

MISS HELLMAN'S MOOD PLAYS: The Autumn Garden AND
Toys in the Attic

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The Autumn Garden and Toys in the Attic are probably the most mature plays ever written by Miss Hellman. They, as well as The Little Foxes and Another Part of the Forest, belong to the Southern cycle family dramas and, as such, deal specifically with the Southern background and way of life.

The Autumn Garden intertwines the lives of several couples, long-time "guests" at Constance Tuckerman's summer resort home, her living. Sophie, Constance's French niece, helps her with the housework. Among the guests are Nick Denery (Constance's girlhood love) and his wife Nina, General Ben Griggs and his wife Rose, Carrie Ellis (her mother Mrs. Mary Ellis) and her son Frederick, Sophie's fiancé. No alliance is entirely successful, Nina despises Nick for his philandering, but need his company. Ben does not love Rose, but decides to go on living with her because it is easier and because he pities her. Frederick relies on an homosexual relationship with a man called Payson in order to escape from his mother Carrie's possessiveness. Sophie blackmails Nick after the neighbors find out that he has slept in her room. She wants the money to return to Europe. Constance discovers that she should have married Crossman, but that it is now too late. Little changes: the characters only become more aware of their realities. Toys in the Attic is set in the Berniers house in New Orleans. As the action begins Julian Berniers is returning back home with his

wife, Lily. Anna and Carrie, his sisters, receive them effusively, but the fact that he is now rich disappoints them. They would rather have him dependent upon them for the rest of their lives. Lily suspects that he has married her for her family's money. Only Albertine Prine, Lily's mother, rejoices over Julian's success. The climax comes when Lily learns that Julian has extorted money from a powerful lawyer, whose wife had been Julian's lover. In a fit of jealousy and despair she informs against her husband. Warkins, the lawyer, has Julian spanked and robbed. As the play ends Julian is again dependent upon Lily and his sisters' money.

These plays differ from the Hubbard sequence in that they stress mood. In their own ways they show the social phenomena of their time more through characters than through plot and action. The Little Foxes and Another Part of the Forest present Miss Hellman's protest against the exploitation of man and land. She now changes her thesis to the more personal theme that existence is only meaningful in action. The psychological atmosphere carries the message. The scene and the season suggest the tension which manifests itself in the conflicts between the characters. Situations are shown, nothing is explained, nothing is proved. The dynamics of plot and action gives way to the statics of mood and idea. The change in method and theme provokes an equally meaningful change in language. The dialogues are less abrupt, more subtle, less obvious, more loosely constructed. There is a tendency to lyricism and, as a consequence, a movement from the objective to the symbolic, as, for example, when Lily remembers her wedding day and her feelings connected with it: "(smiling, suddenly uplifted, happy). Did it rain? I don't remember. It was all days

to me: Cold and hot days, fog and light, and I was on a high hill running down with the top of me, and flying with the left of me, and singing with the right of me—(Softly) I was doing everything nice anybody had ever done nice"¹ (p. 699). The characters gain a third dimension. Unlike the previous plays where Miss Hellman takes sides, here she exposes facts and feelings without judging them. Mood, without judgement, finds its most natural expression in setting and scene.

The scene of The Autumn Garden and Toys in the Attic is the Deep South. The first play is set in a summer vacation town on the Gulf of Mexico, about a hundred miles from New Orleans, a place and situation Lillian Hellman knows from her childhood. Born in New Orleans, she moved to New York when she was six. But she kept coming back to her native town to stay at her aunts' boarding house for six months each year. There she observed the life of the boarders, although she, at the time, "did not connect the grown men and women in literature with the grown men and women"² she saw around her. The second play also draws on her experience, perhaps more so. It is set in New Orleans, not in a vacation house, but still people come and go. Miss Hellman had meant to make Julian the center of her play. She could not. She explains: "I don't think characters turn out the way you think they are going to turn out. They don't always go your way. At least they don't go my way,"³ "I can write about men, but I can't write a play that centers on a man."⁴ The result of her efforts was a play focusing on women and place. The women were Julian's sisters, his wife,

her mother. The place was the same "solid middle class" (p. 685) New Orleans house she had known in her childhood.

In both plays the setting shows a house once luxurious, but now becoming old and shabby and decadent, like its inhabitants. In both plays the season is summer. The characters are lethargic. Heat affects them as it does the crops. Hellman is not alone as a Southerner writer in expressing this environmental influence. Such influence is, for example, the particular hallmark of Tennessee Williams' plays. He too uses heat as a metaphor for the oppressive human condition of the Southerner. It is not simply a fictional device. The Southern economy and life traditionally relied upon agriculture. Produce is dependent upon the weather: too wet, too dry, too hot, too cold. It can make the difference between eating and starving, between success and failure. The Southerner has always related his happiness to his environment. When the environment reacts unkindly, as when it is too hot, the people, rooted to their land like the plants, can only stay and suffer. So it is with Miss Hellman's characters. The oppressive heat of Toys in the Attic wilts the characters. It also expresses their depression. The opening dialogue (Act One) establishes the mood and prepares for the violence to come:

Carrie (as she hears Anna moving about in the kitchen).

That you, Anna?

Anna (her voice). Just got home.

Carrie. Hot.

Anna. Paper says a storm.

Carrie. I know. I'll take the plants in.

Anna. I just put them out. Let them have a little storm air.

Carrie. I don't like them out in a storm. Worries me. I don't like storms. I don't believe plants do, either (p. 685).

Carrie transfers her feelings to the plants.

People and vegetables are exposed to the same natural laws and subject to the same catastrophes. Carrie, as her name suggests, is as passive as the plants and so are several characters in the play. They moan and groan and suffer, but have no control over their deeds, no capacity to change.

This passage from Toys in the Attic as well as the title The Autumn Garden emphasize the influence of weather and season on living beings and convey Miss Hellman's intention to relate mankind with nature, characters with setting.

In these plays the archetypal motif is that man's life is a natural life. Mankind is translated into nature. The garden functions as the microcosmos for the world of humans. The end of summer equals the end of growth, be it plant or human. The symbolic meaning attached to the plant-man metaphor is not new. This basic archetypal motif is particularly appropriate to the South, where one's fate as a human is directly affected by the fate of the vegetable kingdom of crops, of plants, of the Southern climate, of long hot summers and dreary winters.

Two connections can be made. One, as the economy goes, so goes the happiness of the characters. And two, as climate, setting, and weather must be endured, attempts to surmount them do not succeed. The truth is that the characters only

approach greatness as they try to get rid of the environmental influence. The greater their failure to break out of the grip of circumstance, the greater they take on tragic characteristics. This is the closest that Miss Hellman comes to dramatizing the tragic condition, and that, in the twentieth century, is more successful than the attempts of most dramatists. Still Miss Hellman suggests that the characters are no more responsible for their misfortunes than they are for the heat or for the condition of nature in general. So Carrie relates to Anna her conversation with her boss:

Carrie. He let me leave the office after lunch.
"You're looking a little peaked, Miss Berniers, from the heat." "I said I've been looking a little peaked for years in heat, in cold, in rain, when I was young and now" (p. 686).

Such psychological, rather than economic or environmental determinism, recurs throughout the play. Later Carrie mentions: "Oh, it's too hot tonight," and, when Lily remarks "My, it's awfully hot to go to work" (p. 713), Carrie replies: "Yes. And sometimes it's awfully cold" (p. 713).

Lillian Hellman makes good use of the antithesis cold-heat. She contrasts Albertine's aloofness and self-reliance with Anna, Carrie and Lily's emotional dependence. When the eccentric lady comes to inform the two sisters about Julian's arrival, she makes a movement to enter the house, then hesitates and says to Henry: "Perhaps it would be best if you went in. I'm not good at seeing people anymore, and there will be much

chatter. (He doesn't answer her. She laughs). Very well. But I'm sure it's hot in there. Would you tell them I'm out here?" (p. 692). Heat here stultifies people into a lack of action and incapability.

This same opposition of heat to cold recurs meaningfully throughout the plays, and is an important device to convey the mood. Heat and cold support life when well used—destroy it if abused. Both can be measured scientifically, but in the mind of the individual they have subjective connotations. They can express one's degree of emotional balance, dependence, and self-reliance. In Toys in the Attic Lily "toils not." She—like Anna and especially like Carrie—is weak, inactive and emotionally dependent. She calls for Albertine: "Where's Mama?" (p. 742) and not finding her turns to Carrie, as impotent as herself: "Don't you want to help me? It's hot" (p.742).

The notion of heat is also implied in the very title of the play. The attic is a room in the top of the house, immediately under the roof. No insulation is used in attics and consequently they are very hot in the summer and very cold in the winter. The attic, moreover, is a place where things are put away for being either useless or infrequently used. As they are things they are passive and as they are passive they must suffer both heat or cold according to the season. There are two different levels of interpretation for the word "toys" in the title. In a first level the characters are living playthings. They are submissive, dependent, and unable to control their feelings even though they can tell right from wrong. They lack self-assurance and self-control and so are

driven by their emotions—too hot, too cold. A second interpretation is that the "toys" stand for mementos of past happiness or past life, future wishes and future dreams. Toys are objects which stimulate the imagination of the child, but they do not intrinsically have the quality to fulfill its necessities. Toys beget illusions and not reality.

The same change from hot to cold is implied in the title of The Autumn Garden. Here again the metaphor is plants. In this play Lillian Hellman moves a step along in the season and instead of having toys in a hot summer attic she focuses on an autumn garden somewhere between the end of summer and winter as the middle-aged characters are somewhere between ripe and rot. Once more she evokes heat to convey the psychological tension of her characters. Rose Griggs tries to start a conversation with her husband about their impending divorce and so she says: "It was not so hot in town. Henry's got that wonderful air conditioning, of course, but it's never like your own air. I think Sunday's the hottest day of the year anyway" (p. 539). This disjointed speech is symbolic of her equally disjointed state of mind. Rose hates the idea of losing her husband's affection, and her emotional unstableness is expressed by means of the antithesis heat/cold, as it appears in the form of hot weather/air conditioning. Heat is connected with Rose, her anxieties, her insecurity, her desire to be young again or at least to look young, her need to lure General Griggs back to her. The air conditioning represents the artificiality

of town life, its coldness and impersonality. In both plays the heat is oppressive. It has slightly different connotations in different contexts, but the basic meaning is that life vanishes and people will achieve very little. The equation is: heat equals emotional dependence and inaction, cold equals aloofness and artificiality. And people equal toys and plants. People and plants must achieve ripeness, but it will only come after a continuous process of maturation. They need warmth and water, but not heat and cold and storm.

The philosophical problem of relating being, growing, and doing is what Miss Hellman attempts to present in her Mood Plays. For that reason she creates her characters and lets them, like unstable compounds, wander from one mode of existence to another. Some of them revert to what they had always been but others evolve from toys into plants and from plants into individuals, who are, as Lorena R. Holmin says, "forced simultaneously into self-confrontation."⁵

This self-confrontation results in the characters' recognition of their failure in life and their responsibility for it. It comes suddenly through the unexpected influence of a catalyst. He is Nick in The Autumn Garden and Julian in Toys in the Attic. There are obvious similarities. Nick and Julian are Southerners who had been away in Europe and Chicago, respectively, and were anxiously expected back. They are superficial, simple-minded, emotionally dependent and psychologically weak. Their wives Nina and Lily, are both rich women. They recognize their husbands' flaws and yet cultivate them. The reason for such an apparent contradiction is that these very

flaws keep husband and wife together. Nick tells Nina that she hates herself for loving him because she has contempt for his inconstancy, his shallowness, his ostentation and his lies. And when she mentions she would not have married him if she had known him well, he replies: "You would have married me. Or somebody like me. You've needed to look down on me. And to be ashamed of yourself for doing it" (p. 531). The relationship between Nick and Nina is described as that of a weak and superficial man, unfaithful but dependent on his wife, whose unconscious sadomasochism needs the company of such an immature husband.

Julian is incapable of earning money and keeping it. His sisters are aware of that, and when he suddenly comes back home without even a short notice, they wonder what might have happened to the shoe factory business he had started with Lily's money:

Carrie."... What do you think?

Anna. I think it's happened again. And he feels bad and doesn't want to tell us.

Carrie. Well, that's natural enough. Who wants to come home and say they've failed? (p. 695).

Lily and Carrie want Julian to remain poor and consequently dependent on them. Lily suffers when he succeeds. She says to his sister: "I feel most bad and sad, Miss Carrie, because what he married me for, he doesn't need anymore" (p. 740). Albertine, Lily's mother, is shocked and advises her:"Are you really saying that if Julian stayed dependent on you, all would be safe"(p.719),

"... be happy that Julian has finally had a little luck. Lily, he would have come to hate your money" (p. 719).

Nick is basically indifferent to the feelings of his companions and too superficial to care. Julian, in turn, unconsciously unbalances the apparent harmony of the family, bringing its hatred, frustrations, complexes and inertia into the open. Nick and Julian function in these plays as catalysts that bring on action in a chemical compound, but it is Griggs who has vision, and like the Greek chorus, echoes, in the last act of The Autumn Garden, Miss Helman's thesis that existence is only meaningful in our daily acts: "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 a pile of smaller moments to stand on. That big hour of decision, the turning point in your life, the some day 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 frittered yourself away, Crossman" (pp. 541-42). The symbolic meaning of the plant-man metaphor can be extended here. Both plant and man grow slowly. Their movement from birth to maturation and then to age is gradual though imperceptible to the eye. Its result, obvious. A plant needs everyday care to yield good fruit. A man's successful life is not made of one heroic moment. It is the sum of everyday, simple, positive good deeds. Men, like plants, cannot easily change their place, situation, condition. They may be destroyed. Even Sophie shows that her strength comes from her natural habitat and must go back to Europe at war, where she belongs. Carrie, like

Griggs, feels the inefficacy of her existence, empty of smaller but firm moments for her to stand on. She, like Griggs, recognizes the tragedy of her life, of Anna's life, hers and Anna's hubris. They also frittered themselves away waiting for that big hour of wealth, power, self-reliance. They have dreamed of getting rich and making Julian rich, of going to Europe, of family love, and when their dreams come true they hate those dreams and they hate themselves most.

Carrie wants to be rich to increase Julian's dependence on her. She wants to pet and spoil him. But it is Julian who contrives to acquire a fortune. Carrie's revolt unmasks her. She turns her anger against her house and the trip to Europe, now the symbols of Julian's wealth: "This house. This awful house, always, always, always" (p.708). "Go to Europe. What are you talking about. ... Well, you go to Europe and I'll go to work" (p. 713). She turns her anger against the symbols of Julian's status: "I hate caviar. The one time I ever ate it, I hated it. Just hated it" (p. 707), and against her sister, who had perceived her incestuous love for Julian: "I told you I didn't love you anymore. Now I tell you that I hate you" (p. 737).

Carrie is too sensitive for the world she lives in. She, like Griggs and most of the characters of Miss Hellman's Mood Plays, is a symbolic representation of the longings and frustrations of a society that is past its power, a lost and frightened society, whose feelings of incompleteness, boredom and fear are apparent in various dialogues throughout the plays:

Carrie. There is no need to worry about me anymore.

Lily. Oh, I do. And I will. I'm frightened of you.

Carrie (angrily). Your favorite word. Did it ever occur to you that other people are frightened too?

Lily. You? No. No, indeed. Of what, Miss Carrie?

Carrie. Of my hair which isn't nice anymore, of my job which isn't there anymore, of praying for small things and knowing just how small they are of walking by a mirror when I didn't know it would be there — (She gasps) People say "Those Berniers girls, so devoted. That Carrie was pretty, and then one day she wasn't; just an old maid, working for her brother". They are right. An old maid with candied oranges as a right proper treat each Saturday night. We didn't see people anymore, I guess, because we were frightened of saying or hearing more than we could stand. (Very angrily) There are lives that are shut and should stay shut, you hear me, and people who should not talk about themselves, and that was us (p. 739).

Carrie's nice hair, her pretty figure, her youth, her job are past and gone. She has lost her sister and her brother's affection. She may never have had them. Nothing is left to Carrie but her incestuous desires disguised in fraternal love, her fancy dreams — those candied oranges she had been sick of for so long. Carrie's big moment has not arrived, will not arrive. She has no smaller moments to stand on. Carrie is afraid.

Griggs takes life seriously. He dreams of starting it again, of basing it on meaningful everyday action. Griggs shudders as he recognizes that, like everybody else, he will take the easier path of giving up wishes and ideals. In his weakness he dreams of seeing his sister again because she looks like his mother — a

psychological regression in search of support. Griggs notices people's daily faults- Rose's faults, his own faults. He knows it is difficult to assume them, but cannot forgive his wife's pretense. He hates simulation and is afraid of lies:

Griggs. What point did you come to about my decision?

Rose. Decision? Your decision-

Griggs (tensely). Please stop playing the fool. I'm afraid of you when you start playing that game.

Rose. You afraid of me?

Griggs. Yes, me afraid of you (p. 540).

Rose and Lily are insecure. Lily is a child-wife who cannot tell love from sex. She cuts her hand and hits her leg against a table on purpose to lure her husband to bed. She says to him: "Make me cured, Julian. Let's go to bed and maybe you'll be pleased with me- Maybe. (She puts his hand on her breast. Anna turns away, Carrie stands staring at them) And if you're pleased with me, then all the bad will go away..." (p. 730). Rose is even more pathetic. Griggs does not actually love her and she fights desperately to prove him to the contrary. Her weapons are ineffectual, phony. She pretends to be younger than she is, uses extravagant clothes, tells him about her love affair with his cousin, Ralph Sommers.

Rose. ... I'm frightened, Ben. I play the fool, but I'm not so big a fool that I don't know I haven't got anybody to help me.... I've got nobody and I'm scared. Awful scared (pp. 540-41).

Lily and Rose are afraid of losing their husbands. They are afraid of loneliness.

And Anna is afraid of telling the truth- of bringing to the surface Carrie's desires and the family hatred:

Carrie. ...You used to tell us that when you love, truly love, you take your chances on being hated by speaking out the truth. (Points inside) Go in and do it.

Anna. All right. I'll take that chance now and tell you that you want to sleep with him and always have. Years ago I used to be frightened that you would try and I would watch you and suffer for you.

Carrie (after a second, in a whisper). You never said those words. Tell me I never heard those words.

Tell me, Anna. (When there is no answer) you were all I ever had. I don't love you anymore.

Anna. That was the chance I took (p. 732).

Both plays, The Autumn Garden and Toys in the Attic contain a collection of twentieth century middle-class Southern types who might well be descendants of the Hubbards, without their energy, their strength and their drive for power.

Lily is a modern blend of Birdie and Lavinia. The combination of the two personalities produces another rather bad outcast. Like Birdie she is insecure: "Mama, don't go. Please. I need help. Your help" (p. 714). Like Birdie she is bewildered in her romantic simplicity: "Did you sell me to Julian, Mama?" (p. 718). Like Birdie she is too apologetic: "I'm sorry you don't like me. I wanted you to" (p. 738), "I'm sorry I spoke that way" (p. 714). "Well, tell him. I'm sorry." (p.715), "Are you angry with me?"(p. 701), "Tell me you're not angry with me" (p. 701). Like Lavinia she sometimes acts insane and seeks refuge in the supernatural:

Lily (sits down, speaks quietly). Everyboby left and there I was. The woman said, "You want me, child?" And I said, "Could I buy your knife?" "No," she said. "The knife is not for sale." But I wanted it more than I ever wanted anyting and, well- (Smiles, slyly)—finally, we swapped something—And when it was in my hand, for the first time in life, I just said everything, and asked. The lady said the knife of truth would dress me as in a jacket of iron flowers and though I would do battle, I would march from the battle cleansed. Then I fell asleep—
Albertine. Your many religious experiences have always made me uneasy, Lily—(pp. 717-18).

Lavinia's and Lily's fanaticism is connected with "truth." Lily calls her mother at two in the morning to speak about struggling "up the mountain of truth" (p. 718). Lavinia talks to "God" and hears his voice compelling her "to tell the awful truth" (p.382). Lily in a fit of jealousy informs against Julian provoking his financial ruin. Lavinia in her insanity reveals Marcus' crimes against the South causing him to fall from his comfortable position of pater familias.. Both Lily and Lavinia ignore the range of their acts and because of this they harm their husbands most.

Lily, Birdie and Lavinia are fragile, dependent, too sensitive, neurotic, naïve. They need protection and ask for it— they are lonely. Lily is one more plant responsive to the heat of summer. She consciously despises her mother's fortune: "Did you sell me to Julian, Mama?"(p. 718), Julian's expensive gifts: "I want my ring, I was married in my ring. (She holds up her hand) This is a vulgar ring" (p. 708); and her own money: "My money? Doesn't matter about my money. I don't want money" (p. 699). "I'm

not worried about money, Miss Carrie" (p. 699). Birdie and Lavinia's names also relate them to their environment and circumstances. Birdie is a delicate, light and restless fowl, trapped and caged within the Hubbard family. Lavinia senses her people's sins and longs to purify them.

Gus and Henry are the representatives of the Southern black race of the twentieth century. Like Addie and Coralee they are patient and self-reliant. Although still the servants they have gained more prestige and exercise more control over their masters.

Julian. Gus, my old friend Gus. You're going to have that farm, kid. Go find it and start with this.
(He hands Gus several large bills. Gus looks at them, but doesn't take them).

Gus. You at that again?

Julian. This time I made it. Throw the ice away—
(He shoves the money into Gus's hand).

Gus. Julian, I don't want that kind of trouble again.

Julian. Nobody'll come for it this time. I'm telling you the truth. And there's as much more as you want. Now get going and find the farm.

Gus. Who the hell wants a farm? Got enough trouble. Where'd you make up the farm from? (p. 724).

Henry is both the chauffeur and lover of Albertine, Lily's mother. Albertine is a rich and eccentric lady. She represents democracy of feeling, inviolability of personal whim, intense and self-asserting Southern individualism. She has Regina's strong personality and nearly becomes the center of the play, as Lillian Hellman felt while writing it. She said in an interview at the University of Chicago: "I've left out telling you about the second

most important character— who almost dominates the play now. She's just going to have to stop dominating it or the play's not going to be done."⁶ But Henry seems to be even stronger than Albertine. He is her support and adviser. He helps her in her relationship with Lily.

Henry. You are not wise with Lily.

Albertine. No. I never was. Well, it's been a good year, hasn't it? The best I ever had.

Henry. Nothing has happened.

Albertine. I know Lily. You do, too.

Henry. She's jealous and scared- (p. 728).

The connection between Henry and Albertine provides Miss Hellman with the means to deal with the theme of miscigenation in the South. Lily has no alternative but to accept her mother's association with a black man, even though she doesn't approve of it. She says to Albertine in a fit of rage: "You have talked this way about my friend because you want to bring me pain. Henry makes plans to pain me—(Outside the fence, Henry turns). As you lie in bed with him, Henry makes the plans and tells you what to do" (p. 747). And when Albertine offers her to come back home if she ever needs it she retorts: "Thank you, Mama. Nice of you. But I couldn't go home to you anymore, as long as—" (p. 748), and of course she means as long as Henry is there.

There are still some other notable parallels among the characters of Miss Hellman's Southern Plays. John Bagtry is as weak as Nick and Julian, and he also functions as a catalyst. His presence prompts the action of Another Part of the Forest.

It is because of John that Regina fights Ben and disobeys Marcus. John's chivalric dreams establish the difference between him, Nick, and Julian. These idealistic dreams place John within the social-philosophical context of the Reconstruction. He is, because of these dreams, bigger than the other characters.

The last outstanding similarity is between Alexandra and Sophie. In the early stages of the Mood Plays they are both characterized as naïve, young and obedient. They have both Greek names meaningful when related to their personalities in the plays and to Miss Hellman's conception of altruism and wisdom. One minor dramatic question that arises during the course of their plays is whether Alexandra and Sophie will be capable of awakening to the evil and deceit around them. This question is directly connected with Miss Hellman's main thesis: the immorality of those who "stand around and watch" (p. 199), "of those who fritter themselves away" (p. 542). At the denouement Alexandra and Sophie suffer a radical change. Miss Hellman makes this change too abrupt to be convincing. There is, in the development of the action, no concrete evidence of strength in the girls to justify their rebellion against the Southern family life patterns and their break from that to a more meaningful life. The parallel between Alexandra and Sophie is still evident in the outcome of their loveless engagements. Although Alexandra's marriage is planned by her family and Sophie decides hers by herself, neither marriage takes place. The different times are responsible for the situational differences. Alexandra is a nineteenth century young lady: pure, uncorrupted: an American revival of the Greek defender of man. Sophie is her modern paraphrase: a realistic twentieth century version of the

European common sense both influencing and suffering influence from the American way of life. Sophie is a mixture of good and evil, reminding us that the human personality is round and composed of aggressive as well as tender impulses in an organized equilibrium. Although often prudent and sensible, she does not hesitate to blackmail and lie in order to achieve her aims. Alexandra is idealistic and romantic. Her character retraces the Southern aristocratic modes of living. Sophie is materialistic and pragmatic, prepared to face the hardships of a modern and depersonalized society. Both girls have in common the one quality that Lillian Hellman most admires: the capacity to stand up and do- be it right or wrong. In her book of memoirs, Scoundrel Time⁷, Miss Hellman shows her disappointment towards people, particularly intellectuals, who think but do not act. When Hammet, her "closest" and "most beloved friend,"⁹ was called before McCarthy's House Committee on UnAmerican Activities, not one intellectual, as Miss Hellman recalls, testified on his behalf, a fact which shocked the British editor, Richard Crossman.

Coincidentally Lillian Hellman has given the name Crossman to a peculiarly lonely character, her spokesman in The Autumn Garden. Crossman, like the other characters in the Mood Plays, is mainly concerned with his own problems. He is nostalgic for the past and skeptical in his frustrating search for the meaning of life. He says: "I've often thought that if I started all over again, I'd go right back to where I started and start from there. Otherwise, it wouldn't prove anything" (p. 477). And then he asks: "Does anybody improve with age? Just tell me that, Sophie, and I'll have something to lie awake and think about" (p.490). Crossman's remarks convey one of Miss Hellman's central themes: that an aimless life is not a life, but a burden and a tragedy. She also uses his words ironically, to show the Southerner's narrow conception of honor

and gentility: "Nick is still a Southerner. With us every well-born lady sacrifices her life for something: a man, a house, sometimes a gardenia bush" (p. 482), and to criticize the comfortable position of those who label environment and society as responsible for both collective and individual action. He says first to Griggs: "Haven't you lived in the South long enough to know that nothing is ever anybody's fault?" (p. 477), and then to Constance: "Remarkable the things that make people nervous: coffee, brandy, relatives, running water, too much sun, too little sun. Never anything in themselves. ..." (p. 478). Crossman's words illustrate the thesis that actions are not determined by external forces alone, that genes and will also influence the behavior of a person, a group, a nation—mankind.

Miss Hellman brings to the theatre not only her art, but also a study of the people, place and time she knows. The Hubbard Plays had questioned the social, political, religious and economic trends of the Southern Reconstruction. They had pointed out the corrupt life of a new rich Dixie aristocracy and analysed its origins in human evil. The Mood Plays similarly describe a certain people and a certain era, not by means of local color, but by showing the sterility and emptiness of a decadent society trying to justify itself. Miss Hellman uses the inductive method to prove her points. Her arguments move from the particular to the general, from the concrete to the abstract. Her character's personal situation reflects the national one. There is no conclusive solution. In the end of the plays Constance, Carrie and Anna are left alone— as they had been before the arrival of their guests. Few people change. Many moments of crisis and decision were past

and missed. It is true that the characters recognize their lies and rationalizations, but only to admit that it is too late for them to look for a new and satisfactory answer. Nick and Nina, Rose and Ben, Carrie and Anna decide to stay together, not because they care for each other, but because it will be easier for them.

The Autumn Garden and Toys in the Attic are, like the Hubbard Plays, set in the American South. But in this latter pair, Miss Hellman displays more maturity and detachment in dramatizing controversial facts—in her mode of emphasizing setting, relating character and action. The Mood Plays mark a step forward in Lillian Hellman's craftsmanship. She displays a Chekhovian grasp for unconscious motivations, not previously achieved in the Hubbard sequence.

NOTES

- 1 Lillian Hellman, Another Part of the Forest, in her The Collected Plays (Boston : Little, Brown and Company, 1971), p. 699. All the quotations from Miss Hellman's plays are taken from this edition. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text.
- 2 Lillian Hellman, An Unfinished Woman (Boston: Bantam, 1974), p.8.
- 3 John Phillips and Anne Hollander, "The Art of the Theatre: Lillian Hellman; An Interview", Paris Review, 33 (Winter-Spring, 1965), p.71.
- 4 Lillian Hellman, Pentimento: A Book of Portraits (New York: Signet, 1973), p. 170.
- 5 Lorena Ross Holmin, The Dramatic Works of Lillian Hellman (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1973), p. 135.
- 6 Richard C. Stern, "Lillian Hellman on Her Plays," Contact, 3 (1959), p. 117
- 7 Lillian Hellman, Scoundrel Time (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), pp. 153-55.
- 8 Hellman, An Unfinished Woman, p. 224.
- 9 Op.cit., p. 224.