate, she might use the terms "hot" and "cold" to designate opposites on a continuum which might then contain the points "lukewarm" or "chilly" as interim stops along the continuum's length. Each of these points contains enough of its own characteristics to remain independent entities, yet each retains enough like qualities to be included in the continuum in the first place. Oftentimes, however, absolute distinctions may be difficult to ascertain, and one point along the continuum might easily blend into another.

The primary benefits of the continuum theme are that it allows for the existence of diametrically opposed elements as well as the fact that it provides for a ready means of visualizing a wide range of possibilities in any given dimension. It is not my intent to suggest that dualism is the important point. Rather, I wish to call attention to the tensions inherent between and within the dichotomies Hellman discusses, both in her work and in her relationships with others. In discussing Hellman's life, for example, we can begin by naming one end point her "Personal Life", while naming the other end point "Public Life." Then we can begin the task of determining the points that lie along the continuum's length between the two extremes. This is helpful in recognizing the fact that Hellman's private life often became public, and vice versa, as in the example of her stand before HUAC. In that situation, her moral stand assumed a political and public life all its own, influencing many admirers and opponents alike. The end point designations and their counterparts along the not-so-linear path allow for the discussion of diverse areas within one larger framework, and for the possibility that two different concepts might yet be related and might co-exist in the same plane of thought. For example, in a subsequent chapter I analyze the end points of truth and deception, showing that Hellman often held views and beliefs about truth-telling and a search for veracity that are frequently quite clear-cut and obvious in selections from her memoirs in which the truth is recalled with startling clarity. On the opposite end of the continuum, however, there exists a grey area

in which nothing is certain, and all attempts at determining the truth are futile and frustrating.

The continuum model, then, is used primarily to allow for complexity, for the possibility of the co-existence of positive and negative qualities or concerns in any given topic area. With this in mind, it is my purpose, in each subsequent chapter in this work, to rely upon this model as a tool in understanding Hellman's moral code, particularly as it lives in her plays, memoirs, letters, etc., which exemplify the blending together of didacticism and artistry.

The continuum model is of primary benefit for the inter-disciplinarian for it allows her to view, in one sweep of line, a wide array of seemingly disparate elements connected nonetheless in their relationship to the whole. So many aspects of Hellman's moral code are neither black nor white, existing instead as a kind of grey mass, shifting in intensity and kind depending upon the situations in which we find her or her characters. Rarely are her tenets simple, devoid of complicating factors and conditions. Indeed, there were many times when she may well have preferred simplicity, for the dictates of her often difficult nature frequently left her puzzled, angry with herself for creating that which seemed to be a harder way to go, upset that the answers weren't faster, clearer. She often regretted not being able to make more determined, definite decisions; so, too, did she often wish to be less vulnerable to the destructive whims of her companion Dashiell Hammett. So much of Hellman's life seemed to exist as dichotomy, yes and no, love and hatred, pleasure and

pain. Hence, the very tensions inherent within her life (and, thus, in her work) are more easily studied, described, and illustrated when using the continuum model, which itself is able to contain such tension, such lack of absolute distinctions, such complexity and such a lack of clear, linear constructions.

However, in order to envision the ways in which this model can best be applied to Hellman and her work, it is first necessary to understand the development of her moral code, its background, particularly with an eye toward her early development. Chapter One discusses some early turning points, suggesting that they played key roles in the formulation of Hellman's moral character, which is further delineated in subsequent chapters.

BIOGRAPHICAL PREFACE

Lillian Florence Hellman was born on June 20, 1905, in New Orleans, Louisiana, to Max and Julia Newhouse Hellman. She died on June 30, 1984. For most of her seventy-nine years, Hellman's voice had been extraordinarily impressive as a moral force both in her private and professional lives, off and on the stage.

Her family consisted largely of German immigrants who had settled in the south; some members later moved to the north. Hellman's father suffered a failed business venture in New Orleans and moved the family to New York City, where he was successful as a salesman. Hellman was shuttled between the two cities from the time she was five until her mid-teens, attending school in each location. She experienced these transitions as upheavals, particularly when noting the differences between the school systems and the abilities of their students. While in New Orleans, Hellman often preferred to skip school, and, since she was so far ahead of the other pupils, her teachers never missed her. Instead, she would read for hours while lounging in the immense tree in the yard of her aunts' boarding house, wondering about her place in the larger scheme of things. She later referred to this time in her tree as the "ill hour", when all melancholy mysteries nonetheless contained an element of sweet yearning as well as the first intimation that the road she would

travel would not be an easy one to traverse.

Hellman favored her father's family over her mother's, for the aunts, Hannah and Jenny, were generous, funny, and kind, and they thought Hellman bright and witty despite her rather frequent outbursts of temper and moral righteousness. Indeed, many such outbursts emanated from the earliest of recognitions that social injustices did exist, and that her mother's family had something to do with their creation. Much of the Newhouse wealth was made from the economic manipulations of poor blacks employed in the family businesses, most of which focused on the cotton industry and on real estate deals. Yet, although Hellman would rail against these injustices and assume that which even she called her "high-toned" and exaggerated moral posture, her aunts doted upon her.

The characters of the boardinghouse served as models for Hellman's earliest writings, contained in a sketchbook of sorts. It was also in New Orleans that Hellman experienced many "firsts": her first romance, the recognition that her adored father had a taste for extra-marital affairs, and the initial stirrings of her own sexual feelings. Many of the major turning points important in the formation of Hellman's moral character (more fully discussed in Chapter One) also occurred in the south. The times spent in New Orleans were, by her own admission, Hellman's best and worst of times. There she learned to sew, to cook fabulous creole food, to speak the patois French of the district, and to laugh. She learned by the examples of her aunts, who were quietly good to the poor of the neighborhood, especially

in aiding single mothers with money if they had it to give. They were kind to children, and were often in demand for their advice to young women upon the occasions of their weddings. Through these strong and remarkable women, Hellman came into a sense of herself as a woman, as someone who could move with some measure of comfort and confidence in whatever world she would come to create for herself.

Certainly one of the strongest influences and the "first and most certain" love of Hellman's life was her black nurse, Sophronia. Hellman's parents contended that Sophronia was the only one who was ever able to exercise any control over their daughter, and they frequently regretted having to dismiss her when they experienced financial difficulties. She was a tall, light-tanned woman with a long, brooding face, who provided Hellman with the secure anchor she needed as a child, with an importance and an indispensability familiar to many southern white children of the time and period. It was evident that Hellman would have done nearly anything for her, partly out of a desire to please her, and partly out of a very real need to earn the approval and respect of one whose own standards were so incorruptably high. Through her, Hellman acquired a sense of worth and merit, and it was by Sophronia's standards that she so often measured herself later in life. This relationship helped to lay the foundation for Hellman's commitment to social justice, to truthfulness, as well as for her moral and ethical code. Moreover, this relationship embodied the positive qualities found in closeness between women, as well as in the love between mentor

and student, teacher and friend. Indeed, Sophronia's guiding voice continued to influence Hellman long after the former's death.

After graduating from New York's Wadleigh High School, Hellman enrolled at the Washington Square branch of New York University primarily to be near her mother, who was ill (she had intended to study at Goucher). Although she left college in her junior year, she did enjoy the study of literature and philosophy, reading such authors as Kant, Hegel, Marx and Engels. She transferred to Columbia, where she spent most of her time reading, or in fervent discussions with intellectuals, whose comments piqued her own curiosity and interest in finding answers to the puzzles of social injustice and economic disorder. But it became clear that college was not for Hellman, and she left Columbia first to travel extensively with her mother, then to take a job reading playscripts for the publishing house of Horace Liveright.

She attended the many parties held by and for the literati of the day, and met writer Arthur Kober, whom she later married. They traveled to Paris where Hellman wrote that which she referred to as "lady-writer" stories for the Paris Comet, yet she became dissatisfied with her role as wife, part-time student and sight-seer. Eventually they returned to New York and moved on to Hollywood; Kober wrote for the screen and Hellman read scripts first for producer Herman Shumlin and later for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM). Their marriage began to deteriorate, and in 1932 they agreed to an amicable divorce. By then Hellman had met and

fallen in love with mystery writer Dashiell Hammett. Their stormy relationship was to continue over the following thirty-one years despite frequent separations due to Hellman's inability to withstand Hammett's indiscretions with other women and his early alcoholism. The later years of their life together were serene and pleasant, as they had come together again after repairing most of what they had lost through strife and disagreement.

Hammett's success as a writer of "hard-boiled" dialogue and realistic street fiction had a definite impact on Hellman as she began a literary career of her own in the theater. He urged her to cut excessive material, to revise constantly, to be critical of implausible turns of events and motives behind characters' actions. He is credited for suggesting Hellman consider the plot line of a detective story for her first play, The Children's Hour, which Shumlin agreed to produce after he'd read it for the first time. Moreover, Hammett was often at Hellman's side throughout her writing career whenever she was writing something new; his comments were often harshly critical, but were useful, nonetheless.

The production of The Children's Hour in 1934 catapulted Hellman to celebrity status overnight. Its theme of the effects of the malicious lie gave the play its moral dimensions. Its suggestion of lesbianism gave the play its controversial character; it was banned in Chicago and Boston, and was only privately performed in London. This play was followed in 1936 by Days to Come, a story of class struggle further illuminated through the lives of key characters. The drama was a failure and

closed after only six performances largely, Hellman admitted, because she tried to say too much, to do too much, in a rather limited and unfocused setting.

The plays that followed included The Little Foxes in 1939 which, together with Another Part of the Forest (1947) chronicled the effects of an aristocratic family's greed and avarice upon a southern town during the expansion of northern industrialization. Watch on the Rhine (1941) dealt with a hero, Kurt Muller, and his courage as he fought Fascism and its proponents as a member of the underground Resistance. Hellman's disgust for the appeasement agreements reached in the aftermath of World War II is detailed in The Searching Wind (1944). Montserrat was the first of the Hellman adaptations and it dramatized one man's attempt to act courageously and morally under the most difficult of circumstances. This was followed by The Autumn Garden, Hellman's Chekhovian drama about the wasted lives and dreams of the middle-aged characters it represented, while The Lark, a new rendition of Anouilh's story of Joan of Arc, debuted in 1956. Voltaire's Candide was made into an operetta with the help of Marc Blitzstein (this musical was also recorded by the New York City Opera in 1970), while Toys in the Attic, a story of peoples' attempts to manipulate each other, and Hellman's last original play, was introduced during the 1960 theater season. One final adaptation, My Mother, My Father and Me, based on the novel, How Much? by Burt Blechman, was written in 1963.

In addition to the plays, which were collected into a single volume in 1972 by Little, Brown, and Company, Hellman also had

written four volumes of memoirs, three of which have been collected by Little and Brown in the book, Three (1979). They are: An Unfinished Woman (1969), Pentimento (1973), and Scoundrel Time (1976). The fourth book, Maybe (1980), suggests that there is a fine and fuzzy line of demarcation between memory and truth, as it recounts Hellman's strange and sporadic dealings with the elusive and eccentric Sarah Cameron. Hellman also edited and collected The Selected Letters of Anton Chekhov (1955) and wrote the introduction to The Big Knockover: Selected Stories and Short Novels of Dashiell Hammett (1966), which she acquired as part of Hammett's estate after his death in 1961.

Hellman taught many seminars in writing and play-making at various colleges and universities, lectured widely, and was given many honors and awards for her contributions not only to the literary world, but to the fabric and weave of the nation's moral and political conscience as well. Her most famous and noted stand was taken against the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC [sic]), whose investigations and blacklisting activities during that which has come to be known as the "McCarthy era" enraged Hellman and many others who were under its scrutiny. Hellman was one of only a few who refused to co-operate, and hers was the first voice of protest to be heard in the din and clamor of those only too eager to testify against their friends and associates.

At the time of her death, Hellman had suffered from arthritis, emphysema, and cardiac problems for a number of years. She also had lost most of her eyesight, a condition which vexed

her particularly in that it required that she write by the method of dictation, and in that it restricted her great love of reading to a limited number of good books recorded on tapes made for the visually impaired. On Saturday, June 29, 1984, Hellman was taken to a hospital on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, where she died of cardiac arrest the next day. She was buried on July 3 at Abel's Hill Cemetery, which is also on the island. A memorial service was held for her at a later date in New York City.

Hellman's life and work focused on the idea that the appropriate exercise of ethics and courage were central to one's existence. This dissertation seeks to examine those moral themes most important to her work, while asserting that Hellman's attempt to live "decently", as she called it, serves as a great model for us all.

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INTRODUCTION

I've long been intrigued by Lillian Hellman's brand of courage and moral strength, especially as they display themselves in key episodes in the playwright's life as well as in many climactic scenes from her plays. There exist, both in her life and work, examples of the ways in which her moral standards, challenging and difficult to maintain though they might have been, influence and, in fact, dictate paths of direction for both Hellman and her characters; these paths then lead to resolutions of conflict that are important and absolute in their complex finality. Yet these standards do not exist in an amorphous, theoretical vacuum. They live and breathe through the author's memoirs as well as on the stage. No one who has ever seen or read The Children's Hour can escape an understanding of the harmful effects of the malicious lie. Nor is it possible to avoid a philosophical debate on the questions posed in Watch on the Rhine or Montserrat. This dissertation seeks to examine the foundation, expression, and deployment of morality, of courage, in Hellman's personal and public lives.

Chapter One discusses the ways in which key or "turning point" episodes affected the shaping of Hellman's moral character as well as a brief overview of Hellman's beginnings, through which we might perceive the roots of her early moral development.

Chapter Two continues with an examination of Hellman's views on truthfulness and speaks of her desire to communicate with veracity. The continuum model provides a method of examining the many complex and diverse issues Hellman faced, both as a person and as a writer, and allows for the co-existence of both negative and positive entities. These elements can be seen also as points along a continuum with respect to their positions relative to the theories held by such philosophers as Aristotle, Kant, Rich and Bok.

Chapter Three explores the elusive nature of truth as seen in the memoirs while suggesting yet another continuum as a critical model. End points represent extremes in this bi-polar construct, and on one end I suggest that Hellman, at least early on, was quite able to recount events, places, people, etc., with amazing truthfulness. However, at the other end of the spectrum lie points which suggest that, especially as Hellman advanced in years and in diversity of experiences, the truth was not so easy to ascertain, all things were tentative, and the truth was slippery and often unattainable.

Chapter Four concerns itself with another component of Hellman's moral composition: her courage and commitment to political activism as seen through her character Kurt Muller in Watch on the Rhine. Hellman's own courage is seen in application in her appearance before HUAC in the 1950's, and is the subject of Chapter Five.

Chapter Six centers upon the problems (and ensuing results) of moral failure, through either the moral lassitude of the weak

and inactive characters of The Autumn Garden or through the greed and avarice openly displayed by the Hubbards in The Little Foxes.

The Summary and Conclusion attempts to pull some of these points together while commenting upon the role of the author as political ideologist, positing that Hellman was a morally committed playwright whose vision and tenacity compels us all to consider our own moral states. It is my hope to have integrated Hellman's moral positions with her public and private lives through this study of selected plays and memoirs. Although there may not be clear-cut answers to some of the ethical dilemmas posited herein, the study of such questions is nonetheless fruitful, particularly as it allows us to further examine both the life and works of one very remarkable thinker.

Chapter One: Hellman's Early Moral Development

What was the nature of Hellman's moral vision and how does it present itself in her works? Certainly critics and scholars, playgoers and readers alike have praised Hellman as she sought to dramatize her own sense of that which is truthful, just, as well as that which resulted through the lack of morality in those plays that have evil as a central theme. This chapter attempts to come to some kind of definition of Hellman's moral code, to explore its dimensions, to show how it developed throughout her early life; later chapters seek to apply its meaning to an examination of her works especially as this moral code seems to break into two complementary components: truth and courage.

The singular and most consistent theme in Hellman's life and work is that of the extraordinary strength of her moral foundation as it is revealed through moral courage and the many forms that can take. Throughout her short stories, plays, memoirs, and journalistic reports, there runs a strong commitment to that which is ethical, to that seemingly amorphous quality that allows a person to be her best, especially while under fire, while at the same time allowing that person to acknowledge her faults and insecurities. This moral strength seems even more visible when reflected against the admission of weakness, for it attains a realistic quality rather than an unbelievable, superior

tone. Hellman's is not a false moral courage, born of bravado or foolhardiness; rather, it is the kind of ethical code that requires self-knowledge, a sense of justice, all of which inevitably lead the courageous into action. This moral courage knows not the elitism of being based in theory alone, for within the confines of mere ideology, courage dies. It is towards the praxis of action that Hellman's moral code and hence, her courage, sought to address social and political wrongs, maliciousness, and even evil at many levels, both in her private life as well as the professional realm of the writer.

What <u>is</u> an ethical or moral code? How can we attempt to define such a seemingly ambiguous notion? We can think of it as a system of beliefs, mores, social behaviors, that are based on some sort of philosophical system. We know that Hellman studied Kant while in college, yet can only speculate that she may have admired his theory of the Categorial Imperative, which simply states that the subject should hold the maxim that she should act in such a way that her motive or base for acting would become the standard accepted by others, a kind of universal. In other words, it seems to be a recapitulation of the Golden Rule.[1] One of Kant's principles of morality suggests that it is less important to ask, "...what is morally good and what is not?" than it is to ask, "What is it that moves me to act in accordance with the laws of morality?" Morality, to Kant, and the impulse that leads a "moral" woman to action, lies in the heart, yet is shaped and tempered by the use of reason and the obligation to duty, such as the duty to be truthful.[2] It is not at all clear or even likely

that Hellman's moral code is based on Kant's theory alone; it may be an amalgamation of various theories, for she always professed to be tied to no particular philosophical school of thought.[3]

Hellman's code of ethics developed at an early age, and seemed to be tied rather closely with situations and incidents that led her to outrage, for her sense of justice had been violated. Indeed, the emergence of a notion of right and wrong, and the decisions and actions a commitment to those ideals demanded were key elements in Hellman's youth. The daughter of a German-Jewish immigrant and a southern belle, Hellman spent half her academic year in New York and the other half in New Orleans, where she used to skip school regularly to ponder life in the arms of one of the large trees in the yard of her aunts' boardinghouse. She often referred to this time in the tree as her "ill-hour", when all melancholy mysteries nonetheless contained an element of sweet yearning as well as the first intimation that the road Hellman was to travel would not be easy.[4]

In the tree Hellman read and composed an early writer's "sketchbook". It was from the tree that she witnessed her father getting into a taxi with a woman other than her mother.[5] Within the family there were other struggles: the wealthy relations of her mother's family, who lived in New York, made lofty pronouncements about the likelihood that her parents' marriage was doomed to failure.[6] They'd argue over who was to inherit the family jewels and money. Oftentimes displays of avarice and greed would lead Hellman to outbursts of moral outrage, especially since the family had made some of its fortune over the sorrow and

sufferings of blacks in the South.[7] Hellman sometimes called her reactions the results of her "high-toned" period during which she was convinced that her moral code was obviously superior to that of anyone else.[8]

"In the web of human experience who can say which threads are strongest? For everyone there are turning point years."[9] Many such turning points occurred in New Orleans and were key to the development of Hellman's moral character. For example, there was the case of the watch and the lock of hair. A young boy had given Hellman a lock of his hair to stop her tears after he had informed her that he found her unworthy of conversion to Catholicism. Hellman perceived the gift, and the shove into the gutter which accompanied it, as a sign of affection and had placed it into the back of a watch her father had given her to celebrate her birthday. When the watch malfunctioned, Hellman's father declared the jeweler incompetent, and demanded its replacement. When the true source of the problem was revealed, Max Hellman confronted his daughter brutally, in a heated accusation in front of all the boarders. This led to Hellman's first attempt to run away from home. During the nasty encounter, Hellman said that she felt as if her head had "...gone somewhere else", and she knew, for the first time, the rampage that could be caused in her by anger. She wandered the streets of New Orleans for two nights, with only $4.50 in a red purse. She was accosted by a man from whom she was able to flee, and found refuge in a boardinghouse in a black neighborhood where she experienced her first menses, a notable turning point for many

women.

She claimed kinship with her beloved black nurse, Sophronia, which gave her entry into the house, and it was Sophronia who was summoned. She arrived with Hellman's father, who was standing at the foot of her bed when Hellman awoke after a fitful night. He asked her to get dressed.

> "Thank-you, Papa, but I can't." He went out of the room while Sophronia...repeated the command.
> "He humiliated me. He did. I won't..."
> She said, "Get you going or I will never see you whenever again."[10]

Her father met her outside and they proceeded to a restaurant where Hellman awaited her father's apology, which he delivered reluctantly.

> My father said, "Your mother and I have had an awful time."
> I said, "I'm sorry about that. But I don't want to go home."
> He said, angrily, "Yes, you do. But you want me to apologize first. I do apologize, but you should not have made me say it."

Hellman began automatically moving her lips in a self-designed litany, in imitation of that which she had deemed to be the holiest route to forgiveness: "God forgive me, Papa forgive me, Mama forgive me, Sophronia, Jenny..." Her father said, "Where do we begin your training as the first Jewish nun on Prytania Street?" After laughing, Hellman decided that she liked her father again and confided in him the change in her womanly

status. She also learned her power over her parents, to understand the nature and force of her own standards, her rebellious nature, the force of her anger, and was able to admit:

> I found out something more useful and dangerous: if you are willing to take the punishment, you are halfway through the battle. That the issue may be trivial, the battle ugly, is another point.[11]

This turning point discovery was an important one, as it was to be useful in her daily life, in her relationships with other people (such as the long and often difficult one in which she was involved with Dashiell Hammett), and in living out and acting upon her moral and political convictions. Hellman often said that her anger was both useful and dangerous, while crediting its deployment for the more interesting, demanding, and satisfying moments in her life.

A similar acknowledgment of her power over her parents occurred when Hellman, at age fourteen, was late for a curfew following a date with a college student. She met a stern reception, ran away, bummed around New York a while, then called the student who brought her home, much to her dismay. Her frantic mother asked, "Are you all right, my baby?" Hellman took advantage of the moment by declaring that she had "heart trouble."[12] Hellman also once hocked an expensive ring which had been given her by her Uncle Jake as a graduation present in order to buy books. Fearing his reaction, she nonetheless decided to tell him of her transaction. He stared at her for a long time,

then said, laughing all the while, "So you've got spirit after all. Most of them are made of sugar water."[13] It would seem obvious that, even at a fairly young age, Hellman's ability to display an independent character was coupled with a fierce temper. She rarely succumbed to another's control, exhibiting instead a strong sense of autonomy.

Probably the most significant and primary person to influence Hellman's moral character was her nurse, Sophronia. She was easily the "first and most certain" love of Hellman's life. Hellman's parents contended that she was the only one who could ever exercise any control over their child, and they regretted letting her go when they experienced financial difficulties. She was a tall woman, with light, tan skin and a long, brooding face who provided Hellman the secure anchor she needed as a child, with an importance and indispensability familiar to many southern white children of the time and period.[14] It was evident that Hellman would have done nearly anything for her, partly out of a desire to please her, and partly out of a very real need to earn the approval and respect of one whose own standards were set so incorruptably high. Through her, Hellman was able to acquire a sense of worth and merit, and it was by Sophronia's own ethical code that Hellman so often measured herself.[15]

One incident revealed the nature of the bond between the two. After Sophronia had left the Hellman household, the two met sporadically, for Sophronia had gone to work for another family, a streetcar's ride away, whose members didn't like Hellman's visits. Hence, their chances to be together were limited in both

frequency and duration. But in times of crisis, Hellman sought her protection and wisdom. She continued to serve as Hellman's rock of dependability. Sophronia's responses to questions were usually brusque, severe and short, at times, but her comments were always right and the mysteries facing Hellman seemed clearer in her friend's presence.

One day, they had gone to the movies, and were returning home by streetcar during the era when blacks were allowed to sit only in the rear of the car. Hellman took a seat behind the driver, pulling her companion down beside her despite the latter's protestations. The conductor ordered them to move, but Hellman refused, yelling "We won't. We won't move. This lady is better than you are..." The car came to a halt; the doors opened. The conductor took Hellman's arm and an old lady slapped her. Hellman threw her bookbag at the conductor, whereupon Sophronia grabbed her and pushed her out into the street. They walked along, Hellman crying all the way, wondering aloud if she'd done something wrong. Sophronia sang, "Right is wrong and wrong is right/ And who can tell it all by sight?" Hellman vowed that she wanted to live with Sophronia forever, that she never wanted to be near white people again. Sophronia was angry, and responded by saying:

> I got something to tell you, missy. There are too many niggers who like white people. Then there are too many white people think they like niggers. You just be careful.

She went on to say that she had a no-good son and a no-good

daughter, which made the already miserable Hellman feel even worse, for she feared that she was being lumped into the same category. She believed herself to be a victim of Sophronia's rejection when, in fact, Sophronia was showing love and affection by telling her charge something truthful, important, and useful. Hellman asked whether or not her nurse would be willing to see her again. Sophronia replied:

> "You're growing up, a few years away. Time's approaching to straighten things out."
> "You mean I'm no good, either?"
> ..."I mean you got to straighten things out in your own head. Then maybe you goin' to be some good and pleasure me. But if they keep on pilin' in silly and gushin' out worse, you goin' to be trouble, and you ain't goin' to pleasure me and nobody else."

Sophronia's tone of contempt was indisguisable, causing Hellman to shiver and experience a deep sadness that her companion seemed to disapprove of her so strongly.

> I said, "You mean I am no good and you don't want to see me anymore. Well, I won't hang around and bother you."
> She slowly got to her feet. "You all I got, baby, all I'm goin' to have." Then she leaned down and kissed me.[16]

The impact of this relationship on Hellman's life was great; one large lesson involving an understanding of the real meaning of civil rights despite the lip service paid it by many so-called liberals made an indelible impression upon Hellman's conscience as a result of their talk. Sophronia's strength, her love and

affection for Hellman constituted a major turning point, particularly as it helped to lay a foundation for Hellman's sense of moral justice, of truthfulness, for her ethical code.

Love, its definitions, conditions and demands, would come to play an important role in Hellman's adult life as well, especially in her relationships with Arthur Kober and Dashiell Hammett, and well as in her friendships with other women. Upon graduation from high school Hellman worked, for a time, for a publishing house, and there entered into what she termed "loveless arrangements." She attended many parties and began a string of casual affairs, yet noted the possible "cost" of such intimacies:

> ...my generation did not often deal with the idea of love--we were ashamed of the word, and scornful of the misuse that had been made of it--and I suppose that the cool currency of the time carried me past the pain of finding nastiness in what I had hoped would be a moving adventure.[17]

At these parties, Hellman met writer Arthur Kober, by whom she became pregnant, and from whom she withheld the news of a subsequent abortion. Certainly an abortion is a large moral issue, requiring that a decision be made with at least some regard for the importance of the question at hand: isn't it immoral to kill an unborn baby? But Hellman gave us no insight as to her reasoning process, informing us only that the abortion was conducted in a small doctor's office without anesthesia. She showed up for work the next day, weak and tired, yet fearful of

her mother's reaction should she stay at home. She invoked the admiration of her colleagues whom she surprised by not revealing the name of the baby's father, yet she decried being "...everybody's pregnant pet."[18] A later pregnancy, after her marriage to Kober, ended in miscarriage.[19]

The relationship with Kober did not work out, and after traveling and working in Europe and then Hollywood, they agreed to a fairly amicable divorce. [20] While in Europe, Hellman experienced another turning point in the formulation of her moral and social conscience. She had decided to try her hand at being a student, and considered registering at the university in Bonn, Germany. The extreme anti-Semitism she found there both frightened and angered her, and she returned to America. Even though Hellman found it impossible to commit herself totally to the principles and teachings of Judaism, she nonetheless was appalled at what she had experienced so personally: the large-scale hatred of one group of people by another.[21]

By 1930, Hellman had met Hammett, a private detective who had become a mystery writer, whose works were doing quite well. On the first night they met, they stayed up quite late, discussing everything under the sun.[22] As their relationship evolved, Hellman found Hammett to be a drunk and incorrigible womanizer, and she left him frequently. He had helped her enormously in getting started as a playwright, with suggestions from one writer to another about how to cut excessive dialogue, how to make sure that a character's motivations, speech and actions were feasible and firmly grounded, yet it is unclear

whether or not Hellman would have sunk without him. Certainly his suggestions were worthwhile, but Hellman's own instincts were usually right, and she was known to have written as many as twenty drafts of plays, ever striving to get the scenes just right. Indeed, it does seem to be the case that, while Hellman's career skyrocketed, Hammett's declined.

Towards the end of their thirty-one years together, Hammett remained sober, and they took true pleasure in one another, enjoying intellectual forays into a wide diversity of topics. However, their later relationship was largely a celibate one, for Hellman had refused his drunken and demeaning sexual advances as early as 1941, which ended the physical aspect of their love.[23] Christine Doudna's interview with Hellman reveals some of Hellman's feelings about her "dependency" on Hammett:

What was it like for you and Dashiell Hammett, as two writers, to live together? Was there any sense of competition?

There was no competition whatsoever. He was proud of me and I was proud of him. There were other kinds of trouble, but never that. That's why I'm always bewildered by competitiveness between people who live together. I don't think I could stand it.

There were no ego problems from the fact that your career was on the rise while his was on the wane?

If there were, I never recognized them, and I don't believe he did. He was very sharp with me about what he didn't like, and terribly pleased when he liked something.

Nobody ever gave more aid to anybody than he gave to me, and you can't do that if you feel competitive. You can start that game, but it breaks down very quickly if you feel any anger or competitiveness.

During that long period when he wasn't writing, did you ever try to get him to write?

No. We didn't have that kind of relationship. He was quite a forbidding man, Hammett. Writing was one of the things you didn't

talk to him about. I wish I had. I don't think it would have done any good, but it seems now to have been cowardly of me not to.

Did you in some ways find Hammett's harshness appealing?

No. I found it awful and I found it sometimes admirable and brave. If you mean I'm a masochist, I'm not. The harshness wasn't ever about anything but my work. And there, if you ask for help or opinions, you've got to take what's coming.

You said that he was very important to the writing of your plays, but you also said there was a chance you made the dependency greater than it was. Do you ever have moments of doubt that you haven't got the nuances of that relationship quite right on paper?

Of course. When you come to feel dependent on people it may be that you exaggerate the dependency--it blinds you to what you could have been without it.

Was that a question which haunted you in your relationship with Hammett?

No, it didn't worry me at all. I was perfectly willing to have the dependence. He said he never agreed with my formulation of it. I've been told by other people that maybe I'd have been okay without it. I don't know--I liked it.
I think between men and women there should be dependency, even between friends. Dependency has very little to do with independence. Independent natures aren't worried about dependency.[24]

Although Hellman did often seek Hammett's authorial advice, more often than not, she served as her own best critic, ever honing her own technique. It is also the case that there were times when she threw out his suggestions altogether, preferring to re-write and revise over and over again.

The nature of their political lives together also served as a turning point in the development of the Hellman ethical code. In early 1935, Hellman became involved in Hollywood politics by joining her friend Dorothy Parker and others in their efforts to organize a writers' union. Hammett had already been involved in

these activities, and encouraged Hellman's participation. As she became more and more involved, Hellman's political inclinations turned from the personal and close-at-hand, moving to the world around her, which was beginning to feel the effects of fascism. Hellman's public positions were known for their Communist-sounding affiliations, yet she professed that she was too much the head-strong individual to ever belong to a political party. Indeed, both Hammett and Hellman were called before HUAC in the 1950's to testify as to their political leanings, and Hammett was jailed for a time, having been found in contempt of court for refusing to provide certain information. Hellman escaped imprisonment, despite her challenge to HUAC's authority and her refusal to comply with its demands (see the chapter herein on "Hellman and the McCarthy Era"). In forming her moral beliefs, Hellman realized that her commitment to justice and courage would demand more of her than private or personal actions. She conducted benefits for the relief of prisoners in Franco's Spain; during one year she urged her friends to give her contributions for ambulances instead of expensive birthday gifts. She traveled to the Russian front and throughout Spain, all the while writing articles and making radio broadcasts on behalf of those fighting oppression.

It seems clear that Hellman and Hammett discussed these issues together, and that Hellman had much admiration for the single-mindedness and dedication of her companion. He was very much committed to the principles of Marxism, and his influence on Hellman, even though he was not able to convert her, remained a

source of stimulation and intellectual exercise.[25] Such discourse must have had an impact on Hellman's moral system, for she was often affected by the plight of the underdog and sought, in her plays, to describe his/her plight while writing other plays, such as Watch on the Rhine, that illustrate the ability of one committed person to make a difference. Hammett's commitment could not be shaken; any attempt on Hellman's part to crack his belief proved futile. She was in awe of his commitment, partly because she was in awe of its magnitude, and partly because he was so patient with her lack of similar conviction.She admired most radicals of her time, calling them true and serious thinkers. She was at once jealous, angry and respectful, for Hammett did not waver or vascillate in his position.[26]

The acquisition and exercise of a person's morality has been described by many philosophers from Socrates on to current theorists. What many of them hold in common is that morality does not consist of a series of acts; rather, it is a state of character, not a passion or a faculty.[27] This position posits that people ought to practice moral virtues not only in special circumstances, but as a rule, as a matter of principle.[28] Most philosophies agree that the end purpose of living a morally sound life is the attainment of happiness (described as Heaven in the Judaeo-Christian tradition), adding that people should conduct themselves morally without constant consideration for their own ends and desires in so doing.

But one cannot help but wonder at the particluar course Hellman's moral development took. Certainly others have been

witnesses to the indignity and the horror of racism, yet have not opted to respond in Hellman's fashion. Still others have been proponents or witnesses of greed and avarice and yet have sought protection from the charge of moral bankruptcy by claiming that they were faced with an ideal opportunity to make a fortune. How can we explain the particular moral choices Hellman made? It seems insufficient to merely raise again the nature vs. nurture debate, even though it is clear that heredity and environment play their respective roles in the development of one's ethical character.[29] The influences of Hellman's parents, relatives, peers, as well as the effect of the moral messages in the hundreds of books she was known to have read all coalesced in meaningful ways to form at least a part of her conscience. Her fascination with the different denominations of religion, her exposure in later life to other thinkers, writers, and artists all acted as catalysts in the on-going and continuous process of the refinement as well as the expansion of an ethical code.

To what extent does one's own sense of agency or autonomy come to play in the formulation of moral characer? Certainly Hellman had the strength and the wherewithal to disagree (and vehemently so) with some of the activities and attitudes of her mother's side of the family, for example, even at an early age. In her adult years, independence of spirit led Hellman to take remarkably unpopular stands both for and against many issues of the day, which have served as lasting models of her courage and stamina. Is it biology? Does such strength come in the genes? Or environment?

Philosophers and scientists used to pose, with a fair degree of regularity, a question that centered on knowing how much of each entity, biology or environment, affected a person's physical, moral, and intellectual development. These debates concerned the amounts each entity contributed to the process. Forty per cent here? Sixty per cent there? Lately, however, the discussion has turned less to a quantitative analysis and more to a qualitative examination of the ways in which the two interact.[30] Even so, there are surely moments when the individual must exert herself beyond the influences of her background, and must act in accordance with the dictates of her own conscience, which is, in the end, a unique creation. It can be said that Hellman's moral conscience emanated as the result of several key "turning points" in her life. Her exposure to the love of her parents, aunts and beloved nurse, Sophronia, all had a large impact upon Hellman's early moral development. Her experiences with her first love, with her schoolmates, with racism, with early independence, all contributed to a larger understanding of the world and Hellman's perceptions of her own role within that world. Certainly all situations involving injustice angered her, and she often felt compelled to act against it, as in the case of Sophronia and the street car driver. The early anger she felt upon important occasions was one example of the kind of moral fire that burned within her, and serves as an illustration of the way in which a particular belief she might have held surfaced in irrepressible expression.

Several critics have had much admiration for Hellman's moral

code. Richard Moody said, "...[Hellman] is a rigorous moralist. This does not connote fanaticism because, to begin with, she is rigorous with herself." He added that Hellman had an "...unmistakable admiration for every kind of excellence: self-discipline, loyalty, the determination never to injure others...the unselfish pursuit of humanly valid ideas."[31] It is my suggestion that Hellman came to these qualities early on in her life, through certain key episodes and turning points through which she experienced an epiphany-like revelation or understanding both of the way the world worked and of her ability to act within the framework of her own circumstances. She developed these admirable qualities as she grew and matured, and, despite the complex and diverse nature of her moral code she held to basic beliefs about the necessity for honesty and courage throughout her often difficult and tumultuous life.

Hellman died on June 30, 1984, after having been admitted to a hospital on Martha's Vineyard suffering from cardiac arrest complicated by the illnesses emphysema and arthritis. Neighbors said that, even up until the end, Hellman's mind remained alert. Newsweek's David Anser summed it up most movingly when he asserted:

> The Hellman anger arose from her clear-eyed view of social injustice and strong moral convictions, and she remained true to her passion throughout her rich and tumultuous life. Not for her the modernist halftones of alienation and equivocation. The fire within her lit up the cultural landscape; its heat will be deeply missed.[32]

Indeed, whether she is remembered as an unfinished woman or the playwright with the ability to move many and whole audiences, Lillian Hellman, with the fiery temper and the unwavering sense of ethics and morality, will be missed. But her contributions to the theater, the world of literature, and to those of us who have need and use of a guiding moral light will prove to be of endless value. For these we remain grateful.

END NOTES

[1] Immanuel Kant, Lectures on Ethics, Trans. Louis Infield, (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 36.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Lillian Hellman, An Unfinished Woman in Three (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1979), p. 132.

[4] Ibid., p. 21.

[5] Ibid., p. 18.

[6] Ibid., p. 16.

[7] Ibid., p. 14.

[8] Lillian Hellman, "Theater" in Three, p. 483.

[9] Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman, Playwright, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), p. 11.

[10] Lillian Hellman, An Unfinished Woman in Three, p. 37.

[11] Ibid., pp. 37-39.

[12] Margaret Case Harriman, "Miss Lily of New Orleans: Lillian Hellman", in her Take Them Up Tenderly: A Collection of Profiles, (New York: Knopf, 1945), p. 98.

[13] Hellman, An Unfinished Woman in Three, p. 15.

[14] Ibid., p. 24.

[15] Hellman, "Helen" in Three, pp. 259-261.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Hellman, An Unfinished Woman in Three, p. 42.

[18] Ibid., pp. 48-51.

[19] Ibid., p. 18.

[20] Ibid., p. 75.

[21] Ibid., p. 64.

[22] Hellman, "Dashiell Hammett" in Three, pp. 278-279.

[23] Diane Johnson, Dashiell Hammett: A Life, (New York: Random House, 1983), pp. 170-171.

[24] Christine Doudna, "Interview With Lillian Hellman," Rolling Stone, 2-24-77, pp. 55-57.

[25] Hellman, "Dashiell Hammett" in Three, p. 302.

[26] Ibid., p. 284.

[27] Aristotle, The Nichomachean Ethics, Trans. Sir David Ross, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 35.

[28] Joel Feinberg, Ed. Moral Concepts, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 117.

[29] Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Development of Children's Orientation Toward a Moral Order" in Vita Humana VI, (1963), pp. 11-13.

[30] Anna Freud, Introduction to Technic of Child Analysis (London: The Ayer Co., 1975), Introduction.

[31] Moody, p. xii.

[32] David Anser, "An Unmellowed Woman" in Newsweek, 7-9-84, p. 73.

Chapter Two: On Truth

Hellman's early moral development seems to have had several key components. One was her unerring sense of justice, involving her anger when some principle held dearly was violated. Another was her concern for the oppressed and the poor, concern against racial discrimination and violence, as witnessed in the previously discussed episode with Sophronia, who was asked to sit in the rear of the streetcar. Yet another and rather important component in the overall make-up of Hellman's moral disposition is her desire to attain truth, to speak honestly, to avoid lies. She exacted this commitment not only of her friends and associates, but demanded it of herself as well.

This chapter attempts to delineate several ideas involving truth, truthfulness, the ambiguity inherent within complex situations, and the harm that can come when a regard for these is faulty or non-existent. The ideas of key philosophers, ranging from the ancients to contemporary theorists, will be examined, including those of Kant, St. Augustine, Plato, etc., as well as Sissela Bok and Adrienne Rich. In addition, I hope to examine Hellman's own views on truth, as well as to try to place her stance along the continuum suggested by the wide range of views presented by the different theorists. The idea of truth is an essential element in understanding Hellman's moral system, for it

illuminates an aspect of her thinking which centers on veracity in communication. As a playwright, Hellman's job was, according to critic Florence Von Wien, "...to see the truth and put it down in dramatic form."[1] It would be impossible to be a moral person while condoning lying and deception. Moreover, many of the plays and memoirs are heavily imbued with cause and effect relations between lying and the disasters that befall either the victims of the lie, as in The Children's Hour, or the liar himself, as in Montserrat, where the hero's hesitancy to reveal information to his oppressors concerning the whereabouts of rebel Simon Bolivar during the Spanish occupation of Venezuela brings about the deaths of innocent people.

First, it might be useful to outline the basic types of arguments that are rendered by the thinkers involved in this study. There are those who believe that truth is an absolute, that it is a complete moral principle which overrides and supercedes any considerations for expediency or the subjective concerns of the relativist. This position is a demanding one, for it states that there are no occasions upon which the telling of a lie is necessary or even excusable. All lies harm both the teller and the deceived. The ancients spoke about truth as somewhat of an absolute, attainable by humans. Aristotle wrote:

> For the man who loves truth, and is truthful where nothing is at stake, will still be more truthful when something is at stake; he will avoid falsehood as something base, seeing that he avoided it even for its own sake; and such a man is worthy of praise.[2]

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Aristotle also believed that the general goal of mankind was happiness, that ideal behavior assumed a mean between two extremes, and that leading a virtuous life would help one to attain these ends.

Plato also wrote about the ideal society, arguing that the freedom of speech was an absolute necessity, for only when all manner of ideas could be freely expressed, ranging from the obviously false to the ridiculous to that which could be discerned as truthful, would people involved in this dialectical process be able to ascertain veracity.

Huby asserts, in her study of Plato's ideas, that the advent of Christianity had much to do with conflicts between the entities of reason and faith, arguing that Christians had a difficult path to tread when attempting to combine Biblical revelations with reason. She says, "...reason came to appear as the enemy of faith and something not to be trusted."[3] Indeed, religious faith demanded belief in the unseen, as well as obedience to a higher authority. There came, then, a group of theologians and philosophers who sought to interpret God's idea of truth to His [sic] servants.

In the case of St. Augustine, for example, his idea of absoluteness had a religious and theological underpinning, since it argued that God possesses all knowledge, that He has ordered people to tell the truth, and that lying is in direct disobedience with His command ("Thou shalt not bear false witness") and is, therefore, a sin. In this context, people who commit this sin are seen to be committing it against God rather

than against each other, and they are forgiven only in the confessional.[4] Some aspects of this position are derived from the Bible, particularly in the Book of Wisdom, 1:1, "A lying mouth deals death to the soul."[5] This tradition continues down through the middle ages, and can be seen in the thinking of other theologians, such as St. Thomas of Aquinas, who also said that lying was a mortal sin.[6]

Many of these philosophers, realizing the severity of their positions, sought to delineate "escape" mechanisms through which some lies could be categorized as being less harmful or more harmful than other lies. This system used such criteria as considerations as to the intent of the liar, the degree of harm the lie caused, and whether or not the lie was meant to achieve a desired end that may have been, in itself, beneficial, as in the example of a white lie that preserves someone's feelings. The "mental reservation" school of thought posited that one could say something aloud only to then qualify it, rendering it truthful, through the addition of an internal reservation, as in the example of someone saying, "No, I did not steal." He then privately adds, "Yesterday," which allows his statement to appear truthful. Many objections were raised to this method; notable among them is the idea that the omission of pertinent facts can serve as its own form of deception, and the responsibility for the connivance remains with the deceiver. There grew an entire body of philosophical literature that debated this question, in all its convolutions and implications.

Then came Immanuel Kant, another absolutist, who stated

quite clearly, and harshly in the eyes of some, that all lies were wrong, no matter their intent.

> But a lie is a lie and is in itself intrinsically base whether it be told with good or bad intent. For formally a lie is always evil...there are no lies which may not be the source of evil. A liar is a coward; he is a man who has recourse to lying because he is unable to help himself and gain his ends by any other means. But a stout-hearted man will love truth.[7]

Kant argued that even lies to preserve oneself or another are still wrong, and gave as his example the classic illustration of the murderer chasing a man. Someone else sees the man and knows of his whereabouts; is she then obliged to tell the truth to the murderer, thereby endangering the escapee's life? There exists a body of thought which claims that truth is not owed to the villain, that a lie told in the service of someone's life is not, in fact, a lie under such circumstances. Kant and his fellow absolutists make no such distinctions, arguing:

> A lie may arise from mere frivolity or even good nature; indeed, the speaker may intend to achieve a really good end by it. But his way of pursuing the end is, by its mere form, a wrong to his own person..."[8]

It is one's duty to tell the truth, and this duty is part of humankind's general goal of happiness. What, then, about conflicting grounds of obligation such as the obligation to tell the truth vs. the obligation to save another's life?

Sissela Bok adds an enormously important dimension to this

debate in her book, Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life. In it, she raises the example of the captain of a ship which is carrying refugees from Nazi Germany. The captain is asked by a policeman on a patrolling vessel whether or not he has any Jews on board. What should the captain's answer be, and what is the nature of his dilemma? Yes, he does have a duty to tell the truth, yet he has another duty to protect the lives of innocent people (given, of course, that the sympathies of the one who judges them to be innocent lie with anti-Nazi sentiment). Bok suggests that one method of forming a resolution is to determine that which might be the greater harm: to lie or to expose the refugees. In helping create a theory that concerns itself with moral choices people have to make in daily life rather than with large and abstract attempts at defining truth, Bok's ideas are useful in that they suggest there are occasions upon which lies might be expedient, even necessary, although choosing to lie for good reasons does not excuse one from assuming responsibility for having done so.

Bok also suggests that lies do harm to the individual, indeed, to collective society, whose workings rely on veracity in communication, as in the case of a tornado warning or knowledge of a poisoned well.[10] Knowledge of this kind empowers he who has it; to distort it or to withhold it from individuals places those who need the necessary information in a position of impotence; without it they cannot make good choices from a full range of alternatives. Thus, the telling of truth affects not only the individual but the entire society as well. Conversely, the

telling of lies also affects people, individually and collectively. Kant said, "By a lie a man throws away and, as it were, annihilates his dignity as a man."[11]

We have seen some examples of absolutists on the one hand, who say that all lies are wrong, to Bok's intimation that some lies, although we are responsible for them, are excusable, even necessary, in certain circumstances such as when saving the life of another. Thus, two points along the truth continuum have been established. At the extreme opposite end stands the belief, once held by such philosophers as Pyrrho, that nothing can be known, there is no surety, no certainty; therefore, attempts at telling the truth are impossible, since one cannot know for sure that that which is about to be said is truthful. Such men shunned discourse of any nature and often lived as hermits.[12] This position is reiterated in some aspects of Existentialistic thought, which claim that life is absurd, nothing is certain; therefore, the purpose of each person's existence is to create meaning, moment by moment, in the face of that final and absolute entity: death.

Recent feminist philosophers have suggested that, for women, lying can be seen as a necessary skill for survival in an essentially corrupt (i.e., male) world. In order to circumvent the power plays and false, even harmful information given to them, women have developed strategies and methods of communications within their own sub-structure that is reliable, on which they can depend, while dealing with that which they perceive to be the negative, necrophilic and patriarchal super-

structure that attempts to disempower them. Although such an ideology can be beneficial, indeed necessary for the survival of many women, there are dangers in such a course as well, which are aptly pointed out by Adrienne Rich:

> There is a danger run by all powerless people: that we forget we are lying, or that lying becomes a weapon we carry over into relationships with people who do not have power over us.[13]

Rich goes on to speak of the importance of women speaking honestly, especially to one another, in order to share and redefine their experiences as women without the shroud of male interference. Yet it is important to realize that intentional lying, planned duplicity, may be a point along the truth continuum that bears further study and investigation.

Where do Hellman and her ideas of truth and truthfulness fit in this continuum? First, it may be helpful to make the distinction between truth and truthfulness, for I perceive them to be related, yet different concepts. Some people think of "The Truth" as a kind of overall principle, a moral absolute that stands firm, never capitulating to revision or redefinition, immune to the provisional and seemingly shaky groundwork of situational ethicists and subjective philosophers. Yet not all those who seek "the truth" are on a quest for no less than the holy grail; many such seekers do not assume the smug self-righteous demeanor that we have come to detest. Many seekers of the truth have at least the good intention of wanting that which

they believe will assist them on their shared goal: the betterment and happiness of humankind. It is not clear, however, that "the truth" is attainable in the first place, for it is an ambiguous and amorphous idea, its dimensions unknown, its usefulness only guessed at. On this topic Rich says:

> In speaking of lies we come inevitably to the subject of truth. There is nothing simple or easy about this idea. There is no "the truth"--truth is not one thing or even a system. It is an increasing complexity. The pattern of a carpet is a surface. When we look closely, or when we become weavers, we learn of the tiny multiple threads unseen in the overall pattern, the knots on the underside of the carpet.[14]

Hence, the truth is impossible to define, to capture as a monolithic entity. Rather, it may be more useful to speak of telling the truth, of honesty, to view life with the ability to observe its reality and to analyze the conditions under which people make moral choices, as was suggested by Bok.

Hellman's plays and her autobiographies concern themselves with the ideas of truth and honesty. Probably her best-known play, The Children's Hour, focuses on the effects of a rather large lie, on its perpetrator, its victims, and its supporters. By "supporters" I mean those who believe the lie and advance its causes, its maliciousness.

Hellman developed this play from a detective case that had been written up in a magazine and brought to her attention by Dashiell Hammett. Although she changed several of the original details, the basic story-line was the same: a young girl brings

charges of lesbianism against the two women, Karen Wright and Martha Dobie, who run her boarding school. Her grandmother, an early benefactor of the school as well as a stately and solid citizen, withdraws her granddaughter from the school, and telephones other members of the community, successful in urging them to do the same. The two women are shattered. One commits suicide as the result of recognizing that she may, indeed, have felt "that way" about her companion. The other loses her fiancee, since he can never be sure of his intended's sexual identity. The girl's grandmother is the only one who goes through any kind of moral metamorphosis: after the lie is discovered, she tries to apologize for her role in bringing about the demise of the school and its administrators. Yet she is never completely free of the responsibility she has had in believing the lie initially, nor is she guiltless for her complicity in spreading the false charge.

The play opens in a room of the boarding school, where several students are practicing sewing skills and the art of elocution. It is perhaps ironic that one student is attempting to recite Portia's speech on justice and mercy (from Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice) and cannot get it right despite frequent prompting. This might serve as a prediction that mercy and justice will be lacking, if not absent altogether, from the action of the drama itself.[15] The events of the play center around Mary Tilford, a troubled and manipulative child, and the havoc she wreaks against her teachers. Mary enters with a faded bouquet for Mrs. Mortar, the conductress of the class, who is also Martha Dobie's aunt. Right away we are presented with an

example of her ability to lie when she says that she picked the flowers while on a walk, despite Karen's insistence that it's the same bunch of flowers she had thrown out only that morning. Mrs. Mortar intimates that Mary has lied about her whereabouts in the past, and Karen gets somewhat of an upper hand by indicating that she is not about to be taken in by Mary's deception. Hellman draws Karen as a sympathetic and compassionate creature, who answers Mary's charges that she's always the one being picked on and singled out for punishment by saying:

> I don't think you're very happy here and I'd like to find out why. ... Look, Mary, look at me. Let's try to understand each other. If you feel that you have to take a walk, or that you just can't come to class, or that you'd like to go into the village by yourself, come and tell me--I'll try to understand. ...I've had feelings like that, too--everybody has--and I won't be unreasonable about yours. But this way, this kind of lying, makes everything wrong.[16]

The idea that even little lies, or "white" lies can harm a person's overall veracity is a tie to the absolutist's idea that all lies are wrong. Bok also entertains the notion that lying becomes pervasive, affects one's overall integrity, and is wrong.

Karen punishes Mary for her inability to turn to the truth by removing a privilege and Mary threatens to retaliate. Her initial action is to feign a heart attack, and Karen's fiancee, Joe Cardin, a doctor and Mary's cousin, is called to the scene. He examines her, finds her to be in fine shape, yet is aware of her manipulative abilities, saying to Mary, "How's it feel to be back from the grave?"[17] She continues to feel herself the victim

of extraordinary persecution, and plans her escape by running away from the school, but not before she has obtained some information about a conversation two of her classmates have overheard between Martha and Mrs. Mortar about Martha's jealousy of Joe and Karen's intended marriage.

Martha is irritated that the pair plan to marry in the near future. She is annoyed when Joe is in the school. She resents the time that Karen spends with Joe, for it was time previously spent with Martha. It is clear from the conversation between Martha and her aunt that Mrs. Mortar is aware of her sensitivity to the couple's engagement, to Martha's preference for Karen, and she calls her niece's feelings "unnatural." Two little girls, Peggy and Evelyn, are eavesdropping at the door. One drops a book and they are discovered. Martha sends them to their room, saying that they will all talk about it later. Joe and Karen enter the room and, upon learning of the eavesdropping, Karen states that the girls will have to move their rooms around. She calls them in to discuss their lack of decorum. They state that they are sorry, that they didn't mean to cause any harm, while Karen considers the possibility that none of the girls did things like that before Mary's arrival. She concludes that Mary, in her dishonesty and proclivity for deception, has had an adverse effect upon the girls' behavior.

Mary and the eavesdroppers are left alone together, and she threatens them with violence unless they tell her what transpired between Martha and her aunt. The girls tell what they know for fear of what will happen to them if they don't. They are,

perhaps, too young, too innocent, to understand that Mary intends to store their revelations and that which they imply for future use. They are so afraid of Mary that they never entertain the notion of lying to protect Martha; neither do they comprehend the nature of Mortar's accusations--somehow, Mary does.

The room re-arranging causes Mary to move in with a girl named Rosalie, who has inadvertently kept a bracelet she secretly "borrowed" from another girl. Mary knows that Rosalie still has the bracelet, and uses that information to her best advantage, intimating that Rosalie has committed theft, and that the victim's mother will surely have Rosalie imprisoned when she learns of the crime (through Mary, of course). Mary will force Rosalie to lie for her when she fabricates the charge of lesbianism by reminding her of the "stolen" bracelet.

In the meantime, Mary effects her escape (primarily by using physical violence to get some money from one of the girls who has saved a little by denying herself the small pleasures of candy, a movie, etc., enjoyed by the other girls) and the ensuing scenes occur in the home of Amelia Tilford, Mary's grandmother. Mary is rude and abrasive to the maid, Agatha, who, along with Joe, is more than aware of her scheming abilities. Initially, Mary does not really have a definite game plan, saying,

> "I'll think of something to tell her. I can always do it better on the spur of the moment ...Grandma's very fond of me, on account my father was her favorite son. I can manage her all right.[18]

And manage her she does, at first by complaining that the teachers will kill her if she goes back, that they have it in for her and always single her out for ill-treatment. She tells her grandmother how she fainted, how her heart hurt, and generally plays upon her sympathies, but her grandmother, at least at the outset, is not taken in by her whining. She even sees through the manipulation, saying, "It's not nice to frighten people by pretending to be sick when you aren't."[19] She says that Mary deserves being punished for leaving school without permission. As the child perceives that her plan is not working, that she'll be returned to school after supper, she grows more and more hysterical and decides to bring out all her ammunition, which she whispers in her grandmother's ear.

It is interesting to note that the lie is whispered rather than spoken aloud in the play. This may be a "throw-back" to the idea that such topics as lesbianism weren't discussed outright, yet a more dynamic possibility is that the lie may have been perceived as such were it stated bluntly. Whispers indicate intimacy, the kind of intimacy in which anything might be revealed that is too personal, private, or shameful to speak normally. Mary must assume some degree of bashfulness on the topic; to appear knowledgeable and comfortable with it would reveal her lack of innocence and destroy her credibility. Moreover, the lack of eye-to-eye contact when whispering preserves Mary's safety, since her grandmother cannot search her eyes for veracity.

Grandmother Tilford trusts Mary so implicitly that she

cannot believe the child could fabricate anything as shocking as that which she has revealed, and so believes her. Even though she attempts a phone call to Karen, she does not reach her immediately and feels a great sense of urgency in her mission, which can't wait for confrontation or proof. She calls for her nephew, Joe, who cannot come immediately, thereby adding to her frustration in ascertaining the truthfulness of Mary's assertions. Her decision to act comes of a desire to "protect" the other children at the school, and she begins phoning the other parents.

It would seem that, had the charge been one of physical abuse or negligence, Mrs. Tilford would have acted differently, would have investigated further. Because the charge is one of homosexuality, Mrs. Tilford's reaction is a homophobic one, and, in her panic, she overreacts, choosing instead to behave in complicity with her fears rather than through the use of reason. Her evaluation of Karen and Martha as being nice, kindly and sensible women, worthy of trust and her financial backing capitulates to the lie of a malicious and obnoxious child.

In any event, she does act, and the consequent harm is irreparable. The dramatic turns of event include a confrontation by Karen and Martha in Tilford's home; there the matron insists that she is correct in her assumption, while the two women, assisted by Joe, attempt to defend their innocence and demand to know the cause of Tilford's accusation. Mary is brought before the tribunal, and Joe offers her the chance to recant, being quite generous in his ability to understand that sometimes people

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say things they don't quite mean.

> Look, everybody lies all the time. Sometimes they have to, sometimes they don't. I've lied for a lot of different reasons, but there was seldom a time when, if I'd been given a second chance, I wouldn't have taken back the lie and told the truth. You're lucky if you ever get that chance. I'm telling you this because I'm about to ask you a question. Before you answer the question, I want to tell you that if you've l---, if you made a mistake, you must take this chance and say so. You won't be punished for it. Do you get all that?[20]

Here, Hellman speaks in Joe's voice, stating her belief that the truth is preferrable to lies, while recognizing that everybody lies at one time or another, including Hellman. An interesting component of this speech is the idea that one might have the opportunity to revoke the lie, to replace it with the truth. That the ability to do so comes infrequently, if at all, denotes the importance of seizing the chance to do so.

Mary sticks to her story, beefing it up when it is discovered that she doesn't really know what she's talking about when she says that she heard "sounds" through a keyhole in the door and saw the two women kissing each other.It turns out that Karen's door does not have a keyhole, and that Martha shares a room with her aunt at the other end of the building, out of possible ear shot. Mary then implicates Rosalie, saying that she was just trying to protect her friend, who is actually the one who "saw" and "heard" Karen and Martha. Rosalie, at first, is an unwilling participant in Mary's little scheme. She is frightened by the prospect of being brought before everyone, and it is to

Karen's credit that she attempts to calm the child. Rosalie says that she doesn't know what Mary means, disclaiming all that has been suggested. However, Mary then manages to work the bracelet into the inquisition, and Rosalie acquiesces, throwing herself, distraught, upon the sofa.[21]

In Act III, Karen and Martha are left to ponder their fates in the cold and empty school. They are devastated by the trial they have had to endure, as well as the public ridicule. Mrs. Mortar was asked to return to the town to testify in their behalf; her failure to comply was a key element in losing the libel suit they brought against Mrs. Tilford since much of the defense's case rested on Mortar's statements. Ladies' groups organized against them, and the grocery delivery boy stares and giggles at them. They have had a hard time of it; indeed, it has been harder, one could argue, than even a true charge of lesbianism should have merited in 1934.

Joe arrives and he and Karen have a rather dramatic scene in which she allows him to ask the very question the whole town has been asking: is it true? They recognize that the entire debacle overshadows their relationship; Joe suggests that they go away to Vienna, where he had been a student, yet he doesn't really want to go there and offers to do so out of a last-ditch hope that they can make a go of it <u>somewhere</u>. He may be lying to himself, and the ensuing break-up mitigates against further self-deception. They realize that the situation will follow them wherever they go, and their own self-doubts would lead to eventual hatred of one another. Whether or not that is actually

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true is somewhat debated by the pair, and Karen asks Joe to at least go away for a day or so to think things over.

After he departs, and Martha has been informed of the relationship's demise, she begins a form of self-examination in an effort to discover the "truth." The events of the previous weeks, although they emanated from and are rooted in lies, at least have forced her to analyze her actions and motivations towards Karen and Joe, and she is not wholly pleased with what she sees. It is unfortunate that the moral dictates of the period mandated such agony in Martha's slow discovery of her own true feelings, and that those feelings were perceived as somehow unnatural and corrupt. It is an indication of the way in which a society can force someone to mask the truth in order to survive within its boundaries. Yet Martha does not survive, for, after making the following speech, she shoots herself off stage:

> Martha: It's funny; it's all mixed up. There's something in you, and you don't know it, and you don't do anything about it. Suddenly a child gets bored and lies--and there you are, seeing it for the first time. I don't know. It all seems to come back to me. In some way I've ruined your life. I've ruined my own. I didn't even know. There's a big difference between us now, Karen. I feel all dirty and--I can't stay with you anymore, darling.
> Karen: All this isn't true. You've never said it; we'll forget it by tomorrow--
> Martha: Tomorrow? Karen, we would have had to invent a new language, as children do, without words like tomorrow.[22]

Karen has trouble coping with the possibility that Martha does love her "in that way", and rejects the idea that it should be

dealt with, hoping to delay facing up to it until "tomorrow" in the hope that its problematic nature will be dissipated by the passage of time.

Several critics have suggested that the play should have ended with the suicide, which is seen but not heard.[23] Instead, Hellman opted to have a "conciliatory" scene, in which Mrs. Tilford comes to apologize. It seems that the bracelet was found in Rosalie's room, that the truth was established, and that Tilford has been in agony ever since its discernment. Her walk, demeanor, and voice have all changed. She says that she has spoken with the judge, that there will be a public apology, an explanation, and the damages paid to Karen in full. Karen's understandably bitter response suggests that those actions will never be enough to rectify the harm and the loss she's had to endure. Yet after a time, she concedes that she might be able to use Tilford's help--that there may be a future, after all. What is particularly interesting in this scene is the fact that Tilford realizes her guilt, her complicity in believing the lie, will never abate, that it remains an integral part of her being. She has assisted in the demise of one life and the compromise of another, and there is no easy way out of such a dilemma. This would coincide with both the absolutist and Bok's positions, in that responsibility for lying and its consequences rest with the liar. And although Tilford did not herself bring the lie in the first place, she nonetheless advanced its destructiveness through her willingness to repeat it to others.

We can consider the converse in the case of the hero in

Hellman's adaptation of Robles' play, Montserrat, in which the protagonist refuses to talk at all, thereby causing the deaths of several innocent victims while preserving the freedom of rebel leader Simon Bolivar during the early nineteenth century occupation of Venezuela by Spain's army. Montserrat, a member of the army, seems to be a bit of a rebel himself in that he has lost faith with the purposes of his presence, and has come to admire Bolivar and his impact upon the people. His associates and consequent captors realize that Montserrat knows of Bolivar's whereabouts, and attempt to force him to reveal this information. When he refuses, the soldiers bring in some peasants from the street, who had been busily going about their daily routines when captured. One by one they are executed as the result of Montserrat's silence.

The moral dilemma for this man centers upon conflicting grounds of moral obligation. On the one hand, telling the truth would mean (and this presumes that the villains can be taken at their word) the instant release of the prisoners at hand. On the other, this revelation would mean certain death for Bolivar and the ensuing and continued oppression of the subjects of Spain's domination, who would continue to suffer various deprivations, such as spoiled food, lack of medical care, little water, the fact that the soldiers regularly rape the women, that freedom of thought is disallowed, and that there exist inhumane working conditions. Bolivar is seen as their liberator, and our sympathies are with them.

In the opening scenes of the play, Bolivar's primary

predator, Izquierdo, enters, defeated, admitting that, for the second time, he has failed to capture Bolivar, despite having been close upon him in his ill-fated pursuit. Each time he fails, Bolivar becomes ever more the hero and the Spanish army ever more a group of bungling fools. Montserrat engages in a re-hash of his objections to the Spanish presence with, of all people, a Roman Catholic priest, who supports the oppression, believing Spain's purpose to be a holy one. Montserrat's views, according to the priest, border on heresy, for they support the insurgents as they "...refuse to confess the Glory of God." Montserrat responds by saying,

> They have not refused God. They have refused to accept the glory of our army. I wanted to understand--I came to you a year ago for help. I have asked you over and over again--does the prestige of God demand slaughterhouses? Father, you don't see what is happening: ride out with us--the stink of burning bodies will change your mind.[23]

Izquierdo suspects that Montserrat has served as Bolivar's informant, warning him of the approaching army and its intent to kill him. His suspicion comes as the result of talking with two men, one of whom is the stable hand who saddled up Montserrat's horse the night before, the other an Indian found at the farm where Bolivar was supposed to have been captured. The Indian says that someone dressed in a Spanish army uniform carefully tied the weak and ailing Bolivar to his saddle and rode off with him into the dark. Montserrat makes no attempt at disguising his role in Bolivar's escape, and even helps Izquierdo along with different

points as the latter recounts the prior evening's events. Montserrat is being truthful, for he freely admits to his responsibility in thwarting the goals of his superiors while assisting the rebel leader. He freely acknowledges that his role is one of insubordination. In doing so, he seems to be mocking the ineptness of the army as well as making a strong statement against its purpose; were it not for his sincerity and humility in his subsequent conflicts of conscience, it would appear that Montserrat attempts to provoke his colleagues with his seemingly cavalier attitude.

Izquierdo formulates a plan whereby he orders that one of the other soldiers brings in six people from the village square. Understandably, they are confused and frightened as to the purpose of their presence in the palace of the Spanish general. They speak of their obligations, a wife to return to, children waiting for their supper, of the ways they have served the general and his officers since their arrival, and so on, and we recognize the desperation in their voices as they desire to pacify their captors and return to the normalcy of their lives. However, Izquierdo intends to use them to force Montserrat into revealing Bolivar's location, saying that he intends to murder them, one by one, until Montserrat breaks down. They are given one hour with him, in which they try to convince him of their need to be released and of his responsibility to come forward on their behalf.

Montserrat's moral commitment is quietly and haltingly expressed as some of the people try to present their views on the

futility of such a commitment. Some suggest that six people can have no impact, that the fight is over, that perhaps Bolivar is not the man who will save them, that their lives are just as important as his. Others seem to quietly support the idea of revolution, but are weary from the reality of their own struggle in the villages where Bolivar was not successful, and many died. A few state that they have no political convictions whatsoever, and merely wish to get home to their families, to enjoy the little peace they have had since the Spanish occupation. In a microcosmic world, Hellman presents the many views expressed in society at large both for and against the political commitment to change, whatever the price. And, although the price is great in this play, Hellman asserts that the good Bolivar can accomplish is worth the sacrifice, for in the deaths of the few will the many be saved and their lives made worthwhile.

It is interesting to note that we come to know the characters not only as "real" people who have families, occupations, etc., but as people who have faults, foibles, weaknesses and strengths of character that make them believable. No one is wholly right or wrong; there are shadings of grey areas, gradations that render these depictions realistic, for people are not just one way or another. Rather, they are amalgamations of good and evil, bad and good intentions, hope and desperation. The struggle they all face seems truly a dialectical process, for they argue back and forth among themselves, often in defense of the revolution, often in defense of their right to their pathetic groveling for mercy. Montserrat is tormented by a

true desire to do that which is right, and, initially, he defends Bolivar's actions and his support of them. Yet he is conflicted about the fate of the six prisoners, and debates a course of action that would save them as well.

Just as Montserrat considers an escape via cutting his throat, Izquierdo enters, and it is obvious that he has been listening to the proceedings. He prevents the possible suicide, and takes the first few victims out to be executed. It is ironic to note that the two men who lead the prisoners into the yard are monks, and the role of the Catholic church in its complicity with the barbarisms of the Spanish occupation is itself portrayed with an eye to veracity.

The only prisoners who seem to support the goals of the revolution and who seem ready to defy the army officers are Ricardo and Felisa. Izquierdo makes several sexual overtures to Felisa, but he is rebuffed at every turn, despite the possibility that she might save herself in capitulating to his will. He asks of her:

> Izquierdo: Dear child. Have you ever been with a man?
> Felisa: No.
> Izquierdo: Shall I teach you?
> Felisa: It was not the way I dreamed of learning.
> Izquierdo: I will teach you. Perhaps I would fall in love for a few days. Would you like that?
> Felisa: It would not matter to me.
> Izquierdo: I think it would. Some way. What has mattered to you? What have you wanted?
> Felisa: More to eat. Less filth. And the death of you and all like you.[24]

Izquierdo prepares to take young Ricardo, and Montserrat

indicates that he is willing to stop the killings, to tell of Bolivar's location. But Ricardo turns out to be courageous in asking Montserrat not to speak, to say instead that he believes in Bolivar, believes in the goals of his campaign against the oppressors. Montserrat speaks of a letter Bolivar once wrote, in which he thought the battle was lost, and in which he had asked for refuge. This disappoints Ricardo, who wants badly to believe that his hero would never have admitted defeat. Montserrat responds by telling him the truth of Bolivar's despair and of his resolve against it:

> There is no man without a time of defeat and an hour of turning back. Bolivar had his defeat, he had his time of mourning, and passed through it. They may catch him tonight and kill him. But he will not turn back again. I know that as surely as I know that I am willing to die for it.[25]

Ricardo accepts this faith, and agrees to be executed without the mask, without facing the wall, and dies a martyr for the cause. Felisa urges Montserrat not to talk and faces her death just as bravely, urging the last one, Matilde, to pray for her children and all the children that were to come. Hence, just as Montserrat is at his breaking point, just as he prepares to speak out, he is encouraged not to do so by the very people who had the most to lose--their lives.

Izquierdo threatens to bring in another six people, and Montserrat agrees to talk. Instead of telling the truth, however, he chooses to lie not only about Bolivar's plans, but about the number of men and guns traveling with him as well. He lies in

order to preserve Bolivar, to give him more time, as Bolivar has informed him of his intention to ride to another town where he will be joined by thousands of fellow revolutionaries. He lies in the service of a good cause, and, although he recognizes that he is lying, Montserrat does so knowing that the purpose of the lie is greater than the guilt he bears.

When some members of the Spanish patrol return to the General's palace to say that Bolivar has slipped through their lines again, Montserrat is elated, and faces his subsequent torture and death with a plea for God to come to him, to help him in his hour of need. One of the monks who serves as executioner falls to his knees, cries, and begs God to "...forgive them, for they know not what they do..." the exact words of Christ upon the cross.[26] Initially, it seems unclear whether he is asking forgiveness for the revolutionaries or for the Spanish army, but I think we can believe that this monk has been transformed from a man acting in complicity with the army to one who recognizes the justness of Bolivar's (and, hence, Montserrat's) cause.

Much of the play centers upon God, the divine right of kings, and the concepts of right and wrong, for the Spanish soldiers argue that they do what they do in service of the King who takes his authority from God. On the other hand, the rebel insurgents rely on God to deliver them from the hands of their oppressors, and it is stated that there are priests riding with Bolivar. The lies that Montserrat tells are told in the service of eventual good. It is as if he knows that they are lies, yet hopes that God will forgive the lies since they exist for good

reason. He agrees that he is a traitor to the king, he admits that he has stolen arms to give to the rebels, and yet we are left with the sense that these things are minor offenses for they further the cause of justice. Montserrat even seems willing to pay for his offenses, not only because he knows he has acted in a treasonous manner, but because lying and stealing are against God's law. He also must make restitution for the lives of the innocent villagers with his own. Hence, morally wrong acts, such as lying, although oftentimes necessary and even desirable, can be seen to be wrong nonetheless, and are punishable.

Upon Montserrat's death, the General, who has been virtually in hiding throughout the entire ordeal, emerges from his room, as does Father Coronil, the priest who advises Montserrat away form his heretical bent. It's as if the cowards and true traitors of God's laws of right and wrong could not bear to be witnesses to the execution of one who was morally superior, and they appear only after his death, in shame. Montserrat's lie is not the only one; it can be seen that the attempts of the foreign government to dictate all manner of behavior, from free thoughts to the practice of art, from illegal and immoral abuse of relations with the business community and so on, is itself a lie, for it deceives the peasants into thinking that their own right to self-determination is void. Such attempts to disempower the people leads to the rise of such leaders as Bolivar.

Hence, in this play, Hellman asserts the position that some lies, although intrinsically wrong, might be useful in the service of a good cause. In her memoirs and other plays, Hellman

reiterates this stance, suggesting that she is aware that truth, as a solid and absolute entity, may not exist, yet she develops a moral code that centers on truthfulness while realizing that there may be valid occasions upon which the need for deception might be valuable. Despite this seeming paradox, she always tried for the truth, viewing it a as necessary component of an ethically sound moral character, even if it was an essentially elusive concept.

> What a word is truth. Slippery, tricky, unreliable. I tried in these books to tell the truth. I did not fool with facts. But, of course, that is a shallow definition of the truth.[27]

And yet Hellman sometimes defined herself as one with a nature "given...to absolutes." She surmised that the words "right" and "wrong" were so "simple-minded as to be silly." But she knew of no substitutes.[28] In other words, Hellman believed in the idea that the truth was worth attaining, but that it did have a rather enigmatic and amorphous quality to it. Moreover, it changed as she aged, so that such "filters" as a fading memory and the desire to suppress bad or embarrassing moments could possibly lead one to ignore or revise that which was actually truthful. Convictions could change as one acquired wisdom or gained facts previously unknown or unclear. She said of this phenomenon, "I don't like to talk about convictions. I'm never sure I'm telling the truth."[29]

In her most recent book, Maybe, Hellman recognized even more fully that the truth is elusive. The story focuses on Hellman's

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relationship with a woman named Sarah Cameron, yet the dates and mishmash of recounted events seems non-linear, without foundation or basis in fact. Many critics have reacted to this, both in support of and against Hellman's method, a fuller discussion of which occurs in the next chapter. In any event, Hellman remained committed to the ideal of at least trying to say that which was truthful. Her ability to succeed may be in doubt among some, but her honesty in making the attempt cannot be doubted. Hellman, in her commitment to truthfulness, remains a compelling moral force, and serves as a model for us all.

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[16] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

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[18] Ibid., p. 25.

[19] Ibid., p. 31.

[20] Ibid., p. 46.

[21] Ibid., p. 50.

[22] Ibid., p. 63.

[23] Brooks Atkinson, "At The Theater: The Children's Hour." NYT, 12/2/34, p. J:23.

[24] Hellman, Montserrat in Collected Plays, p. 417.

[25] Ibid., p. 451.

[26] Ibid., p. 453.

[27] Ibid., p. 460.

[28] Hellman, "On Reading Again" in Three, p. 9.

[29] Hellman, "Dashiell Hammett" in Three, p. 304.

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Chapter Three: On Truth and Memory

In continuing this discussion on concepts of truth and truthfulness, I would like to turn now to its application in the memoirs, which are written in the autobiographical mode. Here, I will examine those aspects of aging that might mitigate against total recall, against accuracy. Hellman suggested that the attempt to look over one's life and assemble all the pieces, all the should-have-dones, all the "...piles and bundles and ribbons and rags..." is a futile one at best, for there are things that one has kept from oneself, inadvertently or with the intent to suppress, things that need the distance of time to reconsider and place in their proper perspective. Unfortunately, by the time the distance is achieved, many of those items of seeming importance have turned into blurred images, and only their forms can be reconstructed.[1] It is to Hellman's credit that, given these constraints, she nonetheless attempted honesty, sought to tell the truth, even though finding it involved great effort on her part.

Since these works are written in the autobiographical style, I thought it important first to examine the stylistic nature of that medium, and to discuss some of the problems it poses for critics and readers alike. It can be seen that some of the harsh criticism Hellman received over this mode can be traced to a

misunderstanding of the style itself. Autobiography is necessarily going to involve different forms and constructs than the novel or non-fiction; since it seems to be a relatively new field of endeavor with respect to scholastic study, it may be beneficial to examine some of the work that has been done in the area, particularly as it applies to the writings of Lillian Hellman.

Then I wish to discuss the ways in which the autobiographical mode might uniquely lend itself to a discussion of the truth, for its very form involves self-examination, the attempt to remember what was real and what was not, as well as the desire to attain veracity in one's words, all of which were commitments Hellman sought to fulfill. Her own comments on truthfulness in her memoirs will follow, along with some concluding remarks concerning the connection between these comments and the preceding chapter on truth.

The body of criticism revolving around the concept of the autobiographical technique is relatively new and, in many ways, is still being shaped as it evolves into a discipline worthy of respect and attention. Some of the key elements of this style involve several dimensions. For example, an autobiographic story may or may not be linear with respect to facts, date and time. It might, instead, be written in a rather disjointed fashion, one in which free associations and connections may be made between two seemingly disparate concepts which, nonetheless, have some aspect of commonality. Facts and dates are only a part of the truth, parts that may comprise a larger, possibly intangible, whole. It

may assume the stylistic markings of the stream of consciousness technique, in which random thoughts are recorded as they allow the author to make juxtapositions between fact or fantasy, between the actual events of the day and her thoughts and evaluations regarding those events. Autobiography is necessarily personal, subjective, for some of its most basic foundations lie in those conscious and only semi-conscious regions of the brain which control memory, perception, and intuition. As these creative and image-laden ideas are recorded, they may assume a form that does not coincide with traditional ideas of literature. Hence, it would seem inappropriate to apply traditional forms of criticism to the autobiographical mode.

And yet just such an effort is frequently attempted in some of the reviews of Hellman's autobiographies. For example, Anatole Broyard, writing for the New York Times, said of one memoir, "It is anybody's guess why Hellman wrote Maybe. It isn't fiction, and as a memoir it reads like a disjointed hangover that lasted forty years."[2] Why isn't it fiction, and why does he judge it to be so poor an example of a memoir? Robert Towers, writing for the New York Times Book Review, had an equally scathing opinion, stating that autobiography devoid of facts and truth becomes only "...a free-floating, phantasmagoric rendition of obscure episodes loosely jointed..."; he adds that since "the facts" are missing, Hellman falls short of actually pulling it off, asserting that she must have known of certain dates and their veracity and usefulness in anchoring her thoughts. He claims that, if she didn't know them herself, they would have been easily verified

through other sources, other people, obituary notices, etc. In short, Towers feels that Maybe is a failure because it is not factual enough.[3] It is interesting to note that rarely does a critic write to say that a work is not full of enough fantasy or that a work is not disjointed enough. Both these men are looking for that which the book never promises to deliver: a narrow definition of truth based on a linear plot line, supported by chronological events which can be easily documented. These are not Hellman's goals in creating Maybe; the title alone suggests that the book's contents are tentative, that truth is elusive and not always linear, that memory fades, taking with it all certainty, much veracity.

I would argue that the memoir, as a form, has received insufficient examination, as well as the fact that traditional patterns of conducting such an examination (and some feminists would consider these to be male-oriented, a discussion of which ensues) do little to further an understanding of the possibilities of the style. It is true that Hellman's proclivity for prefacing many sentences with, "I've forgotten" or "I don't remember" or "I don't know" may be disconcerting, yet they point to the very idea she tried her utmost to express: truth is elusive, the sum total cannot be known, life is disjointed, and impression often supersedes fact. Fact itself may be elusive; it may be artificially constructed and laden with social convention.

Feminist thinkers have grappled with traditional definitions of many things, from politics to the economy, from art to literature. Their objections to these definitions center upon the

idea that males arrogantly assume that their experience is the one held to be the universal hallmark of human existence. Male ideology, its precepts and its predilection for dictating the rules and norms for human behavior, is hardly normative, and much of the effort of feminist thinking is directed at redefining the world from women's perspectives, in an attempt to describe their own experiences, particularly as they differ from the viewpoint of men. With respect to a discussion of the autobiographical mode, feminist critics have much to offer, for they contribute an understanding of the disjointed, non-linear aspects of the style; moreover, the dimension of creativity and the use of intuition, the vivid and yet often amorphous nature of imagery, particularly when subjectively viewed and portrayed, do not scare off feminist critics, who are trying to develop useful critical tools in order to address the autobiographical form. When traditional modes of criticism are applied to autobiography, the results sound much like the reviews of Broyard and Towers, who struggle to understand the form because they use an inflexible model which does not adapt itself to this kind of work.

What, then, are some appropriate models, and how might they be applied to Hellman's writings? In the following paragraphs, I'd like to present some ideas that might help us to better grasp and appreciate the autobiographical form as one worthy of critical study. In 1980, Estelle C. Jelinek edited a collection of essays on criticism and the autobiographical mode. In her introduction, she suggests that the discontinuous nature of autobiography is an excellent and appropriate vehicle of

expression through which the nature of women's lives--full of interruptions and reversals of focus--is creatively reflected. In addition, she posits that the traditional and male-generated body of critical tools is ineffective when applied to autobiography, for such methods are based upon widely different social, economic, and educational strata. She urges women to forge their own expressive models, independent of past and archetypal forms. This new body of literature has and will necessarily give rise to newer and more flexible critical ideologies.[4]

Annis Pratt took up the debate in 1981 when she stated, "Since women are alienated from time and space, their plots take on cyclical, rather than linear, form and their houses and landscapes surreal properties."[5] She discusses the fact that women's works have not only merely chronicled history, but have added to their stories those dimensions of hope and speculation which enrich their contribution.[6] Indeed, much knowledge has been gained from the diaries or journals of pioneer women, for example, but their words told of much more than a wagon journey from the East to the West. Tales of daily survival, disease, death, the birthing of new children to carry their hopes forward, all served to render a more complete composite than a linear travelogue could ever hope to accomplish. Yet to respond to these works only subjectively might pose some problems for feminist critics, whose male colleagues have viewed such activity with an eye of mistrust and with the desire to condemn such tactics as being inferior to their own.

Dorin Schumacher proposed that a feminist criticism based on

scientific and uniformly applicable models could be combined with the artistic, intuitive and flexible approach in order to lend "respectability" to the feminist critic's occupation.[7] Schumacher contends that it would be fascinating to read works of literature in which the female experience was the normative one, while recognizing that such creations are sparse if existent at all.[8] If there were more opportunity for these works to be written, published, and studied, women might have a greater number of chances in which to see themselves truthfully depicted. In other words, the male-dominated, white, and class-privileged literary canon has kept women from recognizing themselves in print, or has harmed women by suggesting that they live up to this or that expectation, neither of which may have been realistic. We are all too familiar with Mailer-esque depictions of women: the Earth Mother, the Bitch, the Rose, and so on. As women decide to define and create their own reality through the lives and experiences of their characters as well as in their memoirs, so, too, might they better voice and verify the truthfulness of those threads which weave their actual existence as opposed to the false "reality" men have created for them. Dashiell Hammett once said of Hemingway, "Ernest has never been able to write a woman. He only puts them in books to admire him."[9] Women can and must write ourselves, as mothers, as lovers, as thinkers, and workers, for it is in sharing the details of our lives with each other that we will be able to ascertain that which is truthful as seen against the false literary canon which we have been told is real.

The masculinist critic has many respectable, time-honored

and traditional methods from which to choose his model: Freudianism, Jung's theories, Christianity, and so on. The feminist critic is up against a dearth of set ideologies and patterns. Rather, much of what she does is reactive, which often provokes the ridicule of the male establishment, especially if she should ever be in error. Yet her ability to render texts comprehensible through either pro-woman or gender bias-free models would allow for a far richer and fuller understanding of those universal questions which we all attempt to face, such as the nature and purpose of life, questions concerning death, etc. In fact, literature's primary purpose can be seen to be to describe one person's experience in order to share it with others, to seek out others who may have shared that experience, to enlarge our vision of the world and of each other. The autobiographical mode suits this purpose rather well, particularly as its subjective nature allows for the sharing of even that which is most personal, most private.

In such works as An Unfinished Woman, Pentimento, Scoundrel Time, and Maybe, Hellman effectively shared herself, commenting on the events and times of her life while noting the difficulty with which she hoped to attain veracity. In these collections, there are stories within stories, and the thread of one tale is dropped on one page only to be picked up on another in order to further the story's action. These excursions through her past illuminate Hellman's character and its development, for in each episode she faced an epiphany, a great learning experience, from which she surfaced with some degree of greater wisdom. It is

interesting to note that, in the memoirs, we see Lillian Hellman through her portraits of others. We see her in relation to them. She doesn't really use the traditional diary setting, but, rather, draws situations and circumstances through which her own personality and character are revealed.[10] Retracing memory is the operative pattern, and the main idea of an opening paragraph often serves as a springboard to another idea, a whole new story, which is, nonetheless, connected to the first. Certain events are relayed out of their chronological order, such as the fact that Hellman tells us of her cousin Bethe's death before she speaks of their last visit together. It is not my intention here to analyze each segment of the memoirs; such work has been most ably done by June Underwood and Linda Wagner.[11] Rather, I wish to state briefly some main ideas about the autobiographical pattern and then turn to Hellman's own statements about her attempts to attain veracity while writing subjectively.

Certainly, the notion of pentimento, the artistic term referring to the ways in which multiple layers of paint on canvas begin, with age, to show through each other, is well-suited for that which Hellman sought to recount: the varied layers of her life and the ways in which they overlapped. Indeed, Underwood states that, in writing Pentimento, Hellman's technique was to "unpeel" rather than to build her narration.[12] This method seems to be a reversal of the usual way in which a story is told, yet reconstructing events that are in the past through the use of memory makes for fascinating reading. Hellman sifted through mental "photographs," some yellowed with age, others torn and

tattered, still others hidden from view, in order to make sense of her experiences, of the things she had learned. In searching the faces of those "photographs," Hellman often found new insights, such as in a real photograph of Sophronia, in which Hellman saw, for the first time and with some measure of surprise, affection in her former nurse's face.[13] She also was frequently disappointed, either at what was or was not found; the spectre of delusion reared its ugly head as often as did the joy or sorrow caused by revelation.

I see Hellman's concept of truthfulness in memory as one that lives and changes along another kind of continuum, much like the one discussed in the previous chapter. At one end of this bi-polar dimension exists the idea that her memory is accurate, reliable, that there are facts, dates and times that are chronologically absolute. This notion characterizes much of the early work of An Unfinished Woman, for example, the beginning chapters of which detail her biographical background, complete with names and places.

At the other end of the continuum, Hellman's ability to recall events is fuzzy at best; in fact, her capability to know her own motives for undertaking nearly all adventures, projects, is suspect, not only to the reader, but to Hellman as well. In discussing Maybe, for example, which was written just five years before Hellman's death, Wagner has stated that the work is a real break from previous memoirs, suggesting that the real point of the book is "...that happenings exist both in themselves and as images which change according to the viewer."[14] In other words,

in Hellman's later work, not much is certain; the people who are presented in the earlier works, their character traits and personalities, and even their relationship to the author herself later bear scrutiny in that their portrayals are often incomplete, devoid of those very dates and facts that would anchor them in reality. Moreover, Hellman's own development, the evolution of both personal and authorial perspective, had a dramatic impact upon her ability to recall the past, to write of it with meaning, to strive for veracity. It is as if the memoirs exist as a collage, the edges of which have begun to "bleed" together, so as to create the impression that the rigid boundaries of one piece, which serve as a definition of at least a part of Hellman's self, have given way to another story, another time, a different place. The final impression this collage renders is one in which the colorful scraps and ribbons join to form one work, one piece: the portrait of the artist.

In discerning the veracity of the works, of Hellman's desire to attain truthfulness, the reader must use a different standard than that provided by the use of facts and dates in order to acknowledge and recognize two primary things: first, that Hellman was looking not so much to verify <u>things</u> as to verify <u>experience</u>; second, that her experience might be seen as meaningful at those points where it might intersect with our own.

There exists another stop along the continuum, one that seems to lie at about the mid-point, since it contains both the qualities of total and accurate recall as well as the blur of faded memory which exist as opposites in this scheme. Its

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distinctions are important since they impinge upon Hellman's search for veracity, at precisely that moment when doing so seemed most futile. It is as if, at that point, Hellman placed her own restrictions and qualifications upon her ability to know that which was truthful, to differentiate that which had actually happened from that which might be fictitious. The ability to remember, the accuracy of recalling the past, surged or faltered, moved forward or backward, progressed or regressed as a matter of degree. Hellman wrote, "...time itself makes time fuzzy and meshes truth with half truth."[15] In speaking of her thirty-one year relationship with Dashiell Hammett, Hellman contended that, "...the memories skip about and make no pattern and I know only certain of them are to be trusted."[16] In the exercise of memory, truth seems an illusion, tempered by the influence of the passing of time, by the healing of old wounds, and by the softening of judgment and ego.

The use of words like "however" and "maybe" suggest this mood of uncertainty; yet it seems clear that Hellman attempted truthfulness nonetheless, via her admission that she wasn't sure of the facts, that there were events she didn't remember, things she was not prepared to say. Some writers use the autobiographical mode to intimate that the past can be recreated, somehow hoping to solve its mysteries, lay to rest its doubts, while verifying the self. Poirier said, of Hellman's memoirs, "The act of writing can be said to dispel rather than create the illusion that the past can ever repeat itself."[17] Frequently, it seemed as if Hellman was able to discern her true feelings about

something or someone only by writing about it, as if the act of composition created some sense of permanence. Even so, Hellman constantly reminds us that her depictions and portrayals may be faulty, and that the attempt to re-create experience is fraught with uncertainty: "It is all like that, yes and no."[18]

Some of the tentative quality of memory has to do with very realistic and concrete factors, such as Hellman's advancing age, her failing eyesight, and her long troubles with emphysema, cardiac disease, and arthritis. The physical debilitations she suffered tried her patience; with respect to eyesight, she had to rely upon the "Listening Library", a service for the legally blind in which books are recorded an tapes, which proved frustrating for its lack of any selections that truly interested her. Hellman mourned the loss of her hot temper, saying, "I know now that I was often in an aimless uproar, but I am sad that some of the good anger has been lost to age, and age loses to energy."[19] She was able to admit, with some sadness that she could no longer be "...that woman who worked from seven in the morning until two or three the next morning ...[who]...woke rested and hungry for each new day."[20]

There were times when drinking some wine made her feel "capable", but her new-found confidence was quickly dashed when she found herself in distress while swimming, and was not able to see the shore.[21] Hence, the process of aging, with its propensity for robbing one of health, proved to be a major factor in Hellman's ability to conduct her life as she did in her youth. Moreover, with age comes a growing inability to remember anything

with ease, and even Hellman was able to question the accuracy of her statements, particularly when made from the "vantage" point of old age.

Another entity affecting Hellman's ability to recall the past truthfully had to do with the effects of change. A new address, a change in her relationships, the effects of other peoples' ability to remember things clearly, their proclivity for dissemblance, all had an impact upon Hellman's ability to know the truth about any given set of circumstances. She stated that, when drinking, much seemed clear that actually wasn't, due to the change in perspective.[22] The loss of Hardscrabble farm, the many ups and downs in her love affair with Hammett along with their concomitant emotional charges, all colored or altered Hellman's sense of reality. Indeed, as she grew, as she experienced changes in her life, Hellman's sense of the past, of its meaning, of its relationship to her present and future, were all shaped by events which were caused by change. In writing of her relationship with Hammett, with its difficult and tentative quality, she wrote:

> ...all those questions through all the thirty-one on and off years, and the sometimes answers, got muddled and life changed for both of us and the questions and answers became one in the end...[23]

Another, and, possibly, more interesting dimension in the ability to express oneself truthfully, is the possibility that Hellman deceived herself, supressing information that may have been too painful or too private to admit to her readers. Bok

spoke of self-deception as a coping mechanism of the brain, saying:

> Each year we learn more about the complexity of communication, and about the role of the brain in sending and receiving messages. We see the intricate capacities of each person for denial, deflection, distortion and loss of memory; but also for accuracy, regeneration, and invention.[24]

Hellman suggested that she was an expert at blocking out the good things in her life, until the bad times became the only truth. What, we might ask, happened to the good things she suppressed, and why did she suppress them? In her way of thinking, then, success seemed an accident, emerging from some other effort, not of her own doing, and she seemed absolved of the responsibility as well as the joy of being its progenitor.[25] Bok stated that we are beset with self-deception, by illusion of every kind, through false statements rendered by others in an attempt at flattery, by people who lie for gain of one kind or another, etc. Yet she distinguishes between self-deception that occurs as the result of factors out of our own control,as when someone lies to us, versus the kind of self-deception that comes when we refuse to recognize something that is truthful or that actually exists. Yet, Bok argues, we tend to know when we mean to be honest or dishonest, and our efforts to deceive ourselves are as harmful as when we try to deceive others.[26]

Hellman's memoirs contain a kind of nagging self-doubt, expressed by those words, "however", "maybe", and so on. Another

example of its presence is when Hellman asks, in mid-sentence, "...or is that a lie?"[27] She claimed that she had actually forgotten much of that which had been important to her, through aging, through a desire to forget. But she did also address the issue of self-deception, saying,

> It's no news that each of us has our own reasons for pretending, denying, affirming what was there and never there. And sometimes, of course, we have really forgotten. In my case, I have often forgotten what was important, what mattered to me most, what made me take an action that changed my life.[28]

She added that, as she grew older, she realized how little she knew about any of her relationships, even about herself, and that it was "...a sad day when you find out that it's not accident or time but yourself that kept things from you."[29] In other words, there were times in Hellman's life when she recognized the fact that she herself was the primary agent against self-knowledge, that she created her own brand of self-deception, and that the mysteries that lay unrevealed therein continued to at least interest, if not plague, her.

What is particularly fascinating is the fact that Hellman continued to seek veracity, even in the face of an admitted inability to be able to guarantee it to her readers. At least the admission itself is some measure of her attempt at honesty, but interesting contradictions seem to exist as tension points. On one hand, Hellman asserted that not many of the events, people, places, and times in her life can be remembered with much

certitude, yet in the early sections of Pentimento we feel sure about her biographical background and her ability to recall those times accurately. Moreover, in Maybe, for example, she stated that some aspects of her illusory encounters with the seemingly mythical Sarah Cameron were certain, yet she contended throughout most of the book that nothing much can be fully known about any relationship.[30] Are these contentions fully contradictory? I think that they might represent two different, yet related, points along the truth continuum that, despite their differences, reveal the extent to which surety and uncertainty co-exist in Hellman's memoirs. Such entities, while seeming to negate or cancel out each other, render not so much a mish mash of confusion as they serve to illuminate the richness and fullness of the author's experience, complete in its endless assertions and retractions, its changes of focus and interruptions, its desire to seek out what was truthful and what was not. It's as if Hellman bent over backwards to assure her readers that she would, at the very least, try to let them know when she was certain of something and when she was not. If the critic uses traditional models of examination and analysis in order to attempt an understanding of this woman and her medium, he will be frustrated at best. The use of a flexible, more intuitive and non-linear critical tool helps to expand the opportunities for understanding Hellman's experience and, hence, our own.

Certainly Hellman was willing to take many risks in diving into the void of autobiography, in which the self is laid bare, exposed, vulnerable to our scrutiny. Yet the risks of exposing

herself to the reader are less dangerous than are the risks to oneself, for the revelations found within could be more traumatic, more unnerving, than the idea that someone might disapprove. Perhaps Hellman best suggested this fear when she said:

> The piles and bundles and ribbons and rags turn into years, and then the years are gone. There is a light behind you certainly, but it is not bright enough to illuminate all of what you had hoped for. The light seems shadowed or masked with an unknown fabric. So much of what you had counted on as a solid wall of convictions now seems on bad nights, or in sickness, or just weakness, no longer made of much that can be leaned against. It is then that one can barely place oneself in time. All that you would swear had been, can only be found again if you have the energy to dig hard enough, and that is hard on the feet and the back, and sometimes you are frightened that near the edge is nothing.[31]

Here, Hellman suggested that the search for self could be terrifying, for it might result in nothing, in no more wisdom or self-knowledge than one had in the beginning. Much could be negated in such an attempt, for that which had been held to be true might be recognized as an illusion, created for the benefit of ego or to hide something truthful that might also have been painful. The convictions of which she spoke seem to exist as fragmentary moments of a passing fervor, ideologies lost in time, for which an effort at recovery is futile, at best. This position represents one of the end points of the continuum, for it states that everything is tentative, even those beliefs Hellman lived by, which caused major upheavals in her life. This notion seems

hard for her readers to accept, particularly as they recall her committed political fire during such times as the McCarthy era and her stand before the HUAC [sic] committee. Yet it is not difficult to recognize the effects of age, the looking back over a long and varied life, with its disappointments, its trying moments, and its failures, as being just one viewpoint along a continuum which nonetheless supports other positions, seemingly contradictory views, which are, in the end, all parts of the whole, the diverse, Lillian Hellman.

Hellman, in the end, sought to live "decently". By this she meant that she tried to avoid telling lies, hurting her neighbors, and violating her own moral code. In telling us of her experiences as truthfully as possible, Hellman simultaneously commented on the effects of age as well as on those changes in perception and memory which affected the outcome of an attempt to tell the truth in the first place. The result of her efforts was ably summed up by Adrienne Rich: "When a woman tells the truth, she is creating the possibility for more truth around her."[32] It can be said that the purpose of autobiography is to reveal the truth about oneself, and one by-product of such an effort might be to lead others to discover the truth about themselves. In creating these varied and diverse stories, Hellman not only has shared herself with us, but asks us to share our own experiences with each other as well.

END NOTES

[1] Lillian Hellman, Maybe (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1980), p. 42.

[2] Anatole Broyard, "Books of the Times", New York Times, 5/13/80, p. C:20.

[3] Robert A. Towers, "Maybe: A Foray Into the Self", New York Times Book Review, 6/1/80, pp. 3, 36.

[4] Estelle C. Jelinek, "Introduction" in her Women's Autobiography and Essays in Criticism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 18-19.

[5] Annis Pratt, Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p.11.

[6] Ibid., p. 12.

[7] Dorin Schumacher, "Subjectives: A Theory of the Critical Process" in Josephine Donovan's Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1975), pp. 29-30.

[8] Ibid., p. 33.

[9] Lillian Hellman, An Unfinished Woman in Three (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1979), p. 79.

[10] Marcus K. Billson and Sidonie A. Smith, "Lillian Hellman and the Strategy of the 'Other'" in Jelinek, pp. 163-179.

[11] For a fuller discussion of the actual chronology, layout and plan of the memoirs, see June O. Underwood, "Experimental Forms and Female Archetypes: Lillian Hellman's Pentimento", Publications of the Missouri Philological Association, 5, 1980, pp. 49-53, and Linda W. Wagner, "Lillian Hellman: Autobiography and Truth", Southern Review, 19, (April), 1983, pp. 275-288.

[12] Underwood, p. 49.

[13] Hellman, "Helen" in Three, p. 261.

[14] Wagner, p. 287.

[15] Hellman, An Unfinished Woman in Three, p. 51.

[16] Hellman, "Dashiell Hammett" in Three, p. 279.

[17] Richard Poirier, "Introduction" in Three, p. xiii.

[18] Hellman, "Arthur W.A. Cowan" in Three, p. 565.

[19] Hellman, "On Reading Again"in Three, p. 9.

[20] Hellman, An Unfinished Woman in Three, p. 185.

[21] Ibid., p. 99.

[22] Ibid., p. 13.

[23] Hellman, "Dashiell Hammett" in Three, p. 276.

[24] Sissela Bok, Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life (New York: Random, 1978), p. 16.

[25] Hellman, An Unfinished Woamn in Three, p. 211.

[26] Bok, p. 8.

[27] Hellman, "Helen" in Three, p. 251.

[28] Hellman, Maybe, p. 64.

[29] Hellman, "Arthur W.A. Cowan" in Three, p. 537.

[30] Hellman, Maybe, p. 12.

[31] Ibid., p. 42.

[32] Adrienne Rich, On Lies, Secrets, and Silences (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 191.

Chapter Four: On Courage

What is courage? How can we attempt to define such a seemingly ambiguous notion? The dictionary definition works as well as any: "...the state or quality of mind or spirit that enables one to face danger with self-possession, confidence and resolution."[1] There are many examples of courage both in Hellman's life and in her work; it is my desire to discuss those examples within a philosophical framework, while examining the theories of several key thinkers such as Plato, Feinberg, Foot and Wallace. But first, I wish to turn to Hellman's own comments on courage, with an eye to the ways in which her perception of it serves as one component of her overall moral character.

Hellman seemed to have exhibited courage in her life when it was time to take no more, to stand up for her (or others') rights.[2] It had its roots in her youth, when she defended Sophronia against the racist streetcar driver, or when she ran away from home when thinking her rights had been violated. The courage to be independent grew during her early twenties when she began her college career, which led to working for various publishing interests in New York City. Hellman had the courage to live with Dashiell Hammett openly, long before it was acceptable to do so. Her courage came alive during the Spanish Civil War, when Hellman agreed to conduct a radio broadcast from Madrid

despite the danger of heavy shelling. It is an integral part of the formation of Hellman's political consciousness, for only after being involved with the war did she come to an understanding that people were strong and noble in their commitment to noble causes; the fact that these same people were willing to put their lives on the line stirred Hellman's soul as she witnessed their endeavors and grew to admire them.[3] She sought to emulate this courage, to become resolute against falsity, political tyranny, and discrimination.

The possession of courage does not necessarily preclude the co-existence of fear. Hellman mentioned several situations in which she was called upon to act courageously, during which she trembled with fear, or wrestled with herself to determine if what she was doing was right or not. She often became violently ill or nervous during such episodes, sometimes growing sleepy or listless, while, at other times, panicking over minor situations that did not require such intensity of reaction.[4] In the end, she made most of her major decisions instinctively:

> ...Decisions, particularly important ones, have always made me sleepy, perhaps because I know that I will have to make them by instinct, and thinking things out is only what other people tell me I should do.[5]

Her decisions have often led the public to admire her, both for the ferocity of various stands she has taken, and for her willingness to see her decisions through to the end. She stayed with her plan, regardless of fear for herself or for others. For

example, during the HUAC debacle (discussed in the next chapter), she was faced with making a great decision, affecting her future as well as that of Dashiell Hammett. Although she received conflicting advice as to how she should conduct herself, she decided on a course of action and held to it, saying to herself, "...just make sure you come out unashamed. That will be enough."[6] It can be said that her behavior at the hearing affected the outcomes for other witnesses in that it gave them the courage to be uncooperative with the committee; some observers contend that Hellman's stand led to the beginning of the committee's loss of power.

Yet Hellman was disarmingly modest about her actions and the beliefs behind them. For example, she said that she went to the broadcast in Madrid not so much out of any sense of duty or urgency, but to get out of the apartment where she had had an unpleasant conversation with Hemingway, and because the station could not guarantee time on another night.[7] With respect to the events of the McCarthy era, Hellman said that she didn't think she was acting out of any bravado or desire to be rebellious; she thought only that she was exercising her right to speak or to act against that which she found to be wrong or dangerous, referring to the repressive political climate which cost people their jobs and, in some cases, their lives.[8]

Additionally, there were times when Hellman did not have the courage to undertake certain activities, such as during her trips to the Spanish and Russian fronts, respectively. In both instances, she was potentially in danger of and witness to the

shooting and bombing of troops and innocent villagers. She was also invited by military leaders to accompany the troops into areas of heavier fighting. She declined these opportunities, claiming that she had courage enough to resist the foolish act of bravado. In other words, she might have gone were it not for the fact that she understood herself very well, and was afraid not for her life but for her nature.[9] An illustration of this point becomes clear in an episode from Julia. Hellman was asked to carry money to the Nazi resisters for the purpose of freeing imprisoned dissidents. She was to carry a large sum of money through Europe, past dangerous check-points and through areas of great political turmoil. Julia sent a messenger to make these arrangements with Hellman, and warned her, through a note:

> "...don't push yourself. If you can't, you can't. No dishonor."
> "Julia has said that I must remind you that you are afraid of being afraid, and so will do what sometimes you cannot do, and that could be dangerous to you and to us."[10]

Yet Hellman believed enough in the cause at hand to go ahead and carry the money to her beloved friend, whose own courage she admired and hoped to emulate.

Hence, we see in Hellman not so much of the kind of courage which is foolhardy, ever-present, ever-ready to go into battle no matter the cause, but one of a reasoned nature, tempered by self-knowledge and not exclusive of fear. It is not the kind of courage that announces itself, or is self-congratulatory, and Hellman often down-plays her role in certain activities that

clearly involved her participation, if not her creation. In fact, in writing of the war in Spain as in Russia, Hellman focused not upon the great military battles and strategies, but, rather, on the peasants, their concerns, their frailties and their strengths. The woman to whom Hellman gave her shoes and their instantaneous bonding through sisterhood as well as the story of the little Russian boy who ate a piece of candle as his meal everyday during the siege of Leningrad serve as better illustrations and examples of the problems war-torn people faced than descriptions of military bases and bombed-out buildings. Hellman's courage is revealed through little dramas, in the side trips to the little towns, in her visits to hospitals. Yet in every episode of this nature and description, we feel that her encounters with the victims of war expand Hellman's moral horizons rather than demand of her the usual "foreign visitor" gratuities, for it is in the peoples' presence and through their stories that Hellman's political consciousness evolved.

After having left Spain, for example, Hellman read widely of political theorists such as Marx and Lenin, and had the courage to turn to radical thought as the result of her experience, searching for some answers to her many questions.[11] And, while she may not have found the solutions she was seeking, she became even more concerned with the plight of the oppressed and she took on a commitment to defend their rights that was to last throughout her lifetime. Indeed, the trips to Russia and Spain were but catalysts, fragmentary stimulants within the mind that had already recognized and understood injustice and its effects

upon the innocent. She said, "...sometimes it is the plainest experience that speeds the wheels that have already begun to move."[12]

There is, however, a self-conscious quality to these passages, as if the very act of speaking of one's courage or achievements somehow diminished them. It is as if she wished to say that such things were private, that actions speak louder than words which must, in the end, be viewed with suspicion. Much of what Hellman had to say about her courage in activism is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, self-deprecating, as if to soften or deflect the intensity of our admiration and respect.

> I am, in fact, bewildered by all injustice, at first certain that it cannot be, then shocked into rigidity, then obsessed, and finally as certain as a Grand Inquisitor that God wishes me to move ahead, correct and holy.[13]

Yet our attention is only momentarily displaced, if at all, for, despite her disclaimers to the contrary, Hellman's courage enabled her to undertake risky and often difficult projects for those people who needed her support. She said that, faced with danger, most people become themselves. In other words, when called upon to act or react in situations of extreme importance, people will summon those deepest parts of themselves that actually constitute their essences, and they will choose whether or not to respond in keeping with their most basic beliefs. Oftentimes, the ability to act courageously involves a cost, as when Hellman was blacklisted for her stand against HUAC and lost

a source of income for over ten years.

Another example of Hellman's idea of courage, its costs and its admirable qualities, can be seen in the hero of her play, Watch on the Rhine, Kurt Muller, who is an anti-Nazi about to return to the front with money to release anti-Nazi prisoners (if this sounds familiar, Hellman did say that this story and Muller's character were based upon the events portrayed in Julia). The hero believes in and has a deep commitment to a certain political ideology and is willing to risk his life as well as those of his wife and children in order to see it through. As the play opens, the Fanny Farrelly family is preparing to receive one of its members, Sara, who has not been home in twenty years, for she left to marry Muller in Germany. The couple and their three children, Joshua, Babette, and Bodo, arrive at the spacious and grand dwelling in the countryside surrounding Washington, D.C., in part to have a vacation, and so as to allow Herr Muller a bit of a rest before he continues his work. They are weary and shabbily attired; they have had sparse meals at irregular intervals and possess the watchful demeanor of people who have had to live largely in hiding.

By contrast, the home is tastefully furnished, large, gracious in its warmth and comfort. The children are surprised to learn that the front door is not locked, that they may simply walk in. Sara, upon first entering the house, stands and looks about, taking in the half-forgotten familiarity of her childhood and its surroundings; her husband enjoys her reunion with the room and its memories while the children marvel at its

provisions. There are balconies and gardens, and bathroom fixtures that stand solidly upon the floor. Throughout the play, the children will serve as one of the main indicators of the level of depravity they have all had to endure--one child, for example, would like an egg for breakfast if such a thing is not too rare or expensive. Another reveals that they have been in hiding during their stay in Europe. In any event, they are "home" now, and the grand dame of the place, Fanny herself, is most happy to meet them and welcome home her daughter.

They proceed to breakfast whereupon they discover that the Farrellys have other guests, the displaced Roumanian Count Teck de Brancovis and his American-born wife (and the daughter of one of Fanny's friends), Marthe, who, unhappy in her marriage, has begun a romantic alliance with Sara's brother, David. The main conflict of the play centers upon the fact that Teck suspects Muller's role in the German resistance, initially through an attempt to place the source of origin of Muller's accent, and, later, through a secret examination of a shabby but locked briefcase Muller is carrying, whose contents reveal a gun as well as twenty-three thousand dollars. The children reveal that their father was an engineer, that he is good also with the radio, and Teck learns that Muller had to leave Germany in 1933. He begins to put it all together, but seeks to verify his suspicions with the members of the German embassy, with whom he plays poker, without revealing to them the reason for his interest. Teck is a member of the diplomatic aristocracy who has been somewhat displaced by the turns of event in Nazi Germany and Europe,

generally, and finds himself broke and homeless. His main motivation for plotting against Muller is to blackmail him into giving him ten thousand dollars in exchange for a promise to withhold Muller's identity from the German officials who are looking for him. Teck plans to use the money to "buy" a visa and return to Europe. Even though Teck has not stated his full intentions at the time of the initial blackmail threat, Muller stays one step ahead of him by figuring out that Teck wants more than just the money, and will probably still turn him in after he leaves the Farrelly house. Muller has no choice but to kill Teck, for the villain's plan endangers more than just the life of one man; the entire work of the resistance movement, along with the lives of its leaders and key fighters are jeopardized, as well.

Everyone in the household is affected by Teck's threat against Muller and by his subsequent murder at Muller's hands. Fanny and David, whose lives had consisted of comfort and a marked lack of understanding of and reaction to the situation in Europe, are "shaken out of the magnolias" as they decide to help Muller get away by providing him with the lead time he needs to cross the border into Mexico.[14] They had developed a kind of revulsion for their Roumanian guest, and the change in their attitude towards him could easily be expanded to a hatred for all like him who played their respective parts in the demise of the "good" life in Europe, for which Muller and Sara mourn and which they hope to reconstruct. Marthe is freed of a tyrannical and unpleasant husband, who tried to control his wife by threatening and frightening her. She and David are free to be with one

another, yet she wisely decides to move out of the house for a time despite Fanny's suggestion that she stay.

The most deeply affected are the Mullers themselves, of course. Although Sara has had to endure separation from her husband in the past, she fears that this time it will be a permanent arrangement, for Muller learns through a telephone call that he must go back to Germany alone to try to secure the freedom of three of the leaders of the underground resistance movement who have been captured. She tries to prepare and comfort the children for the difficult time that they must then face. No small part of her job will be to explain to them the reason for Teck's murder, part of which is provided by Muller himself:

> Shame on us. Thousands of years and we cannot yet make a world...
> I sit here. I listen to him...I pray I will not have to touch him. Then I know I will have to. I know that if I do not, it is only that I pamper myself, and risk the lives of others...Do I now pretend sorrow? Do I now pretend it is not I who act thus? No. I do it. I have done it. I will do it again. I have a great hate for the violent. They are the sick of the world. Maybe I am sick now, too.[15]

Muller takes responsibility for what he does. He is ashamed of himself, even though he does not exhibit the false bravado of one who kills for the glory of it, not even for a good cause. He is morally upset by the fact that he has committed such an act, yet he knows, and the others agree, that he has had no other choice, that one man had to die for the good of others. Nonetheless, Muller will not be absolved of the responsibility for the murder,

and he carries the guilt of the act with him.

Then we see the reactions of Sara, who remains composed as she telephones reservations for Muller to fly to Mexico; it is clear that she has acted in the same manner on his behalf in the past. She uses a pseudonym instead of his real name, which can be construed to be a form of deception for the greater good, a concept discussed in the previous chapter. Hellman has us believe that Sara knows she is lying, that she must do it, and that the outcome is for a good purpose despite the falsity of the act itself. The greater hardship she faces is being without Muller, whom she loves as intensely then as when they first married.

> He's going away tonight and I don't think he's ever coming back anymore. Never, never, never. I don't like to be alone at night. I guess everybody in the world's got a time they don't like. Me, it's right before I go to sleep. And now it's going to be for always.[16]

And it is clear that Muller feels the same way about Sara.

> "Men who wish to live have the best chance to live. I wish to live. I wish to live with you." (She comes toward him.)
> "For twenty years. It is as much for me today--" (Takes his arms.) Just once, and for all my life. (He pulls her toward him.) Come back for me, darling. If you can."[17]

She must also explain the situation to the children, who have gone upstairs to bed. The baby is crying, Babette is trying to soothe him, and Joshua helps his father to dispose of Teck's

body and to pack. He offers to join his father at the front if he should be long in returning to them and exhibits great cooperation and courage with his composure. He has clearly had to deal with difficult situations before in their past. The leave-taking scene between Kurt and his children is not only heart-rending, it is the vehicle through which Hellman presents her world view, and through which she exonerates Muller's action against Teck with the expressed hope that the combined actions of brave, courageous, and committed people will have some impact upon an essentially corrupt world gone astray.

> The world is out of shape when there are hungry [people]. And until it gets in shape, men will steal and lie and--and--kill. But for whatever reason it is done, and whoever does it--you understand me--it is all bad. 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. 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. Wait for me. I shall try to come back for you.[18]

Muller exhibits the characteristics of courage that seem important to Hellman herself. He has decided a course of action and is committed to it, whatever the price, even though it may mean death. He has broken hands, from being tortured by previous captors, his face is full of bullet scars, he maintains several aliases and has been known to cross the German border many times, living as he does within and just outside of its parameters. His cause is anti-Nazism, and his loyalty to his fellow resistance

workers is admirable. Hellman felt this kind of admiration for those who fought in the Spanish Civil War as well as for those who resisted Hitler and who railed against the appeasement agreements. It was also her feeling that people who did that kind of work, who braved those kinds of dangers, who laid their lives on the line, were worthy of the highest respect, for their courage enabled them to embrace the praxis of activism while others remained arm-chair idealists.

Yet, like Hellman, Muller is reticent about his accomplishments, not out of a desire for secrecy (although that certainly comes into play in his conversations with Teck) but, rather, out of a reluctance to glorify himself or to appear to be engaged in boasting. When discussing one important raid of the house of some Nazis, Muller says that it is not so much that his men are remarkable, but that the Nazis are so ill-prepared to withstand their successful attempt.[19] When Teck suggests that Muller might one day abandon his ideals Muller replies, "Is that what I have? I do not like the word. It gives me the picture of a small, pale man at a seaside resort."[20] And when Fanny says that his work is noble, he says, "It is not noble. It is the way I must live. Good or bad, it is what I am."[21] He dislikes polite political conversations or speculation as to the outcome of his efforts, preferring instead the work itself, however dangerous, to idle speculation. Certainly Hellman also held the belief that actions spoke louder than words, and that there was an immense difference between those who acted upon their beliefs and those who said they did.

Courage, then, is seen in the entire Muller family. Sara has the courage to say goodbye to her husband yet another time, possibly for good, as well as the courage to explain to the children their father's actions, while they have the courage to trust that he will return to them. The children seem to be as little adults, for they have at least some understanding of the world and what is wrong with it. Bodo, for example, the youngest child, speaks of Alfonso of Spain in derogatory terms saying that he grows "...fat on the poor people."[22] Later, he says that he knows it is neither natural or right to shoot "upon" people.[23] Still later, when asserting that he is fluent in many languages, Bodo is accused of boasting. He responds: "There is never a need of boasting. If we are to fight for the good of all men, it is to be accepted that we must be among the most advanced."[24] When Sara and her mother threaten to become angry with each other, Bodo corrects their obviously bad politics by stating, "You and mama must not get angry. Anger is protest. And so you must direction it to the proper channels and the harness it for the good of other men. That is correct, Papa?"[25] This discourse is much more than the simple repetition of an overheard phrase. The children know (much more fully and directly than would American children of the time) the actual circumstances of living in Europe in the late 1930's and early 1940's, and have had to sacrifice much in order to survive in the midst of political chaos and turmoil. Yet they are happy children, who love their parents, and feel loved by them. The children seem also to understand that their father's frequent absences are necessary, that they are for a large and

important cause, and their own demonstration of courage in the face of his frequent departures is at once admirable and worthy of praise.

Clearly Muller himself is the primary representative of Hellman's idea of a courageous person in this play. She reveals that he fought in Spain, that he did dangerous, life-threatening work for several years, that he has been hurt badly in so doing, and that he has had to sacrifice much on behalf of the anti-Fascist cause. His family has had to suffer major discomforts, yet its members seem quite happy and affectionate with one another, unified in their understanding of and support for Muller's work, hopeful that the day of freedom will be close at hand. The fact that Muller has had to commit murder exemplifies Hellman's assertion that being committed to something larger than oneself often exacts a price, often is a path strewn with difficult decisions and morally complex issues. Nonetheless, Muller's choice is definite, clear-cut in its recognition that to act otherwise would be in violation of his basic moral code. Hellman uses this character to tell us that, first of all, this kind of commitment is needed in the world against the foes of justice, against the evil perpetuated by those who hold that the exercise of corruption and violence are honorable and profitable occupations. Secondly, she posits, through this play as well as her own example, that the price one pays along the way may be high, yet is worthwhile if one is truly committed.

Hellman once said, "...fear infects and corrupts what it touches."[26] In her life and in her works, Hellman's moral stance

was one in which she sought to do what was right, to act decently, to do what she could against injustice. Although the demonstration of courage did not necessarily preclude the existence of an accompanying fear, Hellman's statement suggests that to refuse to act morally, for whatever reason, constitutes an abnegation of one's moral duty and, in fact, adds to the corruption with which we are surrounded. Muller, for example, overcomes his fear of his family's discomfort, his own physical and mental torture, believing as he does that Nazism-Fascism has to be stopped, no matter the cost. Most of us choose either a course of inaction or one of half-hearted lip service to a given cause (thereby adding to the climate of corruption) for much lesser reasons, and we read of Muller's (and, hence, Hellman's) commitment with a sense of shame coupled with the desire to act courageously in the future. When speaking of how we generally act when under pressure, Hellman said, "It's all been decided so long ago, when you are very young, all mixed up with your childhood's definition of pride or dignity."[27] Clearly she understood that our sense of courage and strength is developed early on, through facing situations that require of us some response that might involve the use of courage. Hellman often acted courageously, against forces of oppression, either by writing of them, and, hence, bringing their repugnance more fully under public scrutiny, or by taking direct action, such as when she purchased a fleet of ambulances for the medics in the Spanish Civil War.

It is the courageous response that typifies much of Hellman's work as well as her life, as it comprises one important

aspect of her overall moral character. I'd like to turn now to that which some philosophers have written about courage, and summarize the ways in which such ideas are especially pertinent to Hellman's own position. Plato, for example, had much to say about the "Idea of Good" and the "Ideal Life", suggesting that the use of courage was a major component in that one might need to act courageously in order to act virtuously. In other words, if one sought to attain good in a particular situation, such as stopping a theft or a murder, she might have to act bravely (again, even though the circumstances might involve more than a little fear and danger to oneself) in order to act virtuously. In this sense, the display of courage can be seen as a very specific response to a particular event, but Plato added that there was also the need for courage as a moral precept, on a higher, more philosophical level. He said that courage, when used against a brute force, such as an oppressor, or against anything that was unworthy or repugnant, and when moderated by reason and wisdom, rallies on behalf of and in support of the idea of good and its existence in the ideal life. Courage, as an abstract concept, can be readily translated into action even as it exists in the form of one's character, even as it possesses a spiritual nature.[28] To act courageously, then, is to transform a belief, a commitment, into real behavior that has an impact upon and against the source of challenge, whatever it may be. Hellman spoke against liars and deceivers, against political brutality, and against racism. Her actions on behalf of those entities verified her moral commitment in that actions themselves can be seen to be the agents of one's

conscience, acting on behalf of the moral position that lives in the psyche.

This idea is further discussed in the work of James D. Wallace, who believes that, although it may be more useful to look at specific character traits as such, notions like truthfulness and courage lie within a larger ideological domain.[29] He attempts a definition of courage, saying that it is the exercise of action in the face of fear.[30] All courage comes as the result of some other motive, such as the need for self-preservation, generosity toward another, or in the interest of promoting honesty, for example. It does not exist as a motive in and of itself, but rather exists in service to a larger goal or plan.[31] With respect to Hellman's life and work, Wallace's idea that "...one can also regard courage as the positive ability to cope rationally with fears and to face dangers..." as a fitting description of the way in which Hellman's brand of courage is often affected by fear: it exists not as an absolute wall of bravado and singleness of purpose, but rather is affected and tempered by the mitigating powers of fear and reason.[32] Nonetheless, her courage stands as a strong response to that which she abhorred: injustice and corruption of every kind.

Philosophically and realistically, there might seem to be some concern for personal safety when choosing a courageous course of action, such as a worry for personal safety or for the comfort of others, as in the case of Herr Muller in Watch on the Rhine. Some might argue, as does Sara's brother, David, that there might be others who can do Muller's work who do not have

children, who wouldn't risk so much in pursuing a dangerous and unpredictable occupation. Joel Feinberg discusses the ideas of prudence vs. courage, suggesting that to act prudently is to play it safe, to make small gains at little or no risk. Hellman seemed to cry out against those who might act half-heartedly, or not at all, out of concern for themselves, or out of fear for the consequences, political, physical, emotional, etc., that almost certainly must come when taking such risks. Feinberg reiterates Hellman's position when he speaks against the exercise of caution, saying

> ...some good things one cannot get in this way. To get them at all, one has to gamble, taking the risk of not getting them even so, or of coming to harm in the process. If one values them enough, one will do better by oneself to throw prudence to the winds, to play for high stakes, knowing full well the risk and the price of failure.[33]

Muller knows full well the price of failure, which extends not only to the people he might be able to free, but to those who share his beliefs as well, for they are all in the fight together; the weakest link in the chain exists in the form of he who would act prudently, saving his own life, before he would act to save others for a much larger cause. Feinberg adds, "...that someone ought to stick to his vocation when his heart is in it enough to make it worth risking security or health or life itself is not a precept of prudence, but of courage."[34] Certainly Muller's courageous actions constitute this kind of commitment, and, as Hellman's character, he can be seen to represent her

beliefs as they command our respect.

Philippa Foot embarked upon a discussion of courage when she raised several issues pertaining to fear as a force which hindered one's ability to act courageously. She asked who was the more courageous: the one who had to overcome many fears to act bravely, or the one who was relatively fearless?[35] Is it ever easy for one to act courageously? Is one any the less courageous for her lack of difficulty? It would seem that fear can be immobilizing, that it can obstruct the exercise of courageous action. Certainly, when we have overcome great odds in order to be successful at any given achievement do we not perceive ourselves to have come through a greater struggle than if we had acted with ease? More seems to be at stake when we have gone out on a limb, when we have risked much, particularly if the gain or the hoped-for reward is tentatively offered. For example, Muller acted without certainty that his role in the underground resistance would bring about any real reformation in European politics. Yet he did act, seemingly in harmony with Thomas of Aquinas' idea that although the passions "...may make us shirk a course of action by reason, through fear of dangers or hardships...a person needs to be steadfast and not run away from what is right; and for this <u>courage</u> is named."[36]

Perhaps it is useless to ask: Who is the more courageous? Perhaps, instead, it is better to ascertain that which could be called courageous for each individual. What might be a courageous act for me, requiring great sacrifice or suppression of fear, might come to another with ease, and so perhaps the act itself

cannot be depicted as courageous or not. Each person must consider her risks, her costs, her abilities to meet challenges and her commitment to those ideals that might require a brave action. Foot posits, "A moral [person] has moral ends and cannot be indifferent to matters such as suffering and injustice."[37] While this may be true, the nature of each person's response to that very same suffering and injustice depends greatly upon her sense of agency: to what extent <u>can</u> she act, overcoming what odds, and at what cost? Courage and its definition must necessarily exist as yet another set of tensions, replete with those points that represent different positions and levels of commitment to any given situation or idea.

Hellman's courage and its expression can be seen as points along this continuum. Just as she seemed to exhibit great courage in bucking HUAC's demands, so did she decline, out of fear, an invitation to go with the Russian troops into Warsaw. Additionally, Hellman risked her life in order to deliver a broadcast over the radio in Madrid, as well as to carry money to the anti-Nazis. Certainly these actions came as the result of a very deep commitment to worthy causes, yet there were also times when Hellman's fear of being afraid kept her from being involved in dangerous activities, such as going to the Spanish front. Thus, we can see that there were times when she acted bravely, albeit not wholly without fear, and times when fear and self-knowledge combined to prevent her from endangering herself. Hellman also admitted that there were times when she panicked over nothing, and yet became listless when true danger was at

hand.

Ultimately, she lived as a person committed to admirable ideals who nonetheless recognized her limits and acted in accordance with them. And it was within the confines of her own personal restrictions that perhaps Hellman shone the brightest, for in admitting to faults and fears, she endeared herself to her public as one who could be honest and courageous despite human shortcomings. This position suggests that we can also be committed, can also act courageously, and that we do not have to be Superhumans in order to do so; we can falter, we can even be fearful. Yet Hellman exhorts us to take up our work nonetheless, to do the best we can within the limits of ourselves, while remaining faithful to those ideals that require, at times, courageous actions.

END NOTES

[1] American Heritage Dictionary, Second Edition, (Boston: Houghton-Miflin, 1982), p. 333.

[2] Lillian Hellman, An Unfinished Woman in Three (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1979), p. 204.

[3] Ibid., pp. 128-129.

[4] Hellman, "Julia" in Three, p. 436.

[5] Ibid., p. 408.

[6] Hellman, Scoundrel Time in Three, p. 668.

[7] Hellman, An Unfinished Woman in Three, p. 112.

[8] Hellman, Scoundrel Time in Three, p. 615.

[9] Hellman, An Unfinished Woman in Three, p. 177.

[10] Hellman, "Julia" in Three, pp. 405-406.

[11] Hellman, An Unfinished Woman in Three, pp. 132-133.

[12] Hellman, Scoundrel Time in Three, p. 614.

[13] Hellman, "Theater" in Three, p. 486.

[14] Hellman, Watch on the Rhine in Collected Plays (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1972), p. 264.

[15] Ibid., pp. 260-261.

[16] Ibid., p. 260.

[17] Ibid., p. 264.

[18] Ibid., p. 263.

[19] Ibid., p. 250.

[20] Ibid., p. 234.

[21] Ibid., p. 250.

[22] Ibid., p. 215.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 218.

[25] Ibid., p. 219.

[26] Hellman, "Theater" in Three, p. 500.

[27] Hellman, Scoundrel Time in Three, p. 664.

[28] Rupert Clendon Lodge, Plato's Theory of Ethics: The Moral Criterion and the Highest Good (Portway, England: Cedric Chivers, Ltd., 1966), p. 17.

[29] James D. Wallace, Virtues and Vices (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 10.

[30] Ibid., p. 65.

[31] Ibid., pp. 76-77.

[32] Ibid., p. 77.

[33] Joel Feinberg, Editor, Moral Concepts (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 114.

[34] Ibid., p. 115.

[35] Philippa Foot, Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1978), p. 12.

[36] St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, 1a, 2ae; Question 61, a.3.

[37] Foot, p. 166.

Chapter Five: Public Courage: Hellman and the McCarthy Era

On May 21, 1952, Lillian Hellman testified before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC [sic]), saying that she would be pleased to answer any questions concerning herself but that she refused to name names; she would not suggest that anyone she knew either was or had been a member of the Communist party. Unfortunately, the committee members refused to accept Hellman's attempt at honor, and, eventually, they forced her to plead the Fifth Amendment throughout the latter part of her testimony. This chapter examines the nature of that which has come to be called the "McCarthy era" and strives to demonstrate its very great effect on American public life as well as on Ms. Hellman. What was the character of this dark and gloomy period in our nation's history? What were its origins? What political and sociological movements did it embrace and why was it so complete in its devastation of individual lives? Who was this senator from Wisconsin and what forces precipitated his enormous rise to power? These factors will be discussed in an attempt to depict Hellman's involvement in and objection to a time of, as she would say, scoundrels. Moreover, Hellman's inner courage and its public expression are of utmost interest and importance in understanding her role as one of the few people of the time who maintained any semblance of ethical and moral conduct.

Initially, the HUAC committee was formed in the late 1930's, with Martin Dies as its head, to investigate claims that certain elements within the Hollywood motion-picture industry were involved in leftist activities which might be of concern to the guardians of national security. Our nation would soon become involved in World War II; our experience in the first World War had made us suspicious of certain leaders, political ideologies, and international events, particularly those of a revolutionary nature. Actors and actresses, writers and producers were asked to attest to their loyalty to the nation and its causes, and were required to make public statements about their patriotic allegiance. In appearances before these so-called "investigative" bodies, film industry employees, from executives to script runners, were forced to endure a nasty barrage of questions, pressures, and allegations as well as insinuations regarding their character, dignity, and honesty. Many such "witnesses" were made to "co-operate"--to reveal their affiliations with political groups, however innocent or suspect, as well as the names of friends and acquaintances who also may have been involved with left-wing "fronts". Many of these names were falsely offered in the hope of ensuring one's ability to remain gainfully employed in an industry-related career. In a number of cases, the name-giving was crushingly accurate; such stars as John Garfield, Phillip Loeb, Canada Lee, J. Edward Bromberg, and Mady Christians all died, either by the act of suicide or the inability to make a living via the blacklist as a result of their appearances before HUAC or after having been named by a "friend". Many "fellow-

travelers" were called before the committee throughout the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's.

By the time Hellman came to testify, there had been significant turns of event which enhanced the nation's seemingly general fear of Communist aliens and their political propaganda. For example, the McCormack Act had been passed in 1938, which required that agents of foreign governments register their names and occupations at the Department of Justice; the Smith Act of 1940 mandated the registration of all aliens. These two bodies of legislation served to heighten anti-Communist feelings, as did the widespread deployment of Truman's loyalty oath program. In addition, one section of the 1950 Internal Security Act required all Communists to register as such, while the Hatch Act of 1951 restricted the political activities of federal employees (this was later extended to include state and local personnel).

The "Red Scare" mentality was not solely the creation of those living in the 1950's. Rather, anti-Communist sympathies were noted in a variety of movements and time periods within our country's history. Robert Griffith, writing in The Spectre anthology, suggested that a red scare which had occurred during the years 1919-1921 served as a model precursor to the McCarthy era; he also posited that, during the earlier scare, there were a number of handy myths, beliefs, attitudes and stereotypes about Communists that could be conveniently revived at any later time.[1] In the 1930's there was a notable increase in radical activity from the members of the left, especially as people reacted to the unstable economic conditions that led to the horrors of the Great

Depression. Many felt that the greater number of subsequent suicides, bankruptcies, etc., was the direct result of Capitalist policies, and looked to the Communist party for solutions.

It is clear that McCarthy was not so much a creator of the period as he may have been its product, despite his role in advancing anti-Communist sentiment. The political, sociological, and cultural factors that led to McCarthy's rise began long before his arrival in the nation's legislature. Thus, when he announced, on February 9, 1950, at a meeting of the Republican Women's Club of Wheeling, West Virginia:

> I have here in my hand a list of 205...a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department[2]

it came as no big surprise to much of the nation, although such a dramatic announcement certainly excited public outrage, particularly when it focused upon "questionable" employees of trusted government agencies.

Anti-Soviet feelings ran high prior to WWI and, although Russia was an American ally during the war itself, suspicions as to its motives never quite subsided completely. Part of this was due to the Hitler-Stalin Pact, an agreement which led even die-hard supporters of the Communist movement to abandon the ranks of party membership. Further mistrust of our friendship with Russia occurred over the appeasement agreements, through which much of western Europe was re-arranged to Hitler's satisfaction.

Given these political developments, it is easy to see that the time was ripe for intense mistrust of anything that sounded even remotely anti-American. Enter the American Legion, the Chamber of Commerce, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and a variety of religious groups, such as the Catholic Church's Knights of Columbus or the Catholic Veterans (to name only a few of the many powerful political interest groups which effectively lobbied in Washington, D.C.) and the stage was complete. Americans became truly rabid in their rejection of anyone who seemed subversive, particularly during the Eisenhower years, which many historians characterize as the age of consensus, when all citizens attempted to emulate each other, and when the "good life" was exemplified by such inventions as modern kitchen gadgetry. Keeping up with the Joneses was the national pastime. Hence, no one could express a unique or individual sentiment or behavior without provoking suspicion. The name of the game was conformity, and everyone sought its protection. The Truman and Eisenhower years saw a decline in the nature and the volume of leftist activities, as these were eclipsed by the politics of middle-to-right conservatism. Indeed, the primary difference between the so-called liberals and the rightists of the day expressed itself in terms of style and technique rather than actual content or purpose.

Hence, it would seem that this national out-pouring of anti-Communist feeling, which exhibited itself through legislation as well as through the media and in the minds of citizens, was fairly unanimous. Yet some scholars suggest that the period

during which the fear of Communism was supposed to have been at its highest was, in fact, non-existent. Anti-Communist feelings may have always run high, and were not necessarily at any kind of peak during the McCarthy's terms in office. Eventually, national concerns against McCarthy were stronger than a fear of leftists. One survey showed that, in 1930, most people felt negatively about a Communist's human and legal rights, but the same sampling showed that, by 1953, less than one per cent of those who responded felt any concern about Communism at all. Less than eight per cent of these were involved in thinking about world affairs. This refutes the validity of the red scare theory, and collaborates the idea that the fifties was a time of domestic complacency or, at the very least, self-absorbency.

Samuel Stouffer conducted this study in 1954, which resulted in his book, Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties, in which his data supports the notion that the "...picture of the average American with the jitters, trembling lest he find a Red under his bed, is certainly nonsense." Moreover, Stouffer states that there is a positive correlation between popular attitudes of the public and those of influential figures, while suggesting that such attitudes are created from the top down (from the President, his administration, the Congress, etc., to the public at large).[3] His work goes on to suggest that a prevailing national fear of Communism just didn't exist.

Robert Griffith stated that "...Joe McCarthy...was adopting a political issue already sanctioned by much of the nation's leadership."[4] Thus, it would seem that the credit attributed to

McCarthy as a creator of the era is wrongly placed. It also seems that the public itself was less concerned with these issues than were those who sought political power. Certain politicians wanted America (and its enemies) to believe that the anti-Communist scene was an inherent one rather than one through which ambitious men came to power (Richard Nixon was one such opportunist). "McCarthy was the product of anti-Communist politics, not its progenitor."[5]

If this is true, and if it can be argued that the general populace became less and less concerned with Communism nationally, how did such an era of hysteria occur? And what was the nature of the abuses it engendered through the formation of such agencies as HUAC?

Michael Rogin, in The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Spectre, supports Griffith's argument that the McCarthy era rose out of the direct actions and inactions of the members of certain elitist groups. For example, the Americans for Democratic Action was a group formed in 1947. It supported Truman's presidential bid in 1948. Yet its efforts were greatly diminished by the activities of powerful groups on the right (such as the D.A.R., the K. of C., etc.,).[6] The well-known sociologist, Talcott Parsons, suggested that McCarthyism grew out of the various political and social dilemmas facing Americans--the Cold War, domestic security, and so on.[7] Yet the data substantiates the notion that the entire era was predominantly a product of the political system and its leaders.

Consequently, the historical and socio-political

perspectives which attempt to describe the rise of McCarthyism do so in a variety of fashions, using a vast array of methodologies, data sources, and observations. Needless to say, the theories don't always agree with one another. What remains central, however, is that the McCarthy era itself certainly did exist, and created much that was harmful, both to the nation as well as individual citizens, through its longevity and public support and due to its malicious nature. There is much remorse in the public and in the current literature on the part of those participants who have recognized their error and folly in persecuting so many who were innocent; the remorse is accompanied often by stirring admonition lest it happen again.

The most powerful and visible agency of the era was the HUAC committee itself. Led by such notables as Martin Dies, J. Parnell Thomas, and John S. Wood, HUAC served as the perfect medium through which Congressional conservatives could set their respective record "straight" over the fact that they were not "soft" on Communism or its infiltration into the United States. The following is an illustration of the actual number of hearings, some of which lasted for months at a time, held during those sessions of Congress that coincided with HUAC's prime years.

DATES	CONGRESSIONAL SESSION	NUMBER OF HEARINGS
1946-47	79	4
1947-49	80	22
1949-51	81	24
1951-53	82	34
1953-55	83	51

It may be helpful to note that the period from 1945-49 can be characterized as a time when the investigation's focus was the Hollywood film industry, and its hearings were conducted on the west coast before moving to Washington, D.C. This, however, does not imply that, beyond the time frame specified, such focus was discontinued. Rather, the investigation of motion pictures and related subdivisions prevailed into the forties and fifties, but it was accompanied by other hearings and probes (1949-55) which centered on other issues, such as a growing concern over national security issues, including espionage, subversion, and the suspicion that the formulation of our own foreign policy was Communist-tainted from within the State and related Departments.

From 1941-49, Senator Jack B. Tenney of the California state legislature was asked by officials in the federal government to head a mini-Huac to make initial inquiries into the existence and nature of leftist movements within the film business. Named the Tenney Commission, this committee called many witnesses who endured the questioning only to be called again later before the national HUAC. The main reason for investigating the media in the first place (and the term media is here used to include various aspects of the radio, movie, television and theater industries) had to do with the fear that these products were the prime vehicles for the transmission of Communist propaganda or that they publicized (to other nations) certain military secrets, thereby compromising our national security. HUAC believed that films, in particular, contained subtle yet subversive messages demonstrating the shortcomings of the American system while

advocating the viability of the Communist model. Moreover, evidence was gathered which indicated that the Communist party had made a large and concerted effort to recruit new members in the entertainment field, thinking that it could further extend its influence in the nation, thereby gaining a firmer foothold in American intellectual and political life. The film industry, its employees and its products, all came under attack. Hollywood and the greater Los Angeles area became a prime target for HUAC investigations.

In an article entitled "The Politics of Culture: Hollywood and the Cold War," Les K. Adler renders a remarkable and thorough description of the investigation itself. He also notes that McCarthy made several incendiary remarks concerning the nature of Communist operations. In a speech given in 1947, McCarthy said that the Communist Party (CP) should be outlawed as it was "...an iceberg in the shipping lane with the most dangerous part underwater and invisible."[8] McCarthy went on to say that Communists were against human rights, that they had no human souls, and were, therefore, dangerous, vicious, and anti-American.

Certainly the members of the motion picture industry were aware of the sentiments expressed by McCarthy and others like him. But the studio moguls had no idea they'd come under such close scrutiny as that afforded by Tenney and HUAC. Nor could they predict the degree to which they'd capitulate to HUAC's demands which, at least initially, appeared ludicrous. However, the industry eventually bowed to internal and external pressure

as the result of the fact that its writers, directors, producers, technical personnel, actors and actresses were being investigated for turning out "subversive" material. The members of this medium were also shaken by the possible validity of long-standing claims which suggested that labor disputes within the unions were Communist-inspired. Suppositions such as these led to the belief that Hollywood was a hot-bed of Communist activity.

The film industry was somewhat victimized by the over-inflated testimony of former Communists who stated that the network of party members within public life generally was very large, powerful, and that it threatened every individual and constitution within the republic. Eric Johnston, a former president of the Chamber of Commerce, announced, during his testimony before the Tenney commission and in his role as president of the Motion Picture Association, that all Communists were foreign agents, and asked the U.S. Congress to prevent them from holding positions of leadership in labor unions. This assertion and its accompanying plea were repeated before HUAC on March 27, 1947, when he called for "...a pitiless spotlight of publicity on all Communists."[9] Hence, Spotlight was the name coined for a periodical whose purpose was to alert sensible Americans to Communist activity within the United States.

On May 9, barely two months later, Representative J. Parnell Thomas and his HUAC committee arrived in Hollywood to start their own investigation. Actor Adolphe Menjou, a board member of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals (formed in 1944 partly as a means for the self-preservation of

frightened people within the industry) told the committee that Hollywood was one of the main centers of Communist activity and that a number of films had been influenced by the "reds." This idea, however, was rebutted by Emmett Lavery, head of the Screen Writers Guild, who claimed that, although some writers, producers, etc., had Communist sympathies, it was clear that the production process itself would never allow Communist propaganda, however covert, to get past the patriotism and close scrutiny of such people as Louis B. Mayer and Sam Katz (of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer [MGM]). He further informed the committee that his writers were chiefly aligned with the liberal center, and that he himself did not fear Communist activity within the Guild.

Nevertheless, the Tenney and Thomas committees believed that any tolerance of suspected Communist activity within the industry whatsoever meant that a) the entire membership of that industry was affected, and b) that any subsequent films would undoubtedly carry subversive messages, calling for the violent destruction of the American government. Moreover, this committee began to portray suspected Communists and their allies as the ultimate enemy, as mindless dupes who served as "...light-minded window dressers for the most tyrannical political system in the world."

Initially, opposition to the investigation and its allegations formed around the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech and association, and it was led by producers William Wyler and John Huston and writer Phillip Dunne. Their ideas were endorsed by such notables as Danny Kaye, Humphrey Bogart, Sterling Hayden, Gregory Peck, and Billy Wilder. Those

suspects who came under the committee's fire and who were the most hostile and un-cooperative came to be known as the "Hollywood Ten." The following is a list of their names and occupations within the industry.

NAMES	OCCUPATIONS
Adrian Scott	Producer
Edward Dmytryk	Director
Herbert Biberman	Writer/Director
Lester Cole	Writer
Ring Lardner, Jr.	Writer
Dalton Trumbo	Writer
John Howard Lawson	Writer
Albert Maltz	Writer
Alvah Bessie	Writer
Samuel Ornitz	Writer

All ten were cited for contempt of Congress for their refusal to testify cooperatively. They were also jailed and blacklisted. There were several others who followed this course of action. For many, careers were completely destroyed.

Initially, the studios were quick to defend their employees and their products, and frequently rendered heated testimony on both coasts to both committees. They soon realized, however, that, despite their ardor, their protestations did nothing to alleviate the suspicions they encountered. Moreover, there were several employees who testified that they thought or sensed that they were being paid to be a part of something not quite patriotic--they "admitted" to having fears that their positions and responsibilities may have been used to further the Communist cause. If the officials of a well-known studio were called to testify, it quickly became public knowledge. This publicity

resulted in the fact that more and more films were being picketed by angry Americans and in the fact that even the most successful studios were experiencing financial difficulty. One by one, the studio heads realized their plight, and held an industry-wide conference at the Waldorf Hotel in New York City in 1947. As the result of this meeting, they issued a joint statement which outlined their hiring policy, stating that no one would be hired in any capacity if she or he was suspected of having any Communist affiliations whatsoever. It added that any suspected Communist employees would be fired; they would not be re-hired until they had cleared themselves (before a special committee set up for that purpose). The policy applied to the industry and all its affiliates. Dore Schary, who had voted against the policy, was chosen to deliver the statement despite his well-known and vehement objections concerning the investigation and its validity.

Blacklisting, then, was the industry's way of answering HUAC's charges. The fact that such a practice was endorsed by the film industry surprised and angered many, especially those who recalled with pride their own resistance to the investigation. With the advent of what appeared to be an admission of guilt, the studios turned to the rapid production and promotion of films with strident anti-red messages, several of which were ridiculous in their portrayal of what were perceived to be typical Communists.

Dorothy B. Jones' magnificent study of this flurry of activity and the interesting commodities it produced is contained

within John Cogley's book, Report on Blacklisting. She examined such elements as a film's content, whether or not assigned credits had been altered to protect the studios, and, finally, the film's financial status. Her report suggests that the studios produced several films which were expected to net a loss at the box office, yet the desire for the respect of the committee and the American public outweighed the need for capital gain. Communists were portrayed according to the mythic stereotypes created by a fallacious understanding of them as a people. For example, Communists were shown as being either boring, top-level bureaucrats sitting behind massive desks, or as Mafia-style gangsters who made fast get-a-ways in shiny cars with slinky women, usually named "Natasha." These films were frequently made at the "B"-level, and were heavy, pedantic, and depressing. The basic premise of nearly all these films had Americans believing that every Communist would choose democracy if he or she but had the chance via exposure to the great ideals of the West. Capitalistic individuality would surely be preferred over the weight of collectivism. Additionally, Communist women were drawn as being very masculine, mannish in nature and behavioral traits, a model which suggested that love and romance were available only in the "free" world. Hence, these films gave visual life to the inaccurate images already present in many Americans' minds.[10]

Jones verifies several of her assertions by noting that there was a marked decline in the production of films dealing with serious or politically charged topics during this period known as the studios' "recovery." Instead, Hollywood's film

industry leadership was concerned with escapist films, or with movies dealing with anti-Communist themes, rather than with any film that might discuss the evils of poverty or racial discrimination. The following represents this decline.

PERCENTAGE OF FILMS DEALING WITH SERIOUS SOCIAL ISSUES

YEARS	PERCENTAGE
1945-1947	28% and rising
1948-1949	18%
1950-1952	11% (rise in escapist, fantasy films)
1953	9%

During the six years between 1948 and 1954, Hollywood produced more than forty anti-Communist movies. Some of the most notable are listed below.

STUDIO	FILM	YEAR RELEASED
Columbia	Walk a Crooked Mile	1948
Republic	The Red Menace	1949
Eagle-Lion	Guilty of Treason	1949
RKO	The Woman on Pier 13	1949
MGM	I Was a Communist	1950
Warner Brothers	I Was a Communist For the FBI	1951

The stereotype of the enemy suggested by these titles left no room for ambiguity.[11]

In addition, such notable public officials as Harry S. Truman, John Foster Dulles, and J. Edgar Hoover gave speeches which reiterated the message contained in these films, and which served to reinforce, in the American mind, the idea that all

Communists were a menace to the national way of life. This general consensus of the evil imposed by such a menace was to influence Hollywood for a number of years to come. Today it is still somewhat difficult to find an American-made film which depicts either Soviets or the idea of socialism in a realistic fashion. Only since China has begun to "capitalize" and modernize (translation: Westernize) has the U.S. expressed any positive attitudes toward it, and those may be based upon the perceived opportunity to further its own economic interests.

It is ironic to note that the highly overt theme of anti-Communism faded from the screen simultaneously with the timing of McCarthy's political demise and his loss of public respect. The practice of blacklisting continued into the fifties and early sixties, but it also seemed to decline with the thaw, however superficial or temporary, in Cold War politics. Nonetheless, the entire experience cannot and should not be forgotten, for many lives and livelihoods were lost or at least affected deeply by the witch-hunting that occurred during HUAC's prime years of existence and power.

Lillian Hellman was one victim/survivor of the McCarthy era, as is evident in her moving memoir, Scoundrel Time. Throughout this rendition of Hellman's outrage against the powers that brought her before the committee as well as against those "liberals" and intellectuals who aided and abetted its success, Hellman utilized a terse writing style to its best advantage. Her language is direct, its impact forceful, as her readers come to an understanding of the shock and anger she endured as well as of

the very great financial loss she suffered as the result of being blacklisted after her appearance before HUAC. Writer Martin Berkeley testified that Hellman had attended a meeting of the CP at his home in California; Hellman was consequently subpoenaed. Despite a public statement issued by Ring Lardner, Jr., in which he stated, with some risk to himself, that he had been at the meeting and had not seen Hellman there, the committee insisted that Hellman's history of radical politics made her an ideal suspect for prosecution. She had actually been named a Communist in Vincent Hartnett's publication, Red Channels, which served as the earliest blacklist in written form of the members of the motion-picture industry.[12] HUAC's members knew of Hellman's affiliation with Hammett, who himself had appeared before HUAC and been imprisoned in 1951 for his refusal to name the contributors to a bail fund for suspected Communists. Moreover, it was public knowledge that Hellman had traveled extensively in Russia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Cuba, particularly during times of political upheaval, and that she had been involved in the Spanish Civil War on behalf of the "rebels."

Hellman's early interest in and approval of the "experiment" in Russia as well as her domestic campaigns for human rights added to the fact that she engendered suspicion in the minds of those eager to prosecute her. Additionally, Hellman co-sponsored a meeting called the "Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace" at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City in March of 1949. This meeting was picketed by those who believed it to be a "front" for Communist-inspired activity, and who objected

to the presence of certain notable Russians such as Dmitri Shostakovich.

Thus, she received her subpoena, and prepared for her defense by first contacting attorney Joseph Rauh, who served as her counsel during that to which she has referred as the most unpleasant time of her life. Rauh also defended several other witnesses, Arthur Miller among them, who claimed that resisting the committee members was easier after Hellman's own testimony. Rauh had been recommended by Abe Fortas, who suggested that perhaps the time was right for someone to assume a moral stance of objection to the committee, its purpose, and its tactics. Together, Rauh and his client prepared her defense. Prior to Hellman's actual appearance, she sent the committee a letter which stated that she was willing to testify as to her own activities and beliefs, but that she would not provide the committee with the names of any others who may have been suspected of having Communist affiliations. The following is the text of the letter.

Honorable John S. Wood May 19, 1952
Chairman
House Committee on Un-American Activities
Room 226 Old House Office Building
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Mr. Wood:

As you know, I am under subpoena to appear before your committee on May 21, 1952.

I am most willing to answer all questions about myself. I have nothing to hide from your Committee and there is nothing in my life of which I am ashamed. I have been advised by counsel that under the Fifth Amendment I have a constitutional privilege to decline to answer any questions about my political opinions, activities,

and associations, on the grounds of self-incrimination. I do not wish to claim this privilege. I am ready and willing to testify before the representatives of our Government as to my own opinions and my own actions, regardless of any risks or consequences to myself.

But I am advised by counsel that if I answer the Committee's questions about myself, I must also answer questions about other people and that if I refuse to do so, I can be cited for contempt. My counsel tells me that if I agree to answer questions about myself, I will have waived my rights under the Fifth Amendment and could be forced legally to answer questions about others. This is very difficult for a layman to understand. But there is one principle that I do understand: I am not willing, now or in the future, to bring bad trouble to people who, in my past association with them, were completely innocent of any talk or action that was disloyal or subversive. I do not like disloyalty or subversion in any form and if I had ever seen any I would have considered it my duty to have reported it to the proper authorities. But to hurt innocent people whom I knew many years ago in order to save myself is, to me, inhuman and dishonorable. I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions, even though I long ago came to the conclusion that I was not a political person and could have no comfortable position in any political group.

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

I am prepared to waive the privilege against self-incrimination and tell you anything you wish to know about my views or actions if you and your Committee will refrain from asking me to name other people. If the Committee is unwilling to give me this assurance, I will be forced to plead the Fifth Amendment at the hearing.

A reply to this letter would be appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Lillian Hellman[13]

Hellman's request was refused by the committee one day later. On the day of her appearance, Hellman arrived at Rauh's office early in the morning, despite the fact that she was not scheduled until 11:00 a.m., and after several days of sleeplessness, nervousness, and attempts at avoiding both the advice of others and the desire to panic. Rauh upset Hellman to the point of nausea by notifying her of the fact that another attorney in Fortas' well-respected practice, Thurman Arnold, had stated that Rauh was sending her straight to prison with the line of defense he'd prepared for her. Arnold's advice was that they should notify the committee that they had changed their minds about the letter, and were sorry for having sent it. Hellman objected, stating that whatever happened to her as the result of her letter was bound to be better than changing course in mid-stream. Hence, she entered the hearing room full of a kind of nervous courage, asking of herself only that she emerge without feeling ashamed of herself.

They arrived a bit early, since Rauh wanted Hellman to get used to the room. He advised her in several areas prior to the entrance of the committee members, saying that she could watch the clock and be assured that the committee would break for lunch at about 12:30, while adding that, if she needed to stall, or if things became too unbearable, she could take a break in the ladies' room. The press corps filed in, joining some older women who seemed to represent some club or organization.

The hearing began with some basic questions regarding Hellman's full name, date and place of birth, and the examiner proceeded by discussing her professional record. The line of inquiry soon focused on the year 1937, and centered on Hellman's activities in Hollywood. She thought they were interested in her journey to Spain, but writer Martin Berkeley's testimony, naming Hellman as having been present at a meeting of the Communist Party which was held at his home, was read into the record. Hellman was asked whether or not Berkeley's statements were true. She responded by saying that she would like to refer to the letter she had sent the committee a few days earlier. For the purpose of clarification, John S. Wood, the chairman of the committee, made it possible for the letter to be read into the record. This may have been a major tactical error on his part, for it allowed a rather gleeful Rauh the chance to pass out mimeographed copies of the letter to the members of the press.

This action irritated the committee, which continued its questioning with renewed vigor and malice, while insisting that Hellman was not to be in the business of advising the committee on its method of operation. Hellman's right hand developed a nervous tick, and she could feel perspiration on her face and arms. She began to panic, and wanted to ask for the bathroom intermission, but noticed that only sixteen minutes had passed on the clock; she decided that she had better try to endure a little more in the event that the truly bad time was yet to come. Barraged by questions, Hellman felt, at times, that she couldn't quite follow the line of reasoning, yet she experienced moments

when she knew that to refuse to answer questions about party membership would constitute an admission of guilt. Just as she felt that she could stand it no longer, Hellman heard a voice from the press galley say, clearly, "Thank God somebody finally had the guts to do it." The committee reacted by warning that if such an outburst reoccurred, the entire press corps would be ejected from the room. The same voice answered, "You do that, sir."[14] Hellman was quite grateful for the strength and salvation of those comments.

Evidently the committee realized that it had backed itself into a corner, for Hellman was dismissed without further ado and was excused from any future appearances. She seemed paralyzed, rooted to her chair, and rose only in reaction to Rauh's loud whispering in her ear. He wanted her to get up and walk out as quickly as possible, saying nothing to anyone, and he told her that she should shake her head to any and all questions. His assistant would accompany her; if anyone came near her she was to keep moving.

They reunited at a restaurant afterwards, and Hellman asked what had happened, since she didn't understand the hearing's brevity. Rauh later suggested that perhaps the reading of the letter led to Hellman's release, for the committee was unable to prosecute her under any of its three plans. One tack would have been to try to smear Hellman as a "Fifth Amendment Communist." That didn't work, because she was willing to talk about herself. Another line of attack would have been to force Hellman to name names, which she wouldn't do (many critics of this period have

suggested that the committee continued to badger witnesses for names already in its possession). The final thrust would have been to prosecute for contempt, which was impossible since, during the testimony, Hellman had, eventually, been forced to invoke the protection of the Fifth Amendment. The members of HUAC had sense enough to see that they were in a bad spot, and that the continuation of the hearing would only lead to public embarrassment as well as lend fuel to the growing fire of opposition to HUAC's tyranny.

Hellman was sick for the next several days, while friends and members of the media either called or wrote letters to say that they admired her and supported her position. Others did not call, perhaps out of the conviction that association with Hellman was a liability to their own well-being. Despite some public support, Hellman was upset with herself for not having told the committee that its members were cowards who were quite guilty of a larger kind of evil. In fact, she wrote several drafts of the speeches she would have liked to have made, which were full of anger and bitterness over HUAC's treatment of her. These speeches also indicated her very great disgust for those liberals, intellectuals, former friends, etc., who were so complacent in their acquiesence to HUAC's domination.

Thereafter, Hellman's life changed in many ways. For one thing, she traded her belief in liberalism for "decency." By this concept, Hellman referred to the ideals and practices of a moral code based on personal sentiment and experience, whose principles centered on a desire for the truth, a desire for justice, an

avoidance of harming one's neighbors, and so on. Her life also changed materially, and severely at that. At one point, she assumed a fictitious name and worked behind the counter at Macy's once the money she and Hammett had was gone. It was clear that her beloved Hardscrabble Farm had to be sold, particularly since blacklisting and IRS liens against all future earnings affected any chance for income. The sale of the farm caused great hardship and sorrow, as is evidenced in Hellman's writings. One day, while she was packing to leave, a herd of deer suddenly walked into the yard. She had been clearing land for a deer park at the time of her hearing, and their appearance seemed a fitting and cheering farewell and raised the hope that Hellman's life was not without purpose and meaning as well as the positive pull of future possibilities.

Despite Hellman's ability to find comfort in less luxurious lodgings, and her eventual return to the writer's world, the loss of Hardscrabble and the entire HUAC debacle were experiences from which she never quite recovered. Hellman stated that her shock and anger came not so much from McCarthy and the evil he promoted but from the fact that so few of her friends and acquaintances raised their voices in protest or came to her assistance.

Moreover, Hellman emphasized that HUAC's abuses were symptomatic of a generation's way of thinking, and that they merely foreshadowed such national disgraces as Richard Nixon and his obstruction of justice in the Watergate affair. She further admonished the "good children of the sixties" for their current purposelessness and lack of instrumentality in effecting social

change in spite of their earlier power as members of the liberal left. She suggested that a McCarthy-like era could happen again, particularly if we, as a nation, did not pay attention to the lessons available to us from our not-so-distant past.[15]

It is this same point which is reiterated through the work of Victor Navasky, especially in his book, Naming Names. In an interview, Navasky made reference to the fact that, during his preparations for the book during the seven years prior to its release, his colleagues could not understand his intense belief in the possibility that such an era could return, could be re-created. Since the book's recent publication, the same colleagues have noted the rise in the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, the Moral Majority, and the election and re-election of Ronald Reagan (to name only a few movements on the right). His friends have since praised Navasky for his great foresight. Despite a seemingly greater plurality of political views and the stronger and more diversified base of the left as well as various human rights movements, it is the case that a new and negative mood has entered the nation through a renewed interest in the ideals of the political conservative. Our nation now seems to be championing an escalation of arms accumulation, as well as demonstrating a penchant for interfering with other countries' affairs. A focus on the capitalist economy coincides with the administration's desire to reduce the departments of education and human services while civil rights legislation takes a back seat to lengthy senate confirmation hearings (some of the candidates for cabinet posts seem to have shady backgrounds).

Navasky asserts that this situation creates a national mentality very much like that of the Eisenhower years, when HUAC was at its prime. Navasky's colleagues agree that his views and assessments are, at the very least, timely, if not accurate.[16]

Navasky, a graduate of the Yale Law School, has many fine journalistic and editorial credits to his name. As a previous editor of The New York Times and a 1971 nominee for the National Book Award (for Kennedy Justice), Navasky has also been the editor of The Nation. Clearly, his legal and journalistic training have combined to make his study of the McCarthy era excellent, fascinating, and well-researched. The book also deals with the collective psychology of the many witnesses who appeared before HUAC and agreed to name names, while focusing on the consequences of their acts. Navasky suggests that, through the state's adoption of the Informer Principle, the witness became, for a time, not a stoolie or a fink, but a kind of national hero, the embodiment of all things American, the loyal patriot. He also examines the very crucial fact that the committee exceeded its legal bounds by conducting the hearings in the first place. He states that HUAC knew the names of Communist Party members before the West Coast hearings ever began, and adds that the informers were as victimized by the entire debacle as were the resistors who were prosecuted, jailed and/or blacklisted. The following few paragraphs summarize the essence of Navasky's argument.

Although there seems to be a wealth of information about HUAC in its prime, about the McCarthy era in general, none of Navasky's predecessors ever questioned HUAC's legality. Certainly

the committee could exercise its power to hold hearings, to subpoena, to make recommendations as to the passage of legislation, among regular duties. However, Navasky argues that the committee abused its power during the red scare by inappropriately harassing its witnesses, using undue political pressure against them both personally and professionally, as well as through the use of the blacklist, all of which caused great harm. During the Hiss and Rosenberg trials, suspected subversives could, at least, make use of constitutional protections via standard courtroom regulations and procedures. There had to be formal indictments followed by substantial evidence of the proof of guilt. There was a jury, and witnesses could "enjoy" the process of cross-examination, whereby the other side could at least be known, made public, read into the record. None of these rights were available to HUAC witnesses. Navasky states:

> Congress...cannot charge people with crimes; the Constitution, in the Bill of Attainder clause, specifically prohibits legislative incursion into this area. Yet witnesses before Congressional committees have far fewer rights than defendants in criminal trials.[17]

It was often the case that the testimonies of friendly witnesses were gathered by HUAC officials behind closed doors during executive sessions, which were nothing more than rehearsals for public harassment and humiliation. By law, executive sessions should be utilized only when the testimony might defame or incriminate another person (the committee certainly didn't have any scruples over this issue) or when the information gathered

might endanger national security or the public interest. The fact that these witnesses went on to make grand public appearances in the Washington hearings is itself an example of HUAC's abuse of the executive session privilege.

Moreover, the politics of the closed session often involved the making of deals between prosecutors and defense attorneys; clients' rights were often eclipsed as a result of the final agreement. Congress itself has recognized two reasons, and only two, through which a witness could legally be subpoenaed: to inform itself as to the need for legislation, and to engage in its watch-dog function over the executive branch. The investigations into the Hollywood motion-picture industry fell into neither of these categories.

It is evident that the committee already possessed the names of the members of the CP, particularly on the West Coast, largely through the efforts of special investigators, several of whom were already members of the Los Angeles police force, such as William Ward Kimple, whose wife was also encouraged to join the force and conduct surveillance upon the CP long before HUAC's prime years. They regularly turned in names to their superiors, especially between 1928 and 1955. Navasky states:

> The testimony of the Kimples...combined with intelligence from the FBI and countless other government sources in the business of trading information...meant that the last thing the committee needed to do its job was to accumulate more names.[18]

Navasky called the HUAC hearings the "degradation

ceremonies", and portrays informers as sometimes sympathetic characters who often were, nonetheless, their own worst enemies. Many witnesses were friendly to the committee out of a desire to protect their families; many "reformed" CP members attempted to demonstrate, for the sake of their own careers, their full break from the party through an admission that their previous involvement was an error in judgment. Naming names seemed to be a way to further ensure that the committee, along with the rest of America, would note the depth of their contrition, which, the penitent hoped, would "buy" a return to a somewhat normal lifestyle, free of the guilt of association and all its attendant suspicions and persecutions. Navasky states that many of these witnesses were no more than victims of their own lack of courage, since they suffered from the effects of blacklisting anyway. "Ironically, it was the informer who was degraded, because [he] represented a threat not only to the person he named, but to the community."[19]

Some witnesses tried to use the "I didn't hurt anyone" excuse by insisting that they hadn't named anyone new. Navasky counters with the statement that there were a few new names rendered through several testimonies. Others suggested that "they got what they deserved", meaning that however bad HUAC was, the CP was worse, and deserved the negative publicity. Some named names out of a rapidly and conveniently formed higher consciousness, claiming the need to "eradicate communism from the face of the earth." Others felt a need for revenge, having broken with the party over ideological differences. Still others claimed

that they weren't responsible for their actions, finding themselves caught in the bind of conflicting and compelling forces which left only one alternative: inform. This abnegation of personal moral responsibility was a consequence of a desperate need for work, yet Navasky has proven that most of HUAC's resisters did return to some level of productivity with their integrity intact. Navasky clearly prefers the position of the unfriendly witness:

> Morality, we are told, is a voice of conscience from within, in harmony with a voice of authority from without. We have seen what happens when a citizen delegates his conscience to the state.[20]

And, although friendly witnesses may have had reasons for what they did, Navasky remains committed to the idea that there were moral and ethical challenges involved which the cooperator failed to meet.

At one point in time, over 500 writers, actors and actresses, producers, etc., were blacklisted from the film, radio, and television industries. Although this number may represent a fraction of the total number of people employed in this field, it nonetheless represents the immeasurable loss of excellent talent. From what literature, film, drama, music and art might the nation have benefited had it not been for the blacklist? The censoring powers of a national paranoia was at its height in the McCarthy era. The evils imposed by this era can also be seen as a sequence of broken trusts, stemming from the abuses of power, and spreading to the loss of trust among

friends, colleagues, and business associates as well as between the government and the people it purports to represent.

The McCarthy years and the ensuing blacklist took ten years from Lillian Hellman, according to her estimate, at least with respect to her ability to create drama. It took another twenty-five years for her to be able to write about the experience through the publication of Scoundrel Time. She had tried twice beforehand to write a memoir of the period but found that she harbored too much anger to make clear sense of what she was trying to say. When she was able to complete writing about this chapter of her life, Hellman took the advice of an editor who suggested that such an explosive and dynamic work demanded its own cover, rather than a slot within a collection of memoirs.

Hence, the book came into existence in its own right, and in it we learn that the roots of Hellman's rebellious and often contrary nature started when she was but a child, and grew over the course of many years whenever she came to a moral crossroads or decision. She recognized early on that her family's wealth had to do with the sufferings of poor blacks, and that anti-Semitism existed in the world when she tried to enroll in a university in Bonn. She also spoke of her nurse and long-time friend, Sophronia, who instilled in her "...anger, an uncomfortable, dangerous, and often useful gift."[21] With respect to her own inability to be fully involved with the ideals of a political party, Hellman nonetheless has said that she had often admired radicals for the serious, committed people they seemed to be.

Despite this inability to be a "team" player, Hellman forged

her own sense of ethics, never guessing that she would be punished for doing so:

> ...when I disagreed I was exercising my inherited rights, and certainly there could be no punishment for doing what I had been taught to do by teachers, books, and American history. It was not only my right, it was my duty to act or speak against what I thought wrong or dangerous.[22]

Clearly the persecution Hellman experienced along with the resultant losses of Hardscrabble and income served as punishment enough for that which was, in actuality, a moral stance of non-cooperation and non-compliance with malicious governmental agencies and its representatives, as well as with the prevailing political persuasions of the day.

Hellman was more than a survivor of the McCarthy era; she was a victor in the sense that her stance gave courage to others for the purpose of emulation. Moreover, she succeeded in transcending the experience, at least to the degree that she recognized the danger of succumbing to the moral devastation and disaster suffered by cooperative witnesses. Hellman was able to synthesize and integrate the period she referred to as one of "black comedy" with the rest of her life, saying, "...that was then, and there is now, and the years between then and now...are one."[23]

Yet, upon re-reading Scoundrel Time for its inclusion in a collection of memoirs, Hellman added a post-script in the form of some notes at the end of the chapter. She characterized her

position and tone in the selection as being too restrained, too civilized, and added that she still felt angry, angrier than she hoped she would ever be again. The hoped-for goals of calm and tolerance for the McCarthy period itself, and for the people involved, from compliant "radicals" to the members of the various investigative agencies, were useless: the rage remained, and was needed.

> I tried to avoid, when I wrote this book, what is called a moral stand. I'd like to take that stand now. I never want to live again to watch people turn into liars and cowards and others into frightened, silent collaborators. And to hell with the fancy reasons they gave for what they did.[24]

Hellman's position is admirable, for it demonstrates a level of moral courage and tenacity with great strength, as well as a willingness to take on the risks inherent within such a position. We can only hope to learn the lesson supplied, and to hold to our own definitions of courage, especially in times of trouble and challenge. Hellman's rendition of her experiences during the McCarthy era exists as a living exhortation towards the formulation and preservation of an active moral conscience, and serves to encourage us all.

END NOTES

[1] Robert Griffin and Athan Theoharis, Eds., The Spectre: Original Essays on the Origins of the Cold War and the Effects of McCarthyism (New York: New Viewpoints Press, 1964), p. xi.

[2] Joseph R. McCarthy, in a speech delivered before the Republican Women's Club, Wheeling, West Virginia, on February 9, 1950.

[3] Samuel Stouffer, Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties (New York: Doubleday, 1955), p. 87.

[4] Griffith and Theoharis, p. xi.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Michael Rogin, The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Spectre (Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1967), pp. 248-260

[7] Talcott Parsons, Ed. American Sociology: Perspectives, Problems, Methods (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 330-331.

[8] Les K. Adler, "The Politics of Culture: Hollywood and the Cold War" in The Spectre anthology.

[9] Eric Johnston, in a speech before HUAC, March 27, 1947.

[10] Dorothy B. Jones, "Communism and the Movies: A Study of Film Content", in John Cogley's Report on Blacklisting: Volume I, The Movies (New York: The Fund for the Republic, Inc., 1956), pp. 196-304.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Vincent Hartnett and American Business Consultants, Inc. "Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television" (New York: Counterattack, 1950), pamphlet.

[13] Lillian Hellman, Scoundrel Time in Three (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1979), pp. 600-726.

[14] Ibid., p. 675.

[15] Ibid., p. 719.

[16] Victor S. Navasky, "Recalling Hollywood at the Height of the Cold War", The Christian Science Monitor, January 27, 1981, pp. 18-21.

[17] ---------- Naming Names (New York, Viking Press, 1980), pp. ix-x.

[18] Ibid., p. 317.

[19] Ibid., p. xii.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Hellman, p. 612.

[22] Ibid., p. 615.

[23] Ibid., p. 721.

[24] Ibid., p. 726.

Chapter Six: Moral Failure: Inaction in The Autumn Garden and Avarice in The Little Foxes

In previous chapters such entities as truth and courage have been discussed as essential components of Hellman's moral character. Largely, those discussions have centered upon an examination of the more admirable attributes Hellman displayed, both in her life and in her work. The search for truthfulness and veracity in communicating her dramas as well as the lessons of Hellman's autobiographies live as examples of continued and sustained efforts through which her own sense of a morally virtuous and ethical code contributed an added dimension to her writing.

This chapter addresses two plays that deal with moral failure, which can be seen through the characters in The Autumn Garden and The Little Foxes. The first of these two plays centers upon a group of characters whose lives have not mounted to much of anything, suggesting that those who at least recognize their plight are somewhat better off than those who wander aimlessly down the path of lassitude and moral inactivity, but only if they then choose to change their lives, to do something about their sad state of affairs. These conditions are depicted largely in the primary characters, Constance Tuckerman, Ned Crossman, and Ben Griggs, but others throughout the play exist in a kind of

limbo in which they have allowed their convictions, their ability to act, to be weathered away by indecision, the love of convention, and the intense desire to avoid self-examination at all costs.

In the second play, the greed and avarice demonstrated by Regina Hubbard and her brothers strikes the reader/playgoer as most repugnant, and exemplify the kind of moral failure that occurs when one person's desire for money, power and status overrides his or her ability to act virtuously. Regina even allows her husband to die rather than help him with the very medicine that would save his life. Yet Hellman meant this play to demonstrate that there are other Reginas in the world; she had meant not to draw her as such an evil figure, but to encourage us to recognize our own symptoms of moral failure through our own displays of greed and avarice.

Again I wish to use the theme of the continuum along which to place the moral ideas of these plays. Hellman was quite committed to action as the only appropriate response to a morally challenging situation, as we have seen in the examples of Montserrat and Herr Muller. To fail to act when one is clearly called upon to do so constitutes a kind of moral failure of its own, for the person turns his back not only upon the chance to change any given situation, but oftentimes refuses to acknowledge its importance in the first place as well as the idea that he has the power to change it. It is as if this person lives with blinders on, either refusing to admit that there are problems in the world or within his own moral code which require action,

which demand a response, or ignoring anything that lies outside the perimeters of his own narrow schemata. At one end of the "moral praxis" continuum, then, lies a point which denotes the inactivity of the morally insensitive, the morally lazy, morally blind, or the arrogant, who choose not to act out of a kind of torpor or out of a belief that they are above any need for the examination of a possibly faulty conscience. Then there are the people who would rather not be "shaken out of the magnolias" such as the members of the Farrelly family; they would seek the comfort of their isolationism to any committed interaction and involvement with others, with their communities, and so on. The characters in The Autumn Garden represent this sort of end point, for in their wasted lives are found the roots and the seeds of moral lassitude and, hence, moral failure.

At the same end of the moral failure spectrum (yet different in the degree or the intensity of their representation of evil) lie the greedy and money-hungry of the world, embodied in the form of the Hubbards in The Little Foxes, who seek fame and fortune on the backs of those they dominate. Oppressive and vain, they consider their wants and needs to be of much greater importance than any one else's sorrows or suffering. Hence, their methods are unscrupulous, their goals dishonorable, their victims people who remain disempowered and poor despite a new source of income for the sleepy southern town in which they all live, which undergoes a kind of transformation as the result of the influx of northern money for the purposes of industrialization. The capitalist investors seek to move their textile production

facility closer to the source of cotton: the South. And in so doing, they bring their brand of oppression and domination, which can be seen to be the larger and community-wide results of their own personal forms of avarice and greed. The Hubbards hope to gain great riches through this mesalliance, and the queen bee of the entire operation is Regina, whose attempts at courting money are no less vicious than her desire to control those within her reach.

We have, then, two plays which both center upon the theme of moral failure, whether it be through the open exercise of evil or through a lack of action, an inability to direct one's life with any worthwhile goals in view. In each drama, there are characters who are outright demoniac, characters whose private designs create the aura of immorality that pervades each play. In The Autumn Garden, each and every character seems affected by an inability to act. The location of their gathering is a somewhat faded and dilapidated summer vacation inn, owned by Constance Tuckerman, which is visited yearly by some regulars, and which, for the first time in twenty years, will be the site of a reunion of sorts between Constance and her former beau, Nick Denery, who uses his charms and wiles to meddle in the affairs of every guest.

Initially, all the visitors speak of how wonderful it is to be reunited again, but it is not long before the entire pleasant facade breaks down in the face of confessions and confrontations, all of which force the individuals involved to take a long hard look at themselves in their state of moral confusion and

misdirection. Constance is having a hard time making ends meet, and her situation is complicated by the fact that she has taken on the care of a niece, Sophie, who is a foreigner and who would rather return to her homeland, despite its aura of political and economic turmoil. Constance is deluded in thinking that she has done the niece a great service by removing her from a seemingly unpleasant situation; this delusion spills over into her expectations about seeing Nick again as well as into her fantasies as to Crossman's feelings for her. Evidently he once did care for her, as did Denery, but both use her as an excuse for the fact that neither of them has conducted his life in a morally worthwhile and meaningful fashion. The shattering of Constance's delusions comprises much of the play's action.

Other guests face some illusion-shattering as well. There is the Ellis family, composed of grandma, mother, and son. Mrs. Ellis is a pretty sharp character. She speaks the truth and sees failure in her daughter and her grandson. She is not taken in by Denery and his tactics, she has great sympathy and understanding for her grandson and his plans to marry Sophie, despite the fact that he seems to be rather taken with a poet named Payson (who, after all, wants Frederick only for his money). Mrs. Ellis controls the purse strings, and rigs it so that Frederick will not be able to keep his travel arrangements with Payson by withdrawing his financial allotment. She quite rightly feels that she is helping her grandson by not allowing him to squander himself on such a parasitic leech, but it is clear that she is manipulative in her own way, and that that manipulation can be

seen to be unseemly, but at least she is quite clear about what she is doing and why she is doing it. This is a refreshing change from the other characters, including her daughter, Carrie, who seeks to control everything Frederick does, including his travel and marriage plans. If one good thing comes of Mrs. Ellis' denial of funds, it is that it leads Frederick to face the fact that, penniless, Payson no longer wants his company. Frederick undergoes an examination of conscience which allows him to see that he has been duped, but which, unfortunately, does not allow him to rise above his mother's control, and he remains one of the characters unable to make decisions for himself, unable to stand on his own with some sense of autonomy. As such, he lets Sophie slip through his hands, for he has not the courage to resist his mother's demands that she take him away for a while. Hence, the Ellises remain, generally speaking, without moral resolve, incapable of changing the torpor that dominates and characterizes their condition.

Then there are Rose and Ben Griggs. Rose is a sort of silly woman who giggles a great deal, and who manipulates her husband. He wishes to have a divorce, recognizing the many years he has wasted in Rose's and the military's service; he hopes to be able just to be by himself, to read for a while, to do what he pleases. He wants to spend his final days doing everything, anything that might matter to him, that might alleviate the sense of purposelessness that typifies his existence. Yet, just as his hopes seem about to be fulfilled, Rose informs him that she has a heart condition, and asks him to stay with her just for a year.

He acquiesces, partly out of a real sense of caring for her, and partly out of his fear that others will find him despicable for any refusal he might render. One of the major speeches of the play (awkwardly written by Hellman and later re-written by Hammett) and the one which best sums up the play's main theme demonstrates his understanding of his condition:

> So at any given moment you're only the sum of your life up to then. There are no big moments you can reach unless you've had a pile of smaller moments to stand on. That big hour of decision, the turning point in your life, the someday you've counted on when you'd suddenly wipe out your past mistakes, do the work you'd never done, think the way you'd never thought, have what you'd never had--it just doesn't come suddenly. You've trained yourself for it while you waited--or you've let it all run past you and frittered yourself away. I've frittered myself away...[1]

Yet he is somewhat grateful that he won't have to be out on his own, which he expresses by saying that perhaps he is actually relieved that this condition prevents him from leaving: "I am not any too sure I didn't partly welcome the medical opinion that made it easier for me to give up...I don't like Rose...I'll live to like her less.[2]

Crossman is in similar straits, for he has intentionally wasted his life. As the result of a long-unrequited love for Constance and its immobilizing effects on Crossman's ability to proceed with a meaningful life, he goes through the motions of a routine filled with banality, wandering aimlessly from bar to bar, returning to his sleeping room long enough to get a few

hour's rest before going to work. He has held dearly to his fantasy that his life may have had meaning if only Constance had returned his affections. He has effectively built his life upon false hope, which is yet another form of self-deception. Constance furthers this fantasy by being secretly pleased when Denery suggests that Crossman has been pining away for her through all the years, yet the accuracy of her delusion must be challenged by the fact that Crossman actually loves her no longer. He merely allows the fact that she did not return his sentiment to serve as a barrier that separated him from reality. He prefers to believe that he would have amounted to something if only Constance had not stood in his way, and states this to her, saying,

> All these years I told myself that if you'd loved me everything would have been different. I'd have had a good life, been worth something to myself...I not only wasted myself, I wanted it that way...
> I've kept myself busy looking into other people's hearts so I wouldn't have to look into my own. If I made you think I was still in love, I'm sorry. Sorry I fooled you and sorry I fooled myself. And I've never liked liars--least of all those who lie to themselves.[3]

In holding to his false dream and its impossible hope, the years pass, and Crossman finds himself in middle-age, evaluating the time he has lived, recognizing that he has used his fantasy about Constance as a means to an end: the avoidance of agency, of self-actualization, of autonomy. He has prevented himself from living with meaning and purpose; his only salvation is in recognizing

his condition. Yet this, too, is a limited form of epiphany, for theory devoid of action remains an incomplete response to such insight, and the play ends before we know just what Crossman's next move will be.

Constance is also shattered by the recognition that she has spent too many years mourning the loss of Denery twenty years before. He is an artist, and returns with his chic yet compassionate wife, ostensibly to enjoy the fellowship of the reunion, but more accurately to try to make some money in painting a companion portrait of Constance to show side-by-side with the one he painted when they were twenty years younger. He displays all manner of charm and elan, only to reveal himself as a manipulative and scheming meddler whose actions nonetheless serve as catalysts through which others might recognize their failings. Yet he, too, admits to his own faults, partly through the fact that his wife, Nina, confronts him with them, and partly through the admission that he has used people in the past to further his own ends. Through the course of the play, Constance recognizes that she has looked forward to his return with too much anticipation, that he has proven himself a scoundrel, and that she was at fault for not wanting to recognize his shortcomings, particularly as they affected her and her niece, in whose bed he sleeps after drinking too much champagne. This causes a great scandal in the small and gossipy town; the neighbor's reactions force Constance to close the house. Denery leaves without ever saying good-bye (while imposing upon his wife to clean up his detestable leavings), and Constance realizes that

she has been lying to herself all those years. [4] The disappointment she has suffered at the hands of Denery is compounded by the recognition that Crossman no longer loves her, and she is left saddened and dismayed by the level of deception (most of which she caused herself) that existed in her life. At the play's end, she invites Crossman to a movie, indicating that perhaps their lives will go on anyhow, that they are people who can still enjoy one another's company, yet Crossman's statement that he will not be returning to the resort in subsequent years renders the suggestion that he is fed up with the charade and no longer wishes to participate in the continued battle of self-deception. Going to the movies will not restore relationships that were based upon faulty premises in the first place, and the drama ends with a sense of the dwindling, the diminution, of valuable human resources: the characters' own dignity and sense of worth.

Hence, the play's main characters each undergo a kind of self-analysis, through which they recognize their state of immobilization through a recognition of the mistakes and illusions with which their lives are imbued. The only character who has a plan of action, a course to follow is Sophie, who realizes that Frederick will not marry her, and who wishes to return to Europe despite an uncertain future there. At least she intends to <u>do</u> something. The others, shaken from their delusions, do not give the impression that their lives will change in any definite or observable way; we feel especially sorry for Griggs, who commits himself to a woman he intensely dislikes, and,

although we might fault him for his indecision and lack of action, we nonetheless acknowledge his desire to help another in trouble. He is clearly trapped, even though much of the trap is of his own making.

As critic Kimball King has suggested, most of the characters in this play suffer from a Chekhovian paralysis of will, which limits their ability to conduct themselves with certitude, with purpose.[5] Crossman can be seen to be the "...engaging but faithless modern man who reflects the shallowness and instability of the times."[6] Indeed, none of the play's characters seems to understand or be involved with larger issues, such as political commitments, or moral casuistical questions. Instead, they are each caught up in the amazingly trivial and meaningless details of their own lives, concerned only with the ways in which they might intersect with the lives of others, and even then only long enough to ascertain whether or not that junction will be of any benefit or use to them, as in the case of the Denerys. Constance lives for Nick's return; Griggs hopes to divorce Rose, Crossman would like only to get through the day. Each person exists in a kind of dream-like realm in which someone else's presence, activity, or lack of involvement creates either false hope or disillusionment which is, nonetheless, devoid of resolution through action.

In The Little Foxes, we meet yet another cast of characters who seem interested in each other only to the extent that one might benefit from such association, and primarily in order to gain wealth or power through such union. This is achieved here

through nasty manipulation and the display of avarice and greed. Blackmail is rampant throughout this drama, and seems to serve as one of Hellman's preferred methods for depicting personal power plays. One critic has said that, in this play, the baseness of human nature is at hand in all its glory, while adding that most of Hellman's plays deal with some level of moral failure which often becomes more evident as it is seen in contrast to someone who is morally good, as is the case between Teck and Muller in Watch on the Rhine.[7] Here we have Oscar and Ben Hubbard, two merchants out to make it big, to strike it rich, egged on by their money-hungry and society-page conscious sister, Regina. She is married to banker Horace Giddens, who is away in the north in a hospital, seeking treatment for a bad heart. Regina and her brothers scheme with a Mr. Marshall of Chicago, who wishes to bring his textile mill to their southern town, in order to maximize profits through savings on transportation, the free water he has been promised, and cheaper labor through the willingness of poor blacks and mountain whites to work for next to nothing. Marshall represents the heavy hand of capitalism at its best, for his goal is to increase his profits as the result of his oppressive policies towards the laborers. The Hubbards are fully aware of his tactics and the impact they will have on the community, for their own father made his fortune by lending goods and money to blacks at highly inflated interest rates, and by selling salt at exorbitant prices to the Union soldiers during the Civil War.[8] They are merchants, who represent the desire of the middle class to be fully respected members of the upper

echelon through an increase in their financial worth. They think that the acquisition of wealth will make them more readily acceptable to those they wish to impress, and whose respect they desire.

They each have families. Oscar Hubbard is married to Birdie, a fading beauty who represents the decline of the more genteel aspects of the Old South, particularly as she longs for the restoration of her beloved childhood home, Lionnet, a plantation on which the blacks were loved and treated "well", and upon which no one ever lost his temper, as her father had claimed. Later in the play we learn that she drinks privately, and in great amounts. She does this partly in order to console herself as to her loss of stature and grace after the transference of Lionnet to Oscar Hubbard, whom she has married. His brother, Ben, wanted its cotton, and Oscar remained pleasant long enough to give the semblance of a suitor, and Birdie was, initially, pleased with him and his attentions. But we learn that it is a marriage which has as its base financial considerations, and, as such, Birdie's pleasure is short-lived, particularly as she observes traits in Oscar that are less than genteel: he is cruel. He shoots game for the sheer joy of killing, and brings down so many birds, squirrels, and rabbits that the poor blacks have no game for themselves. They would give anything for a piece of meat, yet Oscar has terrorized them by threatening to harm them if they should be caught hunting in the area. He wants all of the game for himself, but he doesn't use any of it, and we see the display of his greed, particularly as measured against the very real

needs of those people for whom Oscar has no compassion. He is also cruel to Birdie; he slaps her hard during the play's action when she oversteps her "bounds", and, upon other occasions, he is controlling and domineering. She is fairly afraid of him, and can only reveal her true feelings when she is rather drunk.[10] She warns her niece, Alexandra, by saying that, if she is not careful, the family members will manipulate her, too, and the warning comes none too soon. Oscar tries to negotiate Alexandra's marriage with his reprobate son, Leo, hoping that such a union will secure his son's financial future. This dealing in people's lives is yet another example of the depths to which the Hubbards are willing to stoop, and we are sympathetic to Birdie's plight.

Oscar's brother Ben is a bit brighter than his siblings, yet his desire for money at any level, at any cost, finds him in several negotiations, ever eager to strike a bargain, a compromise, provided that the end result produces an increase in his assets. He is eager to keep everybody happy and tries to go along with every new deal that is struck. He is pragmatic in his approach, and his desire to see the construction of the new mill dictates his reasoning and his responses. He even agrees to Oscar's plans for Leo and Alexandra, for it is in his best interest to keep Oscar content with the arrangement, through which Regina's larger share (which she has been able to demand because Horace's money is so badly needed) is made from Oscar's reduced allotment of the family riches. Even Regina, who has nothing but disgust for Leo (who can discuss only his ladies in Mobile and his fast horses), puts off confronting the actual

marriage arrangements until a later time in an effort to soothe Oscar's anxieties. As such, she joins Ben in his efforts to allay fears and contain dissent.

Regina and Horace's daughter, Alexandra, is close to her father but wary of her mother, for, though she is young and somewhat naive, she has nevertheless been an observer of the decline in her father's condition as well as a witness to her parents' domestic squabbles and is able to envision a cause-and-effect relation. She misses her father while he is away, and rejoices when she is asked to go and bring him home. The reason for his return? The scheming Hubbards need his money to invest in their share of the proposed mill, and they wish to bring Horace home not out of concern that he should recouperate among loved ones, as Regina suggests, but rather to gain access to his money. Thus Alexandra is dispatched to Baltimore to accompany her father upon his trip.

He is seriously ill; Regina knows this and yet risks his health in requesting that he travel because of her greed and her desire to be accepted into society as a woman of great riches and good breeding. Her calculations are base enough to include deception, for she has Alexandra deliver the message that she wants her husband to return to her, that she has missed him. We find out later in the play that Horace had been very much in love with Regina at the time of their marriage, but that she envisioned their union only as a means to an end: her secured financial future. When she discovered that Horace was not going to conduct his life in the pursuit of riches at any cost, as did

her father, she realized that he could not provide the kind of life-style to which she aspired, and she turned from him, both in personal feeling and with respect to the marriage-bed with its attendant responsibilities and delights. She also lied to Horace, in that she stated that she had seen a physician who had determined that she was not well; therefore, Horace was not to approach her sexually any longer. When he acquiesced, she turned from him further, disgusted at a man who could not see through her devices. She informs him during the play's last few scenes that she had lied to him then, and the horror that he experiences, both at her deception and her manipulation of him is compounded by the painful recognition that she never did love him. This realization leads to Horace's heart attack, and the death-scene ensues. He reaches for the medicine bottle which is placed on a nearby table, but the bottle drops and the medicine spills out. Regina stands by, watching his misery, refusing to call the servant, Addie, to get the spare bottle. Horace collapses and Regina waits a fair amount of time before she suddenly calls for help, but, of course, it is too late.[11]

Regina allows Horace to become unconscious and then to die for he has really fixed her financial future, and she doesn't like the deal. Horace had refused to invest in the cotton mill, for he detested the kind of subsequent suffering it would cause, and he despised the kind of greed that was so clearly evident in his wife and her family.

> 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? To pound the bones of this town to make dividends for you to spend? You wreck the town, you and your brothers, you wreck the town and live on it. Not me. Maybe it's easy for the dying to be honest. But it's not my fault I'm dying. I'll do no more harm now. I've done enough. I'll die my own way. And I'll do it without making the world any worse. I leave that to you.[12]

Horace has come to a moral realization that all Regina is, all that she stands for, is rooted in greed. He refuses to be a part of that arrangement, and will have nothing to do with her plans. However, Leo has made it known to his father and uncle that Horace possess some bonds that are negotiable as cash, and that, although Horace keeps them in a safety deposit box at his bank, Leo has access to the keys. The Hubbards make plans for Leo to steal the bonds, and Oscar travels to Chicago to finalize the deal with Marshall. Horace discovers the theft, but decides to say that he has loaned the money, thereby fixing it so that Regina's financial future will be nothing, for he changes his will, bequeathing to her only the missing bonds. She is furious, of course, and then unleashes her fury through the ugly, nasty scene that leads to Horace's death. Yet despite the sense we may have that her hands are tied, it is a temporary illusion, for Regina's greed is the kind that prevails even in times of disappointment and through major set-backs; we can believe that she and all those like her will continue in their attempts to gain access to money and power through the sufferings of others.

It is interesting to note that Hellman makes many of her moral observations through the eyes (and, therefore, speeches) of

the servants, as if to say that the disempowered and the oppressed can recognize the oppression for what it is and can speak of it clearly and simply. Addie recognizes the kind of greed that exists before her eyes, for it is has affected her and her people throughout history.

> Yeah, they got might well-off cheating niggers. 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. Sometimes I think it ain't right to stand and watch them do it.[13]

She sees very clearly the nature of the greed that constitutes this kind of moral failure. There is the misconception that money brings happiness in the first place, and the love of power with its concommitant devices and abuses of others is seen to be the source of evil in the characters who embrace these destructive desires. Addie speaks these words in the presence of Birdie, Alexandra, and Horace, for they make her feel as one of them: she <u>can</u> talk this way in their presence for they have made it clear that she is a valued member of the household. She surely would not address Regina or Oscar in this fashion. Hence, Hellman arranges it so that those who share in an appreciation of each other and in a recognition of the evil around them can also discuss a means of leaving, thereby saving themselves through a presumably good and morally upright life elsewhere. Horace instructs Addie to take Alexandra away from the horrors of life among such corrupt people. And, indeed, his daughter questions

her mother about the reasons behind her father's collapse, implying that she suspects foul play. Her mother challenges Alexandra's ability and independence in leaving her, but she is firm, resolute, indicating that she will make trouble for her mother if she is stopped. When she is invited to sleep in her mother's room, presumably to receive some calming and consolation after all that has befallen her, Alexandra responds, "Are you afraid, Mama?"[15] We have hope for Alexandra, believing as we might in her promise that she will be fighting elsewhere, just as hard as her uncle Ben and those of his ilk will be fighting in their own greedy fashion, for a better and more morally conscionable way of life.

Yet Hellman would have us remain alert, aware of the great numbers of those in the world who emulate the Hubbard mentality, as is represented in Ben's speech:

> The century'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 their names aren't Hubbard, but they are all Hubbards and they will own this country someday. We'll get along.[16]

Indeed they will. Unless, as Hellman exhorts, there are those who might fight against them, those who might consider their ways and values to be corrupt, those who would stand against evil, corruption and greed, the Hubbards of the world will not only come to power, they will prevail and dominate. Hellman saw the nature of this kind of greed, its destructive power, its

embodiment of moral failure and collapse. She saw the suffering of others as its end result, and she cried out against its existence. Hence, this play represents Hellman's vision of evil, and includes her admonishment against capitulation to the moral failure inherent within the Hubbard mentality, replete with its lack of compassion and virtuous conduct. We are invited to sympathize with those who envision a better mode of life, the Addies and Alexandras and Horaces of the world, who, even with the victims like Birdie (who nonetheless can recognize the evil even if they do not have the power to overcome its negative effects) seek to address the nature of evil, its perpetrators, and who try to create better alternatives.

Others agree that Hellman's play is a powerful treatise, steeped as it is in displays of evil and avarice. Ruth McKenney, writing in New Masses in 1939 said:

> The sight isn't pretty. On the contrary. It is completely devastating. The Little Foxes is played to audiences who feel sick in the pits of their stomachs, watching the rich make their money. But if the birth of a fortune is not pleasant, it is exceedingly instructive. Miss Hellman suggests that the way to riches is paved with a little impolite thievery at the expense of one's nearest and dearest, buttered up with a slight touch of knavery, cheating Negroes, playing on race hate, paying sure-fire starvation wages, and government corruption.[17]

Yet Hellman may not have meant for the Hubbards to be so one-sidedly evil. In fact, in an interview with Richard Stern, she stated that she was surprised that Regina was perceived so

one-dimensionally; she had intended for us to see ourselves as often acting out of our own greed, to be aware of it and its negative implications. She added that, "People who have lived very full lives will suddenly get fake morals about what they see on stage." She also had meant to create a Birdie who was pathetic, a lost drunk, rather than someone who so completely evokes our sympathy.[18] Yet we do feel that Birdie is treated badly, even as she seems out of touch in her mourning for a lost and dying South, and we have a sense of sorrow that, to some extend, her misfortune is of her own doing. Katherine Lederer posits that Hellman intended that the Hubbards be seen as both sinister and comic; we might laugh at their sparring and the shifts in the power base at any given moment, yet to describe their antics as humorous asks that we see evil as a funny entity.[19] I do not believe Hellman was asking this reaction of us as much as she was suggesting that we have a kind of empathy for those forces that might influence our own behavior, to recognize that evil exists among all people, that it is a commonly occurring phenomenon, that we all must deal with it in one way or another, particularly as it might affect our own moral spectrum with respect to the formations of our own ethical code. Even though we need to be aware of the existence of evil in our own lives, it is quite clear that the kind of avarice and greed found in The Little Foxes is an unacceptable level of moral failure, and Hellman's position in reaction to this kind of evil is quite clear.

Hence, these two plays represent different yet similar kinds

of moral failure, existing as they do as points in close proximity at the end of the moral spectrum, along the continuum we might describe as being one that deals with moral issues and the lack of an appropriate moral resolution. The torpor and moral lassitude that characterize The Autumn Garden and the rampant evil in The Little Foxes combine to embody Hellman's own recognition of the existence of evil, its impact on people's lives and upon their responses to moral and ethical dilemmas. As such, they serve to illuminate the problems of those who might be confronted with their own lack of morality, regardless of its kind or degree. Hellman's very strong commitment to her own moral and political convictions are not obscured by the events and character portrayals revealed within the plays; rather, we are reminded again of her stance with respect to moral inactivity and greed, and once again must admire her dedication to her position, even if we agree or disagree with its basic assumptions.

END NOTES

1 Lillian Hellman, The Autumn Garden, Collected Plays (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1972), pp. 541-542.

2 Ibid., p. 542.

3 Ibid., pp. 544-545.

4 Ibid., p. 545.

5 Kimball King, "Lillian Hellman", pp. 269-271 in Twentieth Century American Literature (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), p. 270.

6 Garff B. Wilson, Ed. Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theater: From "Ye Bare and Ye Cub" to "Hair" (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 459.

7 Ibid., p. 419.

8 For a fuller dramatization of this story, see "Another Part of the Forest" in Collected Plays, pp. 325-404.

9 Lillian Hellman, The Little Foxes, Collected Plays, pp. 188-189.

10 Ibid., p. 183.

11 Ibid., pp. 188-189.

12 Ibid., pp. 176-177.

13 Ibid., p. 182.

14 Ibid., pp. 183-184.

15 Ibid., pp. 199-200.

16 Ibid., p. 197.

17 Ruth McKenney, "Birth of a Fortune", New Masses, 2-28-39, p. 47.

18 Richard G. Stern, "Lillian Hellman on Her Plays", Contact, 3, 1959, pp. 118-119.

[19] Katherine Lederer, "The Foxes Were Waiting for Horace, Not Lefty: The Use of Irony in Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes", West Virginia University Philological Papers, 8-26-80, pp. 93-104.

Summary and Conclusion

Throughout this work I have attempted to illustrate points of interest with respect to Lillian Hellman's moral vision and its deployment in her works along that which I have called a continuum. This imaginary line suggests the existence of those seemingly opposite and paradoxical themes which, at times, serve as diametrically opposed and dichotomous representations of the various ways Hellman responded to moral issues, both in her personal life and in her dramatic creations. For example, at one end of the spectrum lie the points having to do with a "good" or morally virtuous approach to life's questions; these points include such ideas as Hellman's efforts to be truthful, even when such attempts were somewhat paradoxical in nature, for Hellman's views about her ability to be truthful changed, often as the result of the aging process. One did the best one could despite any remaining inner desire to attain a moral absolute. Many of Hellman's moral stances can be viewed along the length of a continuum: the use of her anger when addressing situations that appeared to be unjust; the causes for which she campaigned by raising funds and speaking publicly; her courage in challenging and threatening circumstances; and her many admirable actions all combine to render Hellman a fascinating study in moral strength, in commitment to activism, and in courage. Moreover, her love of

justice, her virtuous disposition, her attempts at decency are revealed throughout her plays via those characterizations that emerged from the well-spring of Hellman's own ethical code. As such, these dramas, peopled with the villainous as well as the conscientious, exist not only as excellent works of art, but as plays which contain a certain element of didacticism through which Hellman's audiences might better understand their own moral positions in the world.

Yet I do not mean to say that Hellman's virtuousness was devoid of struggle or conflict, nor do I wish to imply that she never experienced times of moral crisis. Indeed, Hellman did struggle, both within herself and with outside forces, such as with the demands of an often unscrupulous Dashiell Hammett, with the HUAC committee, with literary and dramatic critics, all of whom attempted to press Hellman to conform, to change, to meet their ideas of what she should be. She resisted these efforts, remaining, in the end, "nobody's girl." Yet she regretted the many battles she endured, especially those that seemed useless, as in the case of the many times, in their early relationship, when she capitulated to Hammett's demands. Her stubbornness and commitment prevailed, and their later relationship proved to be rewarding and stable. It is to Hellman's credit that she remained faithful to her ideas of what a relationship should be; her insistence on fidelity and decency resulted in happiness, at least during their last years together. Certainly these struggles had an impact upon Hellman's evolving moral consciousness, especially as she sought to discover her own identity, her needs,

her sense of herself as a thinker, a woman, lover, and creator. Chapter One dealt, in part, with Hellman's early moral development, focusing as it did on several key or "turning point" episodes to further delineate the development of her moral code. Hellman's moral "landscape" incorporated the many-faceted nature of a multi-dimensional personality, replete with complexity, and merged even seemingly disparate elements into a comprehensive whole. Hellman's moral code allowed for the co-existence of positive and negative factors, which, after all, is the best example of her ability to integrate all aspects of her experience as a woman and a writer, no matter how diverse those aspects might have been.

In discussing the continuum theme, especially with respect to Hellman's moral vision, it can be said that there exist several sub-continuae, which have their own places within the larger whole. For example, Chapters Two and Three discuss a "truth" continuum, which guarantees certainty on the one hand, while suggesting that truth is elusive and slippery on the other. Through a discussion of the play The Children's Hour I hope to have demonstrated the nature of the malicious lie and its effect upon its victims, and upon those who told it, believed it and advanced its cause. In an examination of the drama Montserrat I suggest that the protagonist is aware that his lie is still an example of wrong-doing, despite the righteousness of the end for which the lie is employed. Hellman attempted to write with veracity, despite her sometimes painful acknowledgment that such an effort did not always result in the desired product, but at

least she tried to indicate that she was uncertain by using such phrases as "I don't remember" or "I'm not sure." Most of Maybe (and, indeed, the title alone suggests this) posits that nothing can be certain, that facts, dates, names and places are but illusory and intangible in the end, in the mish mash of all the years and the tangled threads of the carpets that become our lives. Even the ability to know ourselves changes with each passing day, and the commitment to any moral cause such as that exhibited in Montserrat's conflict seemed, in Hellman's later years, to be "no longer made of much that can be leaned against." Hence, this "truth" continuum contains both the elements of surety and uncertainty, while allowing for the co-existence of these seemingly disparate entities.

With respect to Chapters Four and Five, there is another sub-continuum. This one attempts to discuss Hellman's moral courage, primarily through her character Kurt Muller in Watch on the Rhine and through her own struggle with HUAC in the McCarthy era. Muller is an example of a hero who is not heroic in the traditional model, for he recognizes that his beliefs exact a price, paid for in the form of his family's happy yet shabby existence in hiding, in the form of injuries to himself and the constant danger he faces, and in the form of the acceptance of the moral responsibility he has in having to murder Teck. At one end of the courage continuum there is outright bravery, observable, for example, when a hero wins a battle of some kind. At the other end is sheer cowardice, in which the existence of fear is insurmountable. Although Hellman's courage in drawing

Muller and in her appearance before HUAC are admirable, the point must be made that neither acted in complete bravery, devoid of fear. Hellman certainly experienced trepidation and discomfort before and during her hearing, and watched the clock, hoping for a break in the proceedings. She trembled, perspired, and developed a nervous tick. Yet her inner spirit prevailed, and she emerged the victor. Just as we honor Muller for his ability to act on behalf of courageous resisters, so, too, can we admire Hellman for her ability to face the HUAC challenge.

Chapter Six seeks to delineate the points of yet another continuum, one of moral failure. This failure is represented through the moral lassitude of the characters in the play, The Autumn Garden, on one end of the continuum, and through the avarice and greed of the Hubbards in The Little Foxes at the other end. Constance Tuckerman, Ben Griggs, and Ned Crossman, among others, exist in a kind of frozen torpor, immobile in their inability to respond to life's moral challenges, and they effectively use each other to stay that way. Conversely, the Hubbards and their ilk act only out of greed, avarice, and revenge in their efforts to become wealthy and powerful. They are only too willing to sacrifice the best interests of the poor and the blacks to forward their own designs. Hellman argued, through these characters, that moral failure took many forms, and that the indecision and awkward groping of Tuckerman et al. is at least as insidious as the rampant evil of the Hubbards. Hence, Hellman's moral vision continued to make itself evident in these plays as well.

The continuum theme has proven to be useful to me in this endeavor, for it allows for a certain flexibility in the presentation of ideas and considerations that are rooted in dichotomy and that co-exist in Hellman's life as well as in her work. These ideas are the representation of a very full and rich life, during which many concepts and ideologies were tested, "tried on", to then be accepted, rejected, or integrated into the wonderfully complex areas of "grey" with which we are usually so uncomfortable: we'd like all things to be simple, black or white. The continuum model allows for the consideration of all ideas, even as they might contradict one another, even as they live as opposite end points. It is through the continuum that we might understand the struggles inherent in many of the paradoxes present in the moral challenges Hellman faced, with an eye to understanding our own ability to meet such challenges. Hellman endured her own uncertainty; she grew, she questioned, she debated. It is through the continuum that we might view the range and the divergent nature of the elements of Hellman's moral code, particularly as she offered the wisdom of her experience to those of us who might seek to avoid or embrace moral dilemma, even those areas of struggle that appear gray and unresovable.

Hellman's force as a moral voice cannot be ignored for its tone was a compelling one, deeply moving, logical even in its complexity, based as it was on beliefs by which she attempted to live. These beliefs resulted in the formation of standards whose requirements she exacted not only of her friends but of herself as well. Her moral commitment and the exercise of it in dramatic

form led others to question the suitability of the role of the author/artist as ideologist, as one who presents any given platform, who exhorts her public to any particular opinion, believe, or point of action.[1] In Hellman's life as in her work, the political is fused with the artistic and neither entity suffers at the hands of its complement. Hellman's award-winning plays and memoirs move us, lead us to examine the nature of our own ethical codes, and urge us to action in ways that are as poetic, as artistic, as they are the hallmarks of a firebrand orator.

END NOTES

[1] For an interesting and challenging discussion of the role of author as ideologist, see Albert Maltz, "What Shall We Ask of Writers" in New Masses, 2/12/46, pp. 19-22 and Lillian S. Robinson, "Dwelling in Decencies: Radical Criticism and the Feminist Perspective" in College English, May, 1971, pp. 879-889.

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