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LILLIAN HELLMAN'S WATCH ON THE RHINE: THE ART AND  
POLITICS OF AMERICAN ANTI-FASCISM

by

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## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Chapter	
I. <u>WATCH ON THE RHINE</u> : A MELDING OF ART AND POLITICS . . . . .	7
II. ANTI-FASCISM AND THE AMERICAN LEFT IN THE 1930S: THE POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL CLIMATE . . . . .	29
III. PARALLEL DEVELOPMENTS: LILLIAN HELLMAN'S POLITICAL AND ARTISTIC SENSIBILITIES . . . . .	45
IV. <u>WATCH ON THE RHINE</u> : A CLOSER LOOK . . . . .	67
NOTES . . . . .	87
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	94

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## INTRODUCTION

The merits of Lillian Hellman's art and politics have been debated for decades. While her popular plays have won prestigious awards and earned for her the approbation of many literary and drama critics, less enthusiastic critics have asserted, perhaps justifiably, that her dramaturgy never reached the inspired heights achieved by such American playwrights as Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams. Nevertheless, even her harshest critics concede that Hellman is a craftsperson extraordinaire; her tightly drawn plots and excruciatingly wrought characters continue to make a lasting impression on the millions who have kept her plays on theatre marquees and bookstore shelves for three generations. Hellman's plays firmly establish her as one of America's best playwrights. Who, today, has not seen or heard of The Children's Hour (1934), The Little Foxes (1939), Watch on the Rhine (1941), The Autumn Garden (1951), and Toys in the Attic (1960)? These plays possess qualities that make them unforgettable; people who saw the original Broadway production of Watch on the Rhine can still recall with chilling detail the emotional impact the play had on them over forty years ago. Hellman's plays were much more than light theatrical entertainment. Her theatre successes span nearly half a century, with revivals in recent years--Elizabeth Taylor starred in The Little Foxes in 1982 in Washington, New York, and London--

stimulating as much thought and garnering as much media attention as did their original productions.

Nor has Hellman's writing been limited to drama. She adapted four works for the theatre and wrote eight film scripts, including a highly-acclaimed documentary about the Spanish Civil War. Over the years, Hellman contributed dozens of articles and reviews to leading periodicals and edited the letters of Anton Chekhov (during the McCarthy Era when the blacklist kept her from writing for stage and screen) and a collection of short stories written by her friend and companion of thirty years, Dashiell Hammett. At an age when most people are ready to give up their careers, Hellman, at sixty-three, turned her talents to a new genre. Through An Unfinished Woman (1969), Pentimento (1973), Scoundrel Time (1976), and Maybe (1980),<sup>1</sup> Hellman not only established herself as a leading memoirist, but, more interestingly, thrust herself into a quagmire of controversy. At the center of this controversy, however, is Hellman's politics, not her art.

Until she began writing about her life, the reading public had only superficial knowledge of the woman behind the plays. From the early thirties on, the New York papers eagerly followed the comings and goings of the celebrity playwright. Indeed, there has not been a year since 1934 (the year her first Broadway hit, The Children's Hour, was staged) that Hellman has not been featured in the headlines and columns of The New York Times; most years include at least a dozen news stories, interviews, and reviews focusing upon the playwright and her work. Whether it was because of her fame as a playwright or the glamor of the circle in which she moved, the events of Hellman's life have been chronicled and commented upon in the news media by admirers and

critics. When brought together, the news clippings form a documentary outline not only of an artist's career but of the parallel development of the life of a political activist.<sup>2</sup> Yet the facts provided about Hellman's life remained, at best, sketchy. At worst, they were intentionally misleading or untrue. Consequently, Lillian Hellman remained, for the most part, a mystery until she began revealing herself through her best-selling memoirs which disclosed, perhaps, much more than she had intended. Indeed, Hellman's version of her past political associations and activities---intended to set the record straight--raised the ire of old political enemies who vociferously challenged the truth of her recollections. Not content to let sleeping dogs lie, Hellman unwittingly exposed her past to the merciless and adamant criticism of fellow intellectuals who found her perceptions of the past to be at variance not only with their own recollections but also with the historical record.

Such strife, however, was not new to Hellman. As a leading writer and activist since the 1930s, she has been at the center of numerous brouhahas that divided the American left. However, untangling this massive web of artistic jealousy, political disagreement, and personal acrimony would be a far more ambitious undertaking than the scope of this study permits. Thus in order to cast some light on the interrelationship between Lillian Hellman's art and her politics, I shall focus upon one significant episode: her response--as artist and activist--to the threat of European fascism.

As a focal point for this study, I have selected for examination one of Hellman's best-known works, Watch on the Rhine, an artistically brilliant yet politically charged play in which Hellman's

creative and political impulses melded in just the right proportions to produce a persuasive work of lasting merit. When it opened in New York in 1941--just eight months before the United States entered World War II--Watch on the Rhine was a powerful and compelling anti-Nazi polemic which gave audiences pause to ponder the ethical questions of the day. Yet the play was equally acclaimed for its artistic value. Indeed, Watch on the Rhine can stand alone on its artistic merit when removed from its historical setting, as recent revivals in the United States and Great Britain illustrate. Watch on the Rhine has survived the test of time because its characters and themes have universal appeal. Kurt is more than an anti-Nazi; he is every man who is willing to risk his life for a cause in which he believes. The justification of killing one human being in order to achieve an ultimate human good is, likewise, a question that is not unique to the early years of World War II. Therefore, the play cannot be viewed as a single, static work, but rather as a series of distinct, discrete reincarnations, each maintaining the play's basic humanity while at the same time affecting and being affected by the peculiarities of its time and place.

Consequently, the play's meaning is dynamic, with each set of historical circumstances and audience assumptions contributing to a meaning that is unique to its own environment. Thus for eight months before America entered World War II, the play impressed audiences as a powerful argument for our involvement in the war. In December, 1941, however, a somewhat different play emerged as the consciousness of American audiences adapted to wartime imperatives. This play reassured Americans that they were, indeed, fighting for a principle that was worth preserving at any cost. American audiences, however, never lived

with the psychological effects of bombs falling from the sky over their homes and workplaces; because the British did, Londoners who saw the West End production of Watch on the Rhine in 1942 again perceived a different play than the one their American comrades-in-arms had apprehended in the safety of a nation insulated from the fighting by thousands of miles of protective sea. And when an American film version of the play was released in the late summer of 1943, a year and a half of war had significantly transformed the perceptions and sensibilities of American audiences from what they had been prior to or during the early months of the war. Moreover, removed from the context of World War II, Watch on the Rhine holds yet another meaning for today's audiences which include those who remember World War II, as well as a generation of adults whose knowledge of the war has come only from textbooks and classroom lectures. Far removed from the play's time and setting, today's audiences nevertheless can respond intellectually and emotionally to the play's challenges, for the questions of the individual's responsibility to society and the justification of the use of violence against evil bear equally upon present-day dilemmas. The universal qualities of Watch on the Rhine have thus not only enabled the play to endure as a work of art, but also to change over time, assuming new meanings and offering inspiration and hope to people of good faith who are struggling to find an ethical mooring in the stormy sea of contemporary issues and problems.

Although all of these reincarnations of Watch on the Rhine are interesting and worth considering individually as well as collectively, they do not really bear upon the question at hand. For to look at Lillian Hellman's conception of the play, it is necessary to look not

at the subsequent meanings of the finished play but rather at what was in the consciousness of the playwright as she conceived and wrought--the word "playwright" emphasizes that a play is wrought, rather than just written--the work. Therefore I shall direct my attention to the very first Watch on the Rhine, the one that evolved in Lillian Hellman's mind between the summer of 1938 and the end of 1940. In examining the interplay between art and politics in the creation of this dramatic expression that so effectively combined the two, it will be necessary first to consider the political and intellectual climate that nurtured Hellman's thinking, examining anti-fascism and the American Left in the 1930s. Then I shall examine the cumulative development of the author's political and artistic sensibilities as they bear upon the creation of this play. And finally, I shall take a close look at the development of the play itself--examining it in terms of ideas and text--to see how Hellman labored for the balance between art and polemic that resulted in Watch on the Rhine's ability to move audiences for nearly half a century.

However, by way of background I shall begin my study with a detailed synopsis of the work under consideration, followed by a discussion of the play's critical and popular success. I offer these preliminaries in order that the reader may comprehend both the facts and the flavor of the play in preparation for the discussion which will follow in subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER I

### WATCH ON THE RHINE: A MELDING OF ART AND POLITICS

The 1940-1941 New York theatre season suffered no dearth of good plays. Many of America's best playwrights had offered new works that season and a significant number of those plays reflected growing concern about the war in Europe. By the spring of 1941, Norway, Denmark, the Low Countries, and France had fallen to Hitler, and Britain was fighting the Luftwaffe's attacks. Within the year, the United States, too, would be at war. As daily headlines chronicled the course of events in Europe and the Far East, theatre marquees offered titles that gave American audiences pause to reflect upon the meaning of these seemingly faraway events as the United States was being drawn closer to involvement in the war. Although their subjects and approaches differed, Robert E. Sherwood (There Shall Be No Night), Maxwell Anderson (Candle in the Wind), S. N. Behrman (The Talley Method), and Elmer Rice (Flight to the West) succeeded in focusing the imagination of American theatregoers upon the imminent threats of fascism and war. Yet--perhaps because their authors had unwittingly sacrificed artistic values in the interest of making overt political pleas--none of these plays demonstrated sufficient artistic merit to be seriously considered that year for a drama award. Consequently, Broadway's other offerings showed greater promise for winning the Drama Critics Circle's annual prize, with William Saroyan's The

Beautiful People, Richard Wright's Native Son, and Joseph Kesselring's Arsenic and Old Lace vying for best play of the season. But just as the season was drawing to an end a new anti-fascist play opened at the Martin Beck Theatre. Lillian's Hellman's electrifying drama of anti-Nazi heroism, Watch on the Rhine, opened April 1, 1941; three weeks later the New York Drama Critics Circle members emerged from their secret deliberations at the Algonquin Hotel proclaiming Hellman's drama the best American play of the 1940-1941 season.<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

The play opens in the late spring of 1940, with the bustle and excitement of a suburban Washington, D.C., household preparing to welcome home a family member they have not seen since her marriage twenty years earlier to a German engineer. Fanny Farrelly, the ebullient widow of a respected American jurist and diplomat, and her not-so-ambitious lawyer son, David, are awaiting--with mixed feelings of elation and nervousness--the arrival of Sara Mueller, her husband Kurt, and their three children, Joshua, Bodo, and Babette. Sara's mother, Fanny, has only a vague recollection of having met Kurt once, more than twenty years ago; David has never met his sister's husband. Sara's children, too, are strangers to their grandmother and uncle, who know little about the Muellers except that they move about Europe frequently, never staying long in one city or country. The banter between Fanny and the servants reveals a strong bond between a bossy, impetuous matriarch and family retainers who have spent decades perfecting the art of keeping the upper hand without letting Fanny know that she never really had it. It is clear, too, that David--much to



his mother's displeasure--has never married and is content with an undistinguished career in the shadow of his late father's brilliant successes in law and government service.

David seems to be responsible for the extended stay of a couple of houseguests, an exiled Rumanian count and his wife who, though penniless, continue to enjoy the life of luxury by using their well-known name and charm to garner invitations for extended visits in American homes and to obtain retail charge accounts that keep them fashionably outfitted for their parasitic hobnobbing in Washington's rarefied circles. The charmingly manipulative count, Teck de Brancovis, is less concerned about the romance that is developing between his wife, Marthe, and David, than he is about covering his rising gambling debts at the German Embassy. Despite the fact that Marthe's mother had been a dear friend, Fanny has ceased to be amused by these two and has begun to suspect the reason behind David's reluctance to turn them out of the house. Oblivious to European political developments, Fanny thinks nothing of Teck's ties with the German government. Having spent a good part of her life living and travelling in European-American diplomatic circles, she perceives international relations only in terms of the social intercourse that insulates and unites members of the diplomatic community.

As the characters move off stage from the living room (the play's single set) to the adjoining terrace for breakfast, the living room is empty for the unexpectedly early--and unobserved--entrance of the Muellers, who have arrived ahead of schedule on a cheaper train. They have made their own way to the house long before the time David had planned to drive into the station to meet them. Being in this

fine room after twenty years of a very different kind of life brings on a flood of highly-charged emotions in Sara, whose worn, dowdy dress belies the wealth and comfort of her girlhood. Little in the room has changed in twenty years, and as Sara moves about, she identifies mementoes of her past for her husband and children, who are awed by and somewhat uneasy in such elegant surroundings. Hellman describes the setting:

Four or five generations have furnished this room and they have all been people of taste. There are no styles, no periods; the room has never been refurnished. Each careless aristocrat has thrown into the room what he or she liked as a child, what he or she brought home when grown up.<sup>2</sup>

All the Muellers are discomfited by the contrast between the life this room represents and the life from which they seek temporary refuge. The Muellers' battered luggage and shabby clothing stand out in sharp contrast to the strength of character they reveal as they all try to comprehend the security and abundance this home affords them. As Sara's and the children's pleasure is overshadowed by the guilt that voluntary poverty raises when one succumbs to the pleasure of an undeserved indulgence, Kurt reassures his family that it is not wrong for them to enjoy the comfort and safety of this unlocked house. The Muellers' conversation reveals that they are refugees and fugitives, but proud and dignified and certain of the humanitarian values and moral imperatives that dictate their seemingly vagabond existence.

The Muellers have come from Europe via Mexico, without proper travel documents, seeking temporary refuge and rest in Sara's girlhood home. As their story unfolds, it is revealed that Kurt gave up engineering in 1933 to become a freedom fighter, that he has completed countless successful missions all over Europe, and that he is one of

the senior and most trusted leaders in an anti-Nazi underground organization. The group's leader, Max Freidank, is the Muellers' closest friend. Kurt and Sara have taught their children socialist-humanist values, and the family is as tightly bound by their collective sense of social obligation as by the familial love that so clearly inspires their interaction. Parents and children are committed to their way of life and are strong individuals as a result of the sacrifices they have so willingly and dutifully made in order to meet that commitment. The children are bright and cheerful, but nonetheless bear on their shoulders the burden of a sick Europe. Innocent, however, they are not; Joshua is fourteen and ready to assume a man's responsibility whenever called upon to do so. He has been well trained by his father, who hopes his son will not be called until he actually becomes a man. Joshua's nine-year-old brother, Bodo, is so amusingly precocious--in several languages--that his grandmother and the audience are thoroughly charmed by him. He walks a tight line between being everybody's favorite baby and his own grown hero. Babette is twelve, shy, and particularly concerned for her mother's comfort and ease. She knows the sacrifices the parents make for their children. All three of the Mueller children are well-mannered and well-educated, all to the credit of their only teachers, Kurt and Sara.

Because Kurt is recovering from recent injuries, he is seeking a few weeks' needed rest in the safety of the United States. He is well over forty now, and painfully aware that his age and the lasting effects of previous injuries are beginning to jeopardize his effectiveness in the movement. The visit to America, he hopes, will be good for the entire family; it has been many years since Sara has known comfort

and safety, and the children have never experienced these luxuries. Although Kurt must return to Germany in a few weeks, he hopes to temporarily leave Sara and the children in the safety of her mother's home. This is not, however, just a pleasure trip for the Muellers; Kurt is carrying in a locked briefcase \$23,000 in cash, "gathered from the pennies of the poor who do not like Fascism, and who believe in the work we do" (246-47). He must smuggle this money into Germany and use it to buy the freedom of political prisoners. The conflict of the play becomes evident early in the first act when Kurt and the Count de Brancovis meet. Kurt knows Teck by reputation and is familiar with his Nazi connections. Teck is suspicious of Kurt and loses no time checking to confirm his guess about the identity of this mysterious German son-in-law "who has bullet scars on his face and broken bones in his hands" (226). Having noticed that Kurt's briefcase is the only piece of luggage that was locked when the Muellers arrived, he surreptitiously breaks into and searches it in the privacy of Kurt and Sara's upstairs bedroom. Teck's carelessness in replacing its contents, however, tips Kurt off immediately to the fact that Teck has found him out. Unaware that his intrusion has been detected, Teck goes to the German Embassy to make some guarded inquiries about fugitives who are being sought by the Nazi authorities.

The play's subsequent action unfolds on several planes. First, we see the warmth and tenderness of the Farrelly-Mueller family reunion as mutual affection and admiration develop between Sara's Old World and New World families. The domestic comedy, marked by much rushing about, playful banter, and general commotion, provides a sharply contrasting background for the dark subplots that gradually come to dominate the

play. As the liaison between Marthe and David is gradually revealed, we learn that the de Brancovis marriage is not worth salvaging.

Absence of affection is not the only factor here, for Marthe has become disgusted by Teck's self-serving amorality. She warns him:

. . . you ought not to be at the Embassy . . . it's insane to play cards with Von Seitz with eighty-seven dollars in your pocket. I don't think he'd like your not being able to pay up. . . . (as if it were an effort) . . . I am getting tired. Just plain tired. The whole thing's too much for me. I've always meant to ask you, since you played on so many sides, why we didn't come out any better (212-213).

But Teck's situation is desperate; he realizes that Marthe is going to leave him for David, and he is out of money. He cares little for his wife, except that her American connections provide them both with a roof over their heads, so her loss is merely another economic setback for him. He will recoup his losses, however, by blackmailing Kurt, then he will be able to return to Europe by selling what he knows about Kurt to his poker pals at the Embassy. From them he will extract not money, but the difficult-to-obtain travel documents without which he cannot return to Rumania.

As the Marthe-Teck-David conflict explodes in front of the adults assembled in the living room and Marthe chooses to remain with David, Kurt is called out of the room to take a long-distance call from Mexico. He returns with a very worried look on his face. He tries to conceal the truth, saying that he must go to California for a few weeks. Teck, who has just been asked to pack his bags, seizes the opportunity he has been eagerly awaiting:

TECK (turns). It is in the afternoon newspaper, Herr Mueller. (Points to paper on table) I was waiting to find the proper moment to call it to your attention. (He moves toward the table, picks up the paper, turns it over, begins to read)  
"Zurich, Switzerland: The Zurich papers today reprinted a

despatch from the Berliner Tageblatt on the capture of Colonel Max Freidank. Freidank is said--(Sara begins to move toward him)--to be the chief of the Anti-Nazi Underground Movement. Colonel Freidank has long been an almost legendary figure. The son of the famous General Freidank, he was a World War officer and a distinguished physicist before the advent of Hitler."

SARA. Max--

KURT. Be still, Sara.

TECK. They told me of it at the Embassy last night. They also told me that with him they had taken a man who called himself Ebber, and a man who called himself Triste. They could not find a man called Gotter. (He starts toward the door) I shall be a lonely man without Marthe. I am also a very poor one. I should like to have ten thousand dollars before I go (245).

Kurt's telephone call had confirmed these facts. David and Fanny are still not sure how this involves Kurt, and even after hearing Kurt's explanation they naively believe that Kurt is in no danger.

DAVID. But you're here. You're in this country. They can't do anything to you. They wouldn't be crazy enough to try it. Is your passport all right?

KURT. Not quite.

FANNY. Why not? Why isn't it?

KURT (wearily, as if he were bored). Because people like me are not given visas with such ease. And I was in a hurry to bring my wife and my children to safety. (Sharply) Madame Fanny, you must come to understand that it is no longer the world you once knew.

DAVID. It doesn't matter. You're a political refugee. We don't turn back people like you. People who are in danger. You will give me your passport and tomorrow morning I'll see Barends. We'll tell him the truth--(Points to the door) Tell de Brancovis to go to hell. There's not a damn thing he or anybody else can do.

SARA (looks up at Kurt, who is staring at her). You don't understand, David.

DAVID. There's a great deal I don't understand. But there's nothing to worry about.

SARA. Not much to worry about as long as Kurt is in this house. But he's not going to--

KURT. The Count has made the guess that--

SARA. That you will go back to get Ebber and Triste and Max. Is that right, Kurt? Is that right?

KURT. Yes, Darling, I will try. They were taken to Sonnenburg. Guards can be bribed--It has been done once before at Sonnenburg. We will try for it again. I must go back, Sara. I must start.

SARA. I guess I was trying to think it wouldn't come. But--  
 (To Fanny and David) Kurt's got to go back. He's got to go home. He's got to buy them out. He'll do it, too. You'll see. (She stops, breathes) It's enough to get back. Very hard. But if they knew he was coming--They want Kurt bad. Almost as much as they wanted Max--And then there are hundreds of others, too--(She gets up, comes to him. He holds her, puts his face in her hair. She stands holding him, trying to speak without crying) Don't be scared darling. You'll get back. You'll see. You've done it before--you'll do it again. Don't be scared. You'll get Max out all right. And then you'll do his work, won't you? That's good. That's fine. You'll do a good job, the way you've always done. (She is crying very hard. To Fanny) Kurt doesn't feel well. He was wounded and he gets tired--(To Kurt) You don't feel well, do you? Don't be scared, darling. Don't worry, you'll get home. Yes, you will (247-48).

And so the second act ends. It is only Fanny and David who have not figured out what Teck, and everyone in the audience, have surmised: Kurt is the man known to the Nazis as Gotter.

The final act begins with a quiet scene in the living room with only Fanny, David, Sara, and Kurt present. Marthe and Teck are upstairs making their farewells and packing Teck's belongings. As Fanny and David learn more about Kurt's role in the anti-Nazi underground, they express admiration for his heroism, but still fail to comprehend or appreciate why he does what he does. Fanny asks Kurt why he assumes personal responsibility.

KURT. For each man, his own hands. He has to sleep with them.



DAVID (uncomfortably, as if he did not like to say it). That's right. I guess it's the way all of us should feel. But-- but you have a family. Isn't there somebody else who hasn't a wife and children--

KURT. Each could have his own reason. Some have bullet holes, some have fear of the camps, some are sick, many are getting older. (Shrugs) Each could find a reason. And many find it. My children are not the only children in the world, even to me.

FANNY. That's noble of you, of course. But they are your children, nevertheless. And Sara, she-- (250).

Teck reappears, carrying his hat and Kurt's briefcase. He reassures Kurt, "Nothing has been touched, Herr Mueller. I brought it from your room, for your convenience" (251). Teck then proceeds to read aloud a Nazi report describing the outlaw Gotter and his exploits since 1933. Kurt is amused by the inaccuracies and pleased to have so successfully evaded and outsmarted the Gestapo. Kurt and Teck match morals and wit as the others look on. Finally, Fanny explodes:

FANNY (comes over, very angrily, to Teck). I have not often in my life felt what I feel now. Whatever you are, and however you became it, the picture of a man selling the lives of other men--

TECK. Is very ugly, Madame Fanny. I do not do it without some shame, and therefore I must sink my shame in money. (Puts his hand on the briefcase) The money is here. For ten thousand, you go back and save your friends, nobody will know that you go, and I will give you my good wishes. (Slowly, Kurt begins to shake his head. Teck waits, then carefully) No?

KURT. This money is going home with me. It was not given to me to save my life, and I shall not so use it. It is to save the lives and further the work of more than I. It is important to me to carry on that work and to save the lives of three valuable men, and to do that with all speed. But--(Sharply) Count de Brancovis, the first morning we arrived in this house, my children wanted their breakfast. That is because the day before we had been able only to buy milk for them. If I would not touch this money for them, I would not touch it for you. (Very sharply) It goes back with me. The way it is. And if it does not get back, it is because I will not get back (254-55).



Teck then coolly assures the group that he will not tell the people at the Embassy about Kurt until he is safely back in Germany

. . . I understand your fear that I would go to Von Seitz, and I would suggest that you give me a small amount of cash now and a check dated a month from now. In a month, Herr Mueller should be nearing home, and he can let you know. And if you should not honor the check because Herr Mueller is already in Germany, Von Seitz will pay a little something for a reliable description. I will take my chance on that. You will now say that I will do that in any case--and that is the chance you will take (256).

Fanny and David can come up with four thousand dollars in cash; they leave the room to get it.

Kurt, Sara, and Teck are left in the room, and Teck philosophizes:

TECK (awkwardly). The new world has left the room. I feel less discomfort with you. We are Europeans, born to trouble and understanding it.

KURT. My wife is not a European.

TECK. Almost. (Points upstairs) They are young. The world has gone well for most of them. For us--(Smiles) we are like peasants watching the big frost. Work, trouble, ruin--(Shrugs) But no need to call curses at the frost. There it is, it will be again, always--for us.

SARA (gets up, moves to the window, looks out). You mean my husband and I do not have angry words for you. What for? We know how many there are of you. They don't, yet. My mother and brother feel shocked that you are in their house. For us--we have seen you in so many houses.

TECK. I do not say you want to understand me, Mrs. Mueller. I only say that you do (256-57).

Getting up to get a drink for Teck, Kurt turns the questioning to his detractor:

KURT. You, too, wish to go back to Europe?

TECK. Yes.

KURT. But they do not much want you. Not since the Budapest oil deal of '31.

TECK. You seem as well informed about me as I am about you.

KURT. That must have been a conference of high comedy, that one. . . . I should like to have seen you and your friends. It is too bad: you guessed an inch off, eh?

TECK. More than an inch.

KURT. And Kessler has a memory? (Playfully) I do not think Von Seitz would pay you money for a description of a man who has a month to travel. But I think he would pay you in a visa and a cable to Kessler. I think you want a visa almost as much as you want money. Therefore, I conclude you will try for the money here, and the visa from Von Seitz. (He comes toward the table carrying the sherry glass) I cannot get anywhere near my friends in a month and you know it. (He is about to place the glass on the table) I have been bored with this talk of paying you money. What-ever made you think I would take such a chance? Or any chance? You are a gambler. But you should not gamble with your life (257-58).

In a sudden but smooth series of moves, Kurt drops the glass on the table, knocks Teck to the floor, and hits him on the head until he no longer moves. Just then Joshua enters, sees what has happened, and calmly stands at attention, ready to follow his father's orders. Following instructions, Joshua opens the terrace doors as Kurt drags Teck off to the terrace. Closing the doors behind his father, Joshua turns to Sara and offers to prepare the younger children for a hasty departure. Sara tells him that only Kurt is going this time, that the rest of the family will remain where they are. She asks him to get the children ready for bed and to keep them in his room until she calls him to bring them downstairs to say good-bye to their father.

Sara then telephones for a reservation for Kurt on the next plane to Brownsville, making the reservation in the name of Mr. Ritter. Fanny and David return counting the cash from the upstairs safe; they are puzzled by Sara's vague response when they ask where

Kurt and Teck have gone. She warns David not to go out on the terrace. As Sara speaks cryptically, her mother and brother slowly begin to understand what has happened.

SARA. For them, it may be torture, and it may be death. Someday, when it's all over, maybe there'll be a few of them left to celebrate. There aren't many of Kurt's age left. He couldn't take a chance on them. They wouldn't have liked it. (Suddenly, violently) He'd have had a bad time trying to explain to them that because of this house and this nice town and my mother and my brother, he took chances with their work and with their lives. (Quietly) Sit down, Mama. I think it's all over now. (To David) There's nothing you can do about it. It's the way it had to be (259-60).

Kurt returns, makes an impassioned speech admitting his crime, but placing it in the context of Higher Law. He does not make excuses for himself, making clear his anguish over having to take one life in order to save many others. He tells Fanny and David that he needs two days, but lets them decide whether they wish to cover for him for two days, or call the police now. Fanny and David do not hesitate to put their full trust in Kurt; they assure him they will take care of everything, and wish him safe journey. Fanny gives him her four thousand dollars and offers to write a check for more, but of course a check is useless to him.

Sara brings the children into the room and the family members poignantly exchange good-byes. Kurt tells his children that he has done something bad, that their mother will explain it to them in a few days. They refuse to believe that their father could do any wrong.

KURT (shakes his head). . . . Do you remember when we read Les Miserables? Do you remember that we talked about it afterward and Bodo got candy on Mama's bed?

BODO. I remember.

KURT. Well. He stole bread. The world is out of shape we

said, when there are hungry men. And until it gets in shape, men will steal and lie and--(Slowly) and--kill. But for whatever reason it is done, and whoever does it--you understand me--it is all bad. I want you to remember that. Whoever does it, it is bad. (Then gaily) But perhaps you will live to see the day when it will not have to be. All over the world there are men who are fighting for that day. (He picks Bodo up, rises) Think of that. It will make you happy. In every town and every village and every mud hut in the world, there is a man who might fight to make a good world. And now good-bye. Wait for me. I shall try to come back for you. (He moves toward the hall, followed by Babette, and more slowly, by Joshua) Or you shall come to me. At Hamburg, the boat will come in. It will be a fine, safe land--I will be waiting on the dock. And there will be the three of you and Mama and Fanny and David. And I will have ordered an extra big dinner and we will show them what Germany can be like--(He has put Bodo down. He leans down, presses his face in Babette's hair. Tenderly, as her mother has done earlier, she touches his hair) (263).

Kurt kisses each child, embraces Sara, and bids farewell to David and Fanny. They all listen as the door closes, the car starts, and the sound of the car is lost in the distance. The children go upstairs and Sara follows them.

Fanny and David are left alone in the living room. The final scene makes clear the change that has come over both:

FANNY (after a minute). Well, here we are. We are shaken out of the magnolias, eh?

DAVID. Yes. So we are.

FANNY. Tomorrow will be a hard day. . . . (She begins to move off.)

DAVID. Mama. (She turns) We are going to be in for trouble. You understand that?

FANNY. I understand it very well. We will manage. I'm not put together with flour paste. And neither are you--I am happy to learn.

DAVID. Good night, Mama. (As she moves out, the curtain falls) (264-65).

\* \* \* \* \*

That the Drama Critics Circle Prize went to Watch on the Rhine was no surprise to anyone who had been reading the theatre reviews during the three weeks that followed the play's opening, for critics had been lavish in their praise. In his opening night review in PM, Louis Kronenberger identified what made Watch on the Rhine so superior to the recent spate of war plays:

Watch on the Rhine is the real anti-Nazi play of our times--the play we have wanted, the play we have needed. It is a play about human beings, not their ideological ghosts; a play dedicated to the deeds they are called upon to perform, not the words they are moved to utter. It is a play whose final crisis, though peculiar to one man's life, is yet central to our own. . . . He knows he must act to save what he is fighting for. He knows, as we have all come to know, that he must violate a human code to restore a humane world: that by blows, and blows alone, can Fascism be destroyed. [Kurt] Mueller thus becomes, symbolically, something a great deal less remote and specific than an undercover anti-Nazi. He is the needed man of our times: the man of principle who is also a man of action.<sup>3</sup>

Brooks Atkinson's New York Times review was equally perceptive.

Lillian Hellman has brought the awful truth close to home. . . . Curious how much better she has done it than anybody else by forgetting the headlines and by avoiding the obvious approaches to the great news subject of today. . . . Watch on the Rhine is the finest thing she has written . . . a play of pith and moment. . . . What it says is that the death of fascism is more desirable than the lives and well-being of the people who hate it. . . . Miss Hellman never preaches. She has given fascism a terrible appearance without introducing a uniform or a party salute. Being primarily interested in people, she has shown how deeply fascism penetrates into the hearts and minds of human beings.<sup>4</sup>

The New York Sun's Richard Lockridge also sensed the reason for the play's tremendous force and power:

Watch on the Rhine is far and away the best drama on the anti-Nazi theme because it elevates that theme to the human level and keeps it there. Fascism is evil because it hurts people, and because it makes people hurt one another. It is vicious because it makes gentle men kill . . . and causes

[individuals] to behave brutally toward [each other]. . . . And if what finally happens among these people is a microcosm of what happens in the world, it is real and poignant because it is happening among people and to people, and because the reality we see in the play helps us to remember the reality of all the other people in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Although these reviewers' comments are typical in content and tone of the analyses that characterized the opening night reviews which appeared in major newspapers and magazines, there were nevertheless points on which some critics believed this play was weak. Those who were not entirely taken with the play nevertheless acknowledged its effectiveness in dealing with its theme. Time Magazine's unidentified reviewer agreed that, despite its alleged dramatic "unevenness," Watch on the Rhine "is by far the best [play] on the subject to date." The reviewer asserted that the first two acts were "merely talk" which "does not make the play move." Nevertheless, this critic conceded that the play's "merit is that, for one act at least, it is a superbly written and acted picture of a dedicated man."<sup>6</sup> John Anderson, writing for the New York Journal-American, also perceived dramatic shortcomings in the play:

Essentially [it] is a bigger play than either of its predecessors [The Children's Hour (1934), and The Little Foxes (1939)]; it has a greater and more immediate subject . . . and while . . . it falls short of the mark in both its opening and closing scenes, and never quite releases the full pressure of its material, . . . [Miss Hellman succeeds in bringing] the lesson close to us in terms of American life. . . . The sight of a man giving his life to fight tyranny is a noble sight and the wrenching simplicity of Miss Hellman's scene leaves the theatre suffused in tears.

Although Anderson praises Hellman's "superbly drawn" characterizations and applauds "the best scenes in her play [which] bring us powerfully within the shadows that lie across Europe, darkening the world," he believes that while the play "makes its point, . . . [it] takes too

long to get started and it stays around far too long after it has made it, so that its effect is dissipated."<sup>7</sup>

Despite such reservations, the professionals' consensus was clear. When the Critics Circle members gathered for their annual balloting--nineteen were present--Watch on the Rhine was favored from the first ballot, receiving nine votes; the most any competitor garnered was two. By the final, seventh ballot, Hellman's play had picked up an additional three supporters, finishing with twelve of the possible nineteen votes.<sup>8</sup> The critics were not merely taken with the play's timely message, but honored it more fundamentally on the basis of its artistic value. For this group was scrupulous about judging works for their artistic merit. Indeed, the New York reviewers in 1935 had formed the Critics Circle and established their own annual awards out of protest over the Pulitzer Prize committee's forsaking of artistic values in favor of pandering to popular taste.<sup>9</sup> The balloting, therefore, suggests that merely dealing with a timely subject was not enough to attract the serious attention of the Critics Circle, for other war plays figured only marginally in the balloting: of a possible 133 votes, The Talley Method received only two and Flight to the West just one. Thus Watch on the Rhine was honored by critics for the artistic brilliance with which Hellman treated her timely theme.<sup>10</sup>

Hellman's play was as popular with the public as it was with the critics. After a short but successful preview production in Baltimore, Watch on the Rhine ran for 378 performances on Broadway. Two days after its New York closing on February 21, 1942, the production reopened in Philadelphia, marking the beginning of a successful road show that lasted another year. In April, 1942, British playwright



and director Emlyn Williams (who had shared Drama Critics Circle honors with Hellman the previous year when his play, The Corn is Green, was named the best imported play of the season) mounted a successful production of Watch on the Rhine in London.<sup>11</sup> Shortly after the original production opened in New York, Warner Brothers bought the rights for a film adaptation of the play which, under Hellman's close supervision, remained exceedingly true to both the text and the tone of the original work. The movie premiered in New York in August, 1943, and in December was voted the year's best motion picture by the New York Film Critics.<sup>12</sup> Although many Americans have read or seen the play, most know Watch on the Rhine from this film version which millions viewed when it first came out and millions have since viewed during its frequent appearances on late-night television.

Although permanently ensconced in play anthologies, Watch on the Rhine as live theatre spent more than thirty-five years in mothballs until Yale's Arvin Brown, artistic director for the Drama School's Long Wharf Theatre, carefully unpacked it in October, 1979. Finding no holes in its fabric, Brown concluded that this was not a dated political piece but rather a play of characters and ideas that were as powerful in 1979 as they had been in 1941. So he mounted a production in New Haven that earned Hellman's praise and so impressed New York producer Lester Osterman that he moved the production to Broadway where it opened January 3, 1980.<sup>13</sup> The production did not last a week, although criticism was leveled against the production itself, and not the play, which was deemed worthy of a better executed revival.<sup>14</sup> Hellman's play received this later in 1980 when Britain's National Theatre mounted a successful revival at the Edinburgh Theatre



Festival. This production was then moved to the Lyttleton Theatre in London where it enjoyed a six month run.<sup>15</sup>

The tremendous popular and critical success of the various metamorphoses of Watch on the Rhine has been due primarily to Hellman's skill as "a dramatist of the first order."<sup>16</sup> Her keen sensitivity to her audience, her ability to create characters that truly come to life on the stage, and her preference for themes that strike at the heart of her audiences' sense of moral decency have earned for her the praise and respect of both contemporary reviewers and dramatic scholars. Despite her claims that she has never felt at home in the theatre, Hellman demonstrates in her work an uncanny ability to sense what will appeal to her audiences as well as how best to approach them.<sup>17</sup> Hellman always preferred writing for the stage because, as she explained in a 1941 interview, "The theatre is a place for the expression of ideas. You can say what you like in the theatre. You have a liberty of speech and editorial expression that you can't find in any other dramatic medium. You can present an idea for the consideration of intelligent audiences."<sup>18</sup> "One doesn't use the speaking stage any more as a medium of pure amusement . . . ," she had asserted a few years earlier, "if you can't transfer your ideas into lines and action on the stage, what excuse is there writing for the legitimate theater?"<sup>19</sup> Hellman not only knew that her theatre audiences wanted challenging ideas to ponder, but also was keenly aware that her audiences were capable of dealing with ideas on a higher plane than that usually offered by Broadway. Disturbed that some people--mostly self-appointed detractors who were incensed over her sympathetic treatment of lesbianism in The Children's Hour--thought that lesbianism

was the subject of the play, Hellman told an interviewer in 1934,

That is a sad mistake. . . . The play is chiefly a study of adolescent problems. But then, Broadway is naive. You're smiling? You know very well that Broadway only imagines it is sophisticated. In reality it is bowed down by conventions, or rather, what it thinks are the conventions of the outside world. Broadway does not know that humanity has grown up.<sup>20</sup>

Recognizing the maturity of her audiences, Hellman built her plays on old-fashioned moral themes that made sophisticated twentieth-century Americans take a hard look at the wide gap between personal morality and social norms. In The Children's Hour she showed audiences how a self-serving lie can ruin people's lives; in Days to Come she pointed to the human costs of the profit motive; and in The Little Foxes she again focused upon the evils inherent in greed and exploitation. Hellman's plays did not make for a pleasant evening's entertainment; on the other hand, they never failed to attract audiences who, more than merely looking for a good time, were interested in being challenged and perhaps even changed by an intellectual encounter with old-fashioned ideas of good and evil, and their costs and rewards.

But ideas alone do not make a good play, for there must be believable characters to communicate a play's ideas to an audience. Hellman's characterization, more than any of her other qualities, has made her a great playwright. Edith J. R. Isaacs explains what it is that makes Hellman's characters so believable. They are not mere mouthpieces of the playwright, Isaacs writes, but "being alive and integrated in the author's mind, [they] take on a life of their own, . . . [setting] us aquiver with their actions and their emotions." Isaacs goes on to point out that "the whole action of Watch on the Rhine stems from the characters themselves and their relations to the

world around them.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Hellman's avaricious Hubbard family in The Little Foxes came to life on stage. Discussing the Hubbards in 1979 with Richard Poirier, Hellman explained her aim in characterization: "I had meant the audience to recognize some part of themselves in the money-dominated Hubbards; I had not meant people to think of them as villains to whom they had no connection."<sup>22</sup> It is precisely this connection which makes Hellman's characters so real; the audience glimpses its own reflection on stage and responds emotionally--as well as intellectually--to what it sees. Thus it is not difficult for well-intentioned but politically uncommitted Americans to see themselves in the places of Fanny and David, or to look at Teck and realize that not being actively anti-fascist is as harmful as being pro-fascist. Hellman admits that as her characters develop in her mind, they gradually assume control over the play that is coming out of her typewriter, leaving the author bewildered and surprised by both the final shape the characters have assumed and the way they have resolved the conflict into which she had originally thrust them. Although this is a gross oversimplification of Hellman's creative process--as a survey of the drafts of her play manuscripts will readily demonstrate--the statement nevertheless underscores the centrality of Hellman's characterization to the creation of a play.<sup>23</sup> Because the play evolves out of the characters, the theme must necessarily emerge from their own personalities and attitudes.

Yet Hellman's skill as an artist only partially explains the success of Watch on the Rhine. In order to understand and appreciate fully the play's artistic qualities, it is necessary to perceive them in terms of the ways in which they interact with the political ideas

that undergird the play. The strong anti-fascist sentiment that inspired Hellman to write Watch on the Rhine, therefore, is the key factor. An examination of Hellman's anti-fascism, then, will shed further light upon our understanding of the meaning of this play. Thus I shall, in the next chapter, look at the political/intellectual climate that fostered Hellman's anti-fascist views, examining the complex phenomenon of anti-fascism and the American Left. Then I shall analyze the development of Hellman's own political thought as it evolved out of the perceptions and attitudes that characterized American intellectuals' response to fascism during the interwar years.

## CHAPTER II

### ANTI-FASCISM AND THE AMERICAN LEFT IN THE 1930S: THE POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL CLIMATE

To liberal American intellectuals of the 1930s, fascism was more a matter of image and perception than a matter of fact and reality. Thus in attempting to understand the anti-fascism of the thirties, we mislead ourselves if we seek to apply to that period a definition derived from the facts and analyses we have at hand a half century later. Rather than looking at what fascism was, we must think in terms of what it seemed to be; therefore neat social science definitions are of little value to us here except, perhaps, for the purpose of comparing the myth with the reality.<sup>1</sup> In the mind of the liberal American intellectual of the 1930s, fascism was a vague, general label applied to all aspects and manifestations of a post-World War I attitude that developed in Europe out of a revolt against the concepts of liberalism, modernism, and democracy. Although fascism appeared in different countries under different names--Adolph Hitler's National Socialism in Germany, Benito Mussolini's National Fascism in Italy, Francisco Franco's Movimiento Nacional in Spain, and Charles Maurras' Action Française in France--these distinctions were generally ignored or overlooked by American anti-fascists who fixed upon National Socialism as the epitome and symbol of European fascism. Even in the Spanish Civil War the real enemy seemed to be Hitler, not Franco;

to the soldiers of the International Brigades--whose ranks included many Americans--the German bombers symbolized a war much bigger than its immediate battle lines suggested. This underscores the fact that opponents of fascism perceived it in a broad, general sense as a threat to Western civilization, not as individual threats to individual Western European democracies. This perception, therefore, created the apocalyptic view that fascism was a single, unified force which had to be eradicated if Western civilization was to survive.

Thus anti-fascism was--as its name implies--a negative movement, a reaction against the shadow of fascism which crept unchecked across the European continent during the second and third decades of this century. Although it originated earlier in Europe, anti-fascism first surfaced in America in the late 1920s and early 1930s, partially in response to events in Europe but primarily as a reaction against the stance of a small but vocal number of influential American liberals who--at least for a brief time--embraced Italian fascism during the mid and late 1920s.<sup>2</sup> Its negative nature defines it not so much in terms of what it is, but rather of what it is not. Its amorphous configuration requires that it be defined loosely and with ample qualification. And, too, its catholicity renders generalization difficult. Anti-fascism was liberal, humanitarian, democratic, and idealistic. Because it was individualistic, it existed outside any context of a perceived class struggle, hence it was not Marxist in its orientation. It was conscious of history, committed to preserving Western civilization's values and traditions for future generations, and expressed itself through an unhesitating commitment to one's fellows. Because it was based upon a symbiosis of belief and action, it made of its participants

philosopher-heroes. Despite disagreements over ideology, methods, and objectives, American anti-fascists--whose ranks included an unlikely and ever-increasing assortment of anarchists, socialists, communists, and democrats, not to mention nihilists, iconoclasts, and even a few conservatives--found themselves inextricably bound to each other by their common aim to eradicate fascism. Regardless of their differing views of society and the individual's relationship to it, American anti-fascists found that this unifying element enabled them to set aside--at least temporarily--other disagreements in order to focus their collective efforts against the common enemy.<sup>3</sup> The resulting coalition transcended distinctions of politics and class and was characterized by an emotionalism which united its adherents in a fellowship of genuine fraternity.

Because European fascism developed as a reaction against communism, it created a simple black-and-white division in political/social philosophy: one was either fascist (i.e., anti-communist) or anti-fascist. Thus anti-fascism, by default if not by design, came out on the same side as communism in this either/or division. Threatened by Hitler's rise to power, the Soviet Union took the lead in the worldwide fight to save the world from fascism, devoting its national resources and party organization to the task. Thus both Marxist and anti-Marxist anti-fascists looked to the Communist Party for leadership in their allied efforts against fascism. Although many American liberals were actively engaged in radical politics, the vast majority of liberals watched the radical show from the sidelines. Nevertheless, the Communist Party's role in this drama was central. By the mid-1930s, party membership in the United States had surpassed

that of the Socialist Party, with many people leaving the latter in protest of Norman Thomas' refusal to press for American intervention on behalf of the Spanish Loyalists. Large numbers who left the socialist ranks were young, college-educated, American-born Jews whose Jewish identities had been strengthened by the ravages of fascism in Europe. Events in Europe had compelled them to consider Jewish concerns first and socialist concerns second; when the two came into conflict, they chose anti-fascism and bolted the Socialist Party.

It was the Communist Party's mid-decade shift in emphasis, however, that enabled democratic socialists and other non-revolutionaries to move into its camp. As fascism's threat to the Soviet system increased, Communist Party leaders realized that they would have to moderate their revolutionary stance if they expected to significantly broaden their base of support. Moreover, the party leadership recognized the need to present a united front against all forms of fascism everywhere, thus effecting a quid pro quo arrangement with groups and individuals whose more narrow and immediate goals were to fight the spread of fascism in other countries. To accomplish this, the party embarked upon a new program of de-emphasizing social revolution and instead focusing upon reform and anti-fascist activities. In 1935 the Communist Party's International Congress expressed this shift in focus, calling for a worldwide Popular Front uniting all people everywhere who wished to see fascism destroyed. By dropping the issue of revolution and emphasizing the popular alliance to fight fascism, the Communist Party made itself an acceptable choice for anti-fascists of every stripe. The Popular Front image focused attention on the global implications of the conflict, thus making the Soviet Union's



involvement appear less self-serving than it in fact was. The party's new emphasis quickly attracted the support of many disaffected socialists--including a preponderance of middle class intellectual and professional Jews--as well as other unaffiliated liberals who wished to act upon their anti-fascist and reform impulses. Although the Communist Party had always opposed anti-Semitism (which was again becoming an issue of concern in America, as well as in Hitler's Germany), after 1935 it made this a major party focus. Party candidates traded for votes on this issue, and the party pointed proudly to the U.S.S.R.'s outlawing of anti-Semitism. This anti-Semitic stance complemented the party's fight against fascism and drew enough support from Jewish intellectuals, teachers, social workers, and small business owners to enable the Communist Party to emerge as "the most militant public force [against fascism] in the Jewish community,"<sup>4</sup> as well as the linchpin of anti-fascist activism in the American intellectual community.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, in the urgency of choosing sides and glossing over the points of disagreement, many American liberals adopted an unrealistic view of the nation that appeared to be so selfless in leading the opposition to fascism. Their perception of the Soviet Union, like their view of fascism, was based more on image than on reality:

Communism appealed to them because it seemed a science as well as an ethic, because it explained and foretold as well as inspired, and because it had become incarnate in a dynamic country directed by a hard-headed elite. Contemptuous of their own "politicians" and impatient with the government's failure to cope with the Depression at home or to recognize the menace of fascism abroad, American intellectuals uncritically accepted the Bolshevik self-portrait. Soviet propaganda pictured a society where unemployment and racial discrimination had been permanently abolished, where artists and writers were honored and made use of, a country resolutely opposed to imperialistic ventures and staunchly anti-fascist.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that the Soviets had taken the lead in the fight against fascism was enough to secure for them the alliance (at least through party involvement, if not through party membership) of many American liberals. To most of these people, the Soviet Union was a fuzzy picture in which none of the sharp edges were visible. Yet even if the sharp edges were pointed out to them, they denied their existence or rationalized their necessity. Consequently, reports damaging to the Soviets were usually ignored or dismissed as malicious rumors spread by fascist sympathizers. And even when the truth about Stalin's purges (1936-38) surfaced, American anti-fascists felt compelled to defend the regime, rationalizing these actions as inhumane but no doubt necessary for Russia's long-range well-being. Moreover, Stalin's actions placed his American defenders in a difficult position; since he was their only ally in the fight against fascism (their own government did not even support them), it would hardly be appropriate for them to criticize him for the way he chose to run his own country. Besides, the outbreak of civil war in Spain (July 1936)--the first military confrontation between the forces of fascism and its opponents--diverted their attention to a more immediate threat which put their faith in Russia to the ultimate test. Thus it was not until the announcement of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact (August 1939) that most American liberals finally took a critical look at the Soviet Union.

The liberals who joined the Communist Party or hovered on the sidelines of its activity in the 1930s were, therefore, attracted more by the party's whirlwind of reform and anti-fascist activity than by its Marxist-Leninist ideology. Throughout the thirties, liberals rallied support for any group which claimed to be fighting fascism, regardless

of the source of its sponsorship. Indeed, they came to perceive all other political issues in terms of the single issue of fascism. Divisions were clearly drawn: any group which supported fascism was an enemy, while any group opposed to or victimized by fascists was an ally. Mike Gold, writing in The New Masses in April, 1933, urged solidarity: "Every anti-fascist is needed in this united front. There must be no base for factional quarrels."<sup>7</sup> Arthur Koestler, in Arrow in the Blue, wrote, "[Marxism is] the logical extension of the progressive humanistic trend . . . the continuation and fulfillment of the great Judeo-Christian tradition."<sup>8</sup> Not only did liberals find communism quite palatable, they were also attracted by the élan of the communists, since

. . . [n]o other party . . . sponsored such an array of cultural and political organizations, bookshops, theatrical companies, dance groups, and films, or such well-publicized and carefully staged mass meetings. "The Communist Calendar," Orrick Johns discovered after he had joined the party, was "as full of dates as festas in Italy. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

Because the social life of the American Left revolved around party activities, many liberals wandered casually into and out of its sphere. Very few, however, stayed for long, demonstrating that it was anti-fascism--not revolutionary Marxism--that made them radicals. Throughout most of the decade of the thirties, the image of the Fellow Traveler was a positive one mythologized in the anti-fascist novels of writers like André Malraux, Arthur Koestler, and Ernest Hemingway. The Fellow Traveler as hero became an important concept in anti-fascist lore, primarily because the image implied a personal commitment rather than an ideological one. The Fellow Traveler was not really part of the communist sphere; he or she was merely traveling the same road to reach his or her own destination. This conception provided ample

rationalization for any liberal who may have questioned his or her own strange bedfellowship with the Communist Party and the Soviet Union.

Because American intellectuals were, as a group, both more liberal than the American public and better informed on world events and their implications for America's future, they provided a vital link between anti-fascism and the masses by serving as publicists of ideas. The group was a large and talented one including, among others, eminent writers (Ernest Hemingway, Theodore Dreiser, Edmund Wilson, John Dos Passos, Lillian Hellman, Archibald MacLeish, Thomas Wolfe, and Dorothy Parker); academics (Charles Beard, Joseph Wood Krutch, John Dewey, Samuel Eliot Morison, William Y. Elliott, Mark Van Doren, and Robert Maynard Hutchins); journalists (John Gunther, Lincoln Steffens, H. L. Mencken, Herbert Croly, Horace Kallen, Walter Lippmann, and Philip Rahv); artists (Aaron Copland, William Gropper, Martha Graham, Rockwell Kent, and Robert Motherwell); and scientists (Harlow Shapley, Harold C. Urey, and Arthur Compton), as well as labor leaders, civil libertarians, educational leaders, civil rights activists, and religious leaders. Radical political figures like Mike Gold, Earl Browder, Irving Howe, Joseph Freeman, Max Eastman, Carlo Tresca, and Emma Goldman lent organizational support and leadership. As exiled European scholars, scientists, and artists began arriving in the United States, America's intellectual community was not only enriched by the talents of men like Thomas Mann, Albert Einstein, Arnold Schoenberg, Walter Gropius, Gaetano Salvemini, Enrico Fermi, Mies van der Rohe, and Bertolt Brecht but, more important, was forced to see that fascism was not a faraway problem but an imminent threat that had jettisoned the

"debris" of its upheaval into the American intellectuals' own studios, laboratories, studies, and dinner parties.

This list of names suggests the quality, breadth, and diversity that characterized the American anti-fascist community during the inter-war years. While generalizations can sometimes be dangerous, it is reasonable to conclude that the majority of these intellectuals were products of the middle class. Most were political liberals of one variety or another; many--at least for a time--flirted with political radicalism, but only a very small number could be described as hard core radicals. Many were Jews; very few were Catholics; and most had rejected organized religion but retained and practiced the basic humanitarian values of the Judeo-Christian heritage. Blacks figured significantly in this group, as outstanding artists like Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, and Richard Wright found among the intelligentsia the acceptance that eluded them in the society as a whole.

The multiplicity of roles played by many of these anti-fascists cannot be overlooked. Lillian Hellman's own activities on behalf of the anti-fascist cause are representative of both the individual diversity and group interaction that characterized anti-fascist efforts in America. Hellman reported on the Spanish Civil War in The New Republic and The New Masses, and after returning to the United States, capitalized upon her first-hand knowledge in order to encourage Americans to continue their fight against fascism. In 1937 she smuggled into Nazi Germany enough cash to finance the escape and/or release of nearly a thousand Jews and political prisoners. When Ernest Hemingway decided to make a documentary film on the Loyalist struggle in Spain,

Hellman--along with Dos Passos and MacLeish--provided financial backing for the venture and helped create the scenario. She impulsively purchased an ambulance for the Spanish Loyalists one morning, paying for it with her previous night's chemin de fer winnings. Hellman also organized and spoke at writers' luncheons, conferences and fora. While these notorious free-for-alls usually generated more debate over politics than art, they always provided effective stages from which to garner free newspaper publicity for the anti-fascist cause. Hellman invariably signed and circulated the same petitions, contributed time, money, and talent to the same drives, and attended the same rallies, benefits, and meetings as did her fellow intellectuals. The New York newspapers, which faithfully reported her activities to their readers, as well as Hellman's own correspondence and memoirs, clearly document a pattern of anti-fascist activism which not only typified that of her fellow intellectuals, but also illustrated the close concert in which members of the larger intellectual community frequently worked on anti-fascist endeavors.<sup>10</sup>

The anti-fascist community was also drawn together by the intellectuals' consciousness of their role as keepers of the culture. As both producers and consumers of art, they believed it was their responsibility to save the world from barbarism, so they prepared to wage battle against what they perceived to be fascism's greatest threat: the destruction of Western culture. They realized, too, that as articulators of ideas they were in a position to influence the thinking of other intellectuals and, to some extent, shape the view of the general public. Each used his or her particular medium--whether it be fiction, theatre, political cartoons, film, or newspaper columns--

to carry the anti-fascist message to whoever would listen. At the same time, intellectuals were concerned about making their art comprehensible to the general public. As Allen Guttman notes:

. . . [T]he engagement of writers and artists (and others) was more than a beating of wings in a net of alien ideologies. Although the mainstream of American life has been characterized by separate channels for "high brow" and "low brow," there have always been men like Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman . . . who have sought . . . the whole man within the organic society. The crisis of the 1930's seemed to bring their efforts to fruition. If Ivory Towers were inhabited, it must have been--metaphorically speaking--in order to scan the skies for the approach of enemy bombers.<sup>11</sup>

And Archibald MacLeish asserted that poetry, as poetry, could "do something to halt the march of Fascism":

Poetry alone imagines, and imagining creates, the world that men can wish to live in and make true. For what is lacking in the crisis of our time is only this: this image.<sup>12</sup>

Actors and playwrights took their plays to street corners and artists designed giant posters for Times Square; everyone did what he or she could and aimed his or her creativity toward the broadest possible audience.

Yet American anti-fascism was more than merely a predictable liberal response to the social, economic, and political crises of the interwar years, for its impact upon American letters was far more powerful than was its influence in the political arena. Anti-fascism was the catalyst that forced the literary explosion that had been building in American letters since the end of World War I. The Great War had left American writers with such an overwhelming sense of disillusionment, betrayal, and alienation that they had turned their art inward. Rejecting bourgeois American institutions, mores, and politics, artists and writers of the Lost Generation eschewed

traditional values and pursued an atomistic aesthetic based on formlessness and valuelessness. Their search for absolutes in pure art led them first to Dadaism. But despite their passionate vitality, Dadaist expressions were hollow and ineffectual, reflecting the nihilism affected by their creators. Nevertheless, the spirit of Dada--of scandalous rebellion and experimentation--ultimately effected a revolution in the literature of the interwar years, hence

. . . the creative energy which was short-circuited in Dada found release elsewhere and spread through the writing of the Twenties like a prairie fire: protest and denial gave the writing a single point of view, a unified plan of attack and the impetus of rebellion carried it away from the narrow traditions of the past and toward new and startling discoveries in form and technique. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Following the examples of James Joyce and Gertrude Stein, writers began to seek the purest, most authentic means of expression. A vital spirit emerged as they created a new aesthetic built upon the war's legacy of bitterness, shattered hopes, and lost innocence. This was the only tradition they knew, the only authentic context for their work, which unwittingly assumed a universal character. The highly personal literature of writers like Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos was "written so compellingly, with such a tragic sense of loss, that it seemed to describe the predicament of all contemporary humanity."<sup>14</sup> Artists began to ask themselves: Can the individual separate himself from society? Can art ignore the values that define political, economic, and social relationships? Once these writers had achieved an authentic context for their writing, their atomistic view was transformed to a humanistic one and aesthetics became reconciled with politics. Egoism had to give way to humanism and pure art had to give way to political art before writers could become anti-fascists; it



is in this reconciliation that the key to understanding anti-fascism lies.

Hemingway and Dos Passos, for example, both reveal in their novels the development each writer experienced along the road from detached disillusionment to humanitarian commitment.

It was fascism . . . which roused Hemingway to the realization that a neutral amorality was anti-human. Earlier, Hemingway had sought masculine robustness in elemental physical aggressiveness which knows no fear of death. His favorite characters had been killers, athletes, soldiers, and his favorite theme, Spanish bull-fighting. Here, where the question of guilt was irrelevant, he saw the manifestation of genuine tragedy. Now Hemingway abandons his impassive animalism, which makes no distinction between the murderer and the murdered, for a critical humanism which differentiates between process and purpose.<sup>15</sup>

Hemingway's prefatory quotation from John Donne in For Whom the Bell Tolls makes clear just how far the author traversed in his journey from atomistic individualism to organic participation:

No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.<sup>16</sup>

In the story of Robert Jordan's transition, Hemingway seems to be tracing his own developing social awareness:

The bridge which serves as the pivot point of the narrative also spans Robert Jordan's academic pursuits [cf. Hemingway's artistic endeavors] and his political activity [Hemingway, too, was devoted to the Loyalist cause]. . . . As Jordan and Anselmo observe the fascist guards on the bridge, they see in them people, human beings much like themselves. And as Jordan listens to Pilar's story of massacres perpetrated by both fascists and anti-fascists, political distinctions recede. . . . The circle has swung fully around from general apathy to universal sympathy.<sup>17</sup>

In his trilogy, U.S.A., Dos Passos reveals a similar pattern of his own development as his characters progress from bohemian revolt to integrated social action. There is little doubt that Dos Passos' bitterness over the injustice of the Sacco-Vanzetti executions in 1927 was a major influence on his change from atomism to organicism.<sup>18</sup> This period in his personal development is reflected in his work by a clear rechanneling of impotent, angry protest into positive counter-attack against the forces of evil.

He sensed now that the real victims of the system were the working classes and that the real evils of the system stemmed from wealth and power. He was thus able to focus his sympathies upon a specific social group and set them against his hatred of another social group, just as in his earlier work he had focused his sympathies upon the individual aesthete and set them against his hatred of war.<sup>19</sup>

Although a growing awareness of the threat of fascism--combined with an increasing apprehension of America's unresolved social problems--was partly responsible for bringing about this change in the thinking of American intellectuals, the influence of European writers cannot be overlooked. Anti-fascist literati like Arthur Koestler, Romain Rolland, Ignazio Silone and André Malraux were instrumental in the creation of a left-wing collective consciousness that integrated "an awareness of history, culture, politics, communitarianism and a commitment to authentic [human and aesthetic] values."<sup>20</sup> Several important ideas--perhaps best articulated by Malraux--found a receptive audience in the American intelligentsia of the interwar years. First, Malraux clearly defined the social role of the intellectual. In doing so, he called upon intellectuals to: (1) help broaden the left by making "the people" inclusive of more than just workers; (2) "transmit and preserve" the non-nationalistic historical legacy of the West; (3) devote themselves

to "the remaking of culture in the present"; (4) "make society self-conscious" by giving it a conscience; and (5) bring closer together "the producers and consumers of culture." Thus Malraux made it clear that the intellectual's social responsibility was to defend culture, especially the artistic and human values that ennoble humankind and foster a society in which each person can freely achieve his or her human potential.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, Malraux encouraged intellectuals who were uncomfortable with political labels to identify with socialist humanism, an ambiguous ideology based on respect for human values and the extension of true democracy to establish harmony between people and their fellows, their work, and their natural environment. The breadth and simplicity of this ideology was important; because it was neither doctrinaire nor dogmatic, it attracted a broad spectrum of adherents who would not otherwise have been able to find common points of agreement. Although it was clearly not conservative, neither was it explicitly "red," hence Marxists and non-Marxists alike could feel uncorrupted by it. While the anti-fascist movement had many ties with communism, by identifying itself with socialist humanism--with its positive emphasis on democratic and humanitarian values--it offered a third alternative that was acceptable to those who opposed both fascism and communism. Also, socialist humanism was a non-threatening choice for the young intellectuals emerging from the apoliticism of the 1920's. Those who were skeptical of political parties and creeds could find little to object to in socialist humanism as Malraux and other intellectuals presented it. As intellectuals became politicized under this broad banner, they reevaluated their role and purpose in

society. They rejected their previous association with the institutions and social order that represented right values (status quo and pro-fascism) and abandoned their former political and artistic neutrality.

And finally, Malraux's glorification of heroism and communitarianism played a key role in attracting intellectuals to the anti-fascist movement. His heroes combined a sense of history and culture with critical thinking and disciplined action; they achieved a sense of fellowship, intimacy and shared values that gave them the strength to look beyond themselves, thus demonstrating the possibility of a political solution to individual isolation and despair. As Kassner, Malraux's freedom fighter in Days of Wrath (1936), epitomized these qualities and values, he became a hero larger than life, a myth which captured the collective imagination of American intellectuals who wanted to see something of the archetypal anti-fascist hero in themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Lillian Hellman certainly did, as she internalized these values which not only motivated her personal involvement in anti-fascist causes and endeavors, but also found their purest artistic expression in her characterization of Kurt Mueller. In the next chapter, I shall examine Hellman's own developing social and political awareness in order to see how various forces and events in her life made her receptive to the political and intellectual influences described above.

### CHAPTER III

#### PARALLEL DEVELOPMENTS: LILLIAN HELLMAN'S POLITICAL AND ARTISTIC SENSIBILITIES

The schizophrenic pattern of her family's life could not help but emphasize to Lillian, as a very young child, the conflicting values and points of view represented by her maternal and paternal relatives. Most of the time while their only child was growing up, the Hellmans lived half of each year in New York, where Lillian's mother's family created in the child's mind a lifelong revulsion for the misuse of wealth and power. The cold, calculating, and avaricious Newhouses--whose attitudes and behavior provided Hellman, many years later, with the inspiration for some of the most despicable characters in American drama--epitomized the evil of greed and exploitation. On the other hand, her father's two unmarried sisters, with whom the family lived in their New Orleans boarding house the other six months of the year, were proud, genteel working women whose kindness and compassion taught the child the humane values that governed her adult life. Such contrasts could not go unnoticed by a precocious child; Hellman began, at a very early age, making conscious decisions about her values. Her parents also influenced and reinforced her choices, for both were sensitive, principled people whose personal moralities were independently arrived at and mutually respected--if not fully comprehended or appreciated--by each other.

It is not surprising, then, that Lillian learned early in life that moral choices are complex and that there are prices to pay, regardless of the choices one makes. In 1973 Hellman recalled:

By fourteen my heart was with the poor except on the days it was with those who ground them under. I remember that period as a hell of self-dislike, but I do not now mean to make fun of it: not too many years later . . . I understood that I lived under an economic system of increasing impurity and injustice for which I, and all those like me, pay with ridiculous wounds to the spirit.<sup>1</sup>

A note in a journal from her early adolescent years illustrates her real or imagined response to another girl's aspersions upon a woman Lillian admired who was living with a man to whom she was not married: "I twisted her arm and held it firm as I forced her to repeat after me, 'Does love need a minister, a rabbi, a priest? Is divine love between a man and woman based on permission of a decadent society?'" (P, 338-39). Such social criticism reveals an early learned--if not yet consistent or discriminating--ability to separate social norms from moral imperatives; this was to become a major theme in Hellman's plays (including Watch on the Rhine), as well as a guiding principle in her social and political judgments.

In her memoirs Hellman described the ways in which her childhood experiences in both milieux made her cognizant of the pain and frustration of dealing with perceived human injustices. Life in New York and New Orleans gave her plenty of examples to ponder. The sense of indignation and impotence with which she first apprehended less-than-human treatment of some individuals by others kindled in her young heart a rage which has sustained Hellman through decades of battles against various permutations of human injustice. Moreover, both Hellman's memoirs and her plays make it clear that she believes that

the bystander is morally obligated to take action against the perpetrator of the offense. The Negro servant, Addie, in The Little Foxes (1939)--modeled after Hellman's own black nurse, Sophronia, about whom she writes so poignantly in her memoirs--speaks for both Sophronia and Hellman when she admonishes the young, innocent Alexandra:

. . . there are people who eat the earth and eat all the people on it like in the Bible with the locusts. And other people who stand around and watch them eat it. (Softly) Sometimes I think it ain't right to stand and watch them do it (182).

When Alexandra later throws up those same words to her mother (who has just killed her husband in order to take control of the family's fortune) we can see the autobiographical aspect of Hellman's drama at work; she admitted that she was not able to write about the Newhouses and their view of life until she had achieved her own emotional break from the tyranny of their greed and intimidation. Indeed, it was necessary for her to do more than quietly despise them; she had to bring out into the open her contempt for them and everything for which they stood. Hellman's unflattering portrayal of her maternal relatives in her early plays--their values and style appeared also in the rich, vindictive Mrs. Tilford in The Children's Hour (1934) and in the exploitative factory owners Andrew and Cora Rodman in Days to Come (1936)--seems to have provided the cathartic Hellman needed in order to be able to live with wealth yet remain uncorrupted by it.

Nevertheless, it took Hellman many years to sort out her feelings about her relatives and make good use of those emotions as she went about the work of creating fictional characters which could elicit similar responses from her readers and audiences. Dealing with the qualities she disliked came first, and most easily, as her earlier

work so clearly illustrates. During the years their daughter was growing up, Max and Julia Hellman were never quite able to extricate themselves from the complex emotional and economic ties that alternately thrust the three Hellmans into two antithetical extended family groups. In New York, they suffered the indignity of being the poor relations of Sophie and Jake Newhouse, a sibling pair of rich and ruthless entrepreneurs whose Sunday dinners more nearly resembled corporate board meetings than family gatherings. At the Newhouse table, approval was only extended to those who could report impressive tales of material acquisition in a weekly one-upsmanship contest that Lillian and her parents observed from the sidelines in silent embarrassment and shame. Her rage, however, never found expression until she began to write for the stage. Hellman succeeded in turning evil against itself as she remembered those early years.

Yet the development of Hellman's skill as a dramatist appears to parallel her growing understanding of and appreciation for the admirable human qualities exemplified by the three women--black and white Southerners--who influenced the child in positive, yet very complex, ways. Lillian's nurse, Sophronia Mason, provided the child with the only constant, stabilizing influence of her childhood. Because Sophronia took the place of a mother whose own emotional weaknesses rendered her incapable of caring for a child who puzzled and frightened her, it was the strong, proud, wise, black woman whose values and ways shaped Lillian's moral development. Sophronia also provided constancy for a child shuttled between the worlds of the New York Newhouses and the New Orleans Hellmans. In the latter place, both Lillian and Sophronia found kindred spirits in the persons of Hannah



and Jenny Hellman, Max Hellman's two fun-loving and generous spinster sisters. Lillian's aunts were shabby genteel ladies who supported themselves and countless transitory, unacknowledged dependents by working hard all their lives and operating a boarding house where the atmosphere was infused with a tolerance and compassion uncharacteristic of both the region and the time. It was they who taught Lillian the virtues of empathy and humility, as well as female independence and heroic action. Because their personalities were complex and because Hellman's emotional ties to them were so strong, she needed to acquire the perspective of middle age before she could successfully write about her aunts. They finally appeared as the more neurotic pair of sisters in Toys in the Attic (1960). Although the two fictitious sisters were flawed by a malevolent streak inspired, presumably, by the Newhouse view of human relations, they nevertheless retained many of the fine qualities Jenny and Hannah Hellman had impressed upon the young Lillian many years earlier. Sophronia, too, required maturity to tackle; although she appeared briefly as Addie in The Little Foxes and her values were clearly represented by the Mueller family in Watch on the Rhine, she loomed so large in Hellman's consciousness that she could not write about her nurse until the late sixties when she began work on her memoirs. In these works, Sophronia--like Hannah and Jenny and Helen Jackson, Hellman's black housekeeper and cook--emerged as the most vividly and poignantly drawn of all the people in Hellman's life.

But if, as a young child, Hellman was puzzled and offended by the economic, social, racial, and religious injustices she observed, by the time she was sixteen she was beginning to learn something about the social theorists whose ideas were shaping the world she would know as

an adult. Julia (a pseudonym), her dearest childhood friend, was, at sixteen, a precocious student and a budding young Marxist. Because of Hellman's intense admiration for her friend, she took seriously Julia's explanations and interpretations of the world of ideas that beckoned to the sharp minds and keen sensitivities of both girls. In a memoir published in 1973, Hellman described Julia's role in acquainting her with some of the theories that later influenced her art and her politics:

How young it seems now that although I had heard the name of Freud, I never knew exactly what he wrote until she told me; that Karl Marx and Engels became men with theories, instead of that one sentence in my school book which mentioned the Manifesto (P, 417).

Her young mentor apparently knew something of what she spoke. Julia left New York the next year, 1922, for medical studies at Oxford and shortly thereafter moved to Vienna where she became a student/patient of Freud. While in Vienna, Julia assumed a leadership role in a Marxist group dedicated to fighting fascism. She lost a leg in the Vienna riots of 1934, and spent the next four years as a leader in the anti-fascist underground. She involved her childhood friend in the group's work in October 1937, when Hellman was traveling by train from Paris to Moscow to attend a Soviet theatre festival featuring a production of The Children's Hour. Knowing that she had a trustworthy courier who was not known to the Nazis, Julia orchestrated a daring but successful plan by which Hellman smuggled into Germany enough cash (much of it from Julia's own inherited fortune) to finance the escape and/or release of nearly a thousand Jews and political prisoners. The money was safely sewn into the lining of the hat Hellman wore as she passed smoothly through customs at the French-German frontier. She passed the money to

Julia in the washroom of a Berlin cafe during a two-hour layover. It was not until her train had reached the safety of Poland that she discovered her bags missing from the baggage compartment. They were not returned to her until weeks later, having been slashed to pieces by suspicious--but disappointed--German authorities.<sup>2</sup> That was only the first of several times in which Hellman knowingly placed herself in great danger for a cause she believed was important.

Even sixteen years before, Marxism, to two bright and sensitive teen-aged girls, had been an idea to be considered carefully; both girls did, but with quite different results. Julia's total personal commitment to the Marxist vision resulted in her murder in 1938 at the hands of Nazi storm troopers who raided the Frankfurt apartment out of which her organization operated. Lillian's political course turned out to be far less radical. She never joined the Communist Party, though many of the people closest to her were avowed communists and many of the anti-fascist groups with which she was affiliated were closely tied to the Party. Yet both Hellman's artistic career and her political activities reveal a consistent, lifelong commitment to socialist-humanist values, as well as outspoken admiration for the Soviet ideal. The different courses the two friends took must have haunted Hellman's thoughts in May of 1938 as she stood in a London funeral parlor looking down upon the once beautiful, now mutilated, face of the friend who, many years earlier, had introduced her to both the ideas and the spirit of Marx and Engels. A note, left for Hellman at the funeral parlor by one of Julia's colleagues, must have reinforced the playwright's own commitment to anti-fascist activism: "We got her to London in the hope of saving her. Sorry that I cannot be here with you. It is better

that I take my sorrow for this wonderful woman into action and perhaps revenge" (P, 445).

In the fall of 1922, as Julia went off to Oxford, Hellman entered New York University where, though she did not complete a degree, she spent three years grappling with Kant, Hegel, Marx and Engels, and very little else. Her style of learning was, like everything else about her, decidedly independent. She often cut classes, preferring to spend her days and evenings in Greenwich Village hang-outs, reading what she wanted to read and engaging in lively debate with fellow students. She must have been more than just a name on the class roster, though, for one of her professors, Alexander Woolcott, sometimes sought her out after class to argue points in his lectures to which she had silently responded with disapproving looks and head-shaking. She enjoyed her literature courses and dreamed of being a writer. An avid newspaper reader, Hellman was prepared to debate issues and ideas with anyone who possessed the intellect and stamina to take her on. During her tenure at N.Y.U., Hellman began to identify herself with a generation of Americans whose "revolt against sentimentality had come . . . out of distaste for pretense" (UW, 45-46).

Hellman left N.Y.U. in her junior year and traveled through the South and Midwest during the spring of 1925. Returning to New York in June, she landed what she described as "a very menial position--a little advertising work, a little publicity, and a lot of manuscript reading"<sup>3</sup> at the prestigious publishing house of Horace Liveright, where she was initiated into both the glamor and the drudgery of the literary world. At that time, Liveright's list of authors was impressive: the firm was publishing Faulkner, Freud, Hemingway, O'Neill, Dreiser, Cummings, and

many others. The fuzzy line between what was officially viewed as work and what was officially viewed as socializing enabled the nineteen-year-old Hellman to make many of the contacts that would allow her, throughout her career, to move freely among the worlds of publishing, theatre, and letters. It was at Liveright's, too, that she met her lifelong friends Edmund Wilson and Louis Kronenberger (her first play was co-written with Kronenberger, but it was never produced) and her short-term husband and long-time friend, Arthur Kober. She married Kober in 1925 and they were amicably divorced in 1932. At the time of their marriage, Kober was working as press agent for Jed Harris, the most successful theatrical producer of the twenties. Kober shared an office with Herman Shumlin, Harris' general manager, who was on his way to becoming the most successful producer of the thirties and forties and who would, in the coming decades, produce all of Hellman's plays.

After her marriage, Hellman took literature courses at Columbia and wrote a number of book reviews for the New York Herald-Tribune. Then the couple moved to Paris, where Kober edited the Paris Comet, an English-language society magazine for American expatriates. Hellman tried, without success, to write short stories. After returning to the U.S. in 1927, Hellman worked in New York as a play reader and publicist. In the spring of 1929 she made enough money by gambling to finance her return, alone, to Europe. She decided to settle in Bonn and attend the university. While waiting for the next term to begin, she moved into a student boarding house and made numerous friends among the German students. She listened with interest to their political discussions: "I thought I was listening to a kind of socialism, I liked it, and agreed with it. It took me months to understand

what I was listening to. Then for the first time in my life I thought about being a Jew. But I was not only listening to anti-Semitism. I was hearing from people my own age the boasts of hopeful conquerors, the sounds of war" (UW, 64). Not realizing that their American friend was a Jew, the young Germans invited her to join their National Socialist Party. Hellman flew back to New York the following day.

The late twenties and early thirties were not the best years of Lillian Hellman's life. Supported by Kober, she hated being a housewife and whiled away the long days by reading and sometimes trying to write. She found occasional diversionary employment on the fringes of the theatrical world as play reader and publicist, but was as restless and dissatisfied with her work as she was with her marriage. Yet there seemed to be no attractive alternatives--particularly after the European venture failed--and Hellman wandered aimlessly through her early adult years, lacking direction, discipline, and motivation. During this time, too, the Kobers fell into a lifestyle that revolved around excessive drinking. They traveled with a fast crowd of writers and hangers-on, people who were making big money and spending it as quickly and easily as it came in. Debauchery became a vicious cycle as partying all night, every night, left participants enervated and hungover, needing all the next day to recuperate and steel themselves for the next night's rounds. A new decade brought a change of scenery but no change in lifestyle. In the spring of 1930 Kober succumbed to the financial attractions of Hollywood and quickly made a name for himself as a successful screen writer for Paramount Pictures. Hellman, who followed him to Hollywood that fall, worked for a time for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, but quickly grew frustrated with her boring job and

menial status as a scenario reader. In Hollywood the Kobers--who were already going their separate ways in a marriage that was not working--became part of a smart set that caroused nightly at the Brown Derby.

There Hellman was immediately attracted to Dashiell Hammett, a handsome, witty, hard-drinking writer whose detective fiction (The Maltese Falcon, The Dain Curse, Red Harvest) had earned for him the respect and admiration of writers and critics, as well as the fame and fortune of a best-selling author. In addition to reviewing books for The Saturday Review of Literature and the New York Post, he was one of Hollywood's most highly-paid screen writers.<sup>4</sup> A liaison quickly developed between the two who, though both married to other people, soon came to be known as a Hollywood couple. Richard Moody describes that period:

When they first met . . . he was recovering from a five-day drunk. His face was drawn and haggard, his tall figure drooped and swayed, his clothes had been lived in too long. Yet Hammett at his poorest was the equal of most men at their best. . . . His charm was irresistible and it had little to do with who he was or what he had done. . . . They met casually and in public places at first. Then more often, privately, and as drinking companions. In the beginning his age advantage of thirteen years appeared excessive, as it would to any girl in her mid-twenties. She was awed . . . [and] intrigued. . . .

Neither could have guessed that their friendship would endure until Hammett's death in 1961, that in their early years together she found him exactly the cool-headed tutor and affectionate critic she needed, that in the later years he found in her the Samaritan he required to ease the burden of his last days, when he was dying of lung cancer. Without his needling, his persistence, his comfort on the bad days, she might never have written The Children's Hour. Without his encouragement after the failure of Days to Come, she might have abandoned playwriting.<sup>5</sup>

And Hellman was also good for Hammett's writing, for she provided him with a model for the witty, wacky Nora in The Thin Man, his finest novel and his finest characterization.<sup>6</sup>

When, in March of 1931, Hellman took a trip back to New York, the undertones of Hammett's witty, chatty letters made clear his devotion to her. On March 4 he wrote:

Darling, It's ten o'clock and you haven't come back so maybe you didn't miss the train after all. . . . The emptiness I thought was hunger for chow mein turned out to be for you. . . .<sup>7</sup>

The next evening:

Sweet, Jones [Hammett's valet] rescued the pajamas from the cleaners this evening. I'll dispatch them to you presently. Arthur [Kober] was in for a couple of hours, left just a few minutes ago. . . . If I can make it [Hammett had stomach flu] we'll probably do the fights tomorrow night. . . . I daresay my absence from the Brown Derby, coinciding with your departure, has started a crop of fresh and juicy rumors. I'll see that they don't die for want of feeding.<sup>8</sup>

And on April 30 he wrote:

Darling, I ran into Arthur, Sid [S. J.] and Laura [Perelman] in the Beren Doiby. I tried to pump Laura about your conduct in New York. . . . Suspected you of the loosest sort of conduct. Just a she-Hammett. . . . Alfred [Knopf] wired me. Glass Key off to a swell start. Made him come across with a thousand dollars. I won't have to eat Jones until perhaps the latter part of next week. . . . My ambition now is to collect enough money to be able to take a couple of months to finish The Thin Man, which, God willing, will be my last detective novel. This is my seventh day on the wagon. When are you coming home?<sup>9</sup>

Immediately following her divorce from Kober in 1932, Hellman moved with Hammett to New York, where he continued to write and she began to make some serious attempts at writing. She renewed her friendship with Louis Kronenberger and together they wrote The Dear Queen, a bad play about a queen who wanted to live like other people until she disguised herself as a middle-class housewife and tried it. Discovering just how restrictive bourgeois morality can be, the queen lost no time returning to her life at the palace.<sup>10</sup> Only the collaborators thought the play was funny; it never reached the stage,



although it was slated for production twice.<sup>11</sup> Hellman's early writing did, however, earn the approval of critic and editor George Jean Nathan, who published two of her short stories in The American Spectator, a West coast literary magazine he edited.<sup>12</sup>

The couple periodically spent time in Hollywood (Hammett's novels were quickly being made into successful films) and both became active in efforts to improve the lot of Hollywood writers. Together with writers like Donald Ogden Stewart and Ring Lardner, Jr. (Hammett's best friends) and Dorothy Parker (Hellman's best friend), they became outraged by the economic and artistic indignities most screen writers suffered at the hands of the all-powerful movie studios. In 1933 work for screen writers was hard to get and never lasted long. The average wage for a screen writer was \$40 a week and that calculation included the salaries of writers like Parker, for example, who earned over \$5,000 a week. The average screen writer could only find work fourteen weeks out of the year.<sup>13</sup> Movie magnates abused writers further by not giving them credits for the films on which they had worked, while freely giving script writing credits to friends and relatives who had contributed little or nothing to a script, but nevertheless collected fat paychecks from the studios each week. Because writers needed acknowledgment of their contributions to the films on which they had worked in order to be competitive in obtaining contracts to work on new films, there was more at stake than bruised egos.<sup>14</sup> These inequities in the film industry mirrored the mid-Depression inequities in the society at large. In an attempt to secure fair and just treatment for their less fortunate colleagues, Hellman and Hammett looked to collective action as a solution.

Early in 1933 they, along with Parker, Stewart, John Howard Lawson, and five others, founded the Screen Writers Guild. Leonard Spiegelglass, who served as vice president in the Guild's early years, describes the climate in Hollywood at the time the Guild was formed; its birth was heralded by the quaking of the earth on March 10, 1933:

. . . first, like in all the terrible movies we'd written, the schools fell apart and the bridges fell down because the people who had built them had cheated. It was like a bad B picture. And secondly, I was at Fox and my salary check bounced. . . . And thirdly, Roosevelt closed the banks. And fourthly, we were asked by the studios to take a fifty percent salary cut, which we all agreed to do on the assumption that everybody was taking it. Well, the only people who took it were the actors, writers, directors and, I suppose, the technical people. We discovered to our absolute horror that the producers didn't take it, the exhibitors didn't take it, and nobody else took it. And that was the agony that turned the old Writers' Club into the Screen Writers Guild. From thirty-three to thirty-six we were kind of an underground movement.<sup>15</sup>

The Guild grew rapidly in membership and power, and with the backing of the National Labor Relations Act achieved recognition as a bargaining unit in 1938. Victor Navasky describes the evolution from guild to union:

Although all three major guilds--writers, directors, actors--were resented by the moguls, and their potential power was such that bitter political contests were fought for internal control of them, these organizations were indeed guilds more than unions. Despite the high hopes and ideals of their founders, they were comprised of people uncomfortable with the kinds of strike mechanisms or mass appeals common to other forms of trade unionism.<sup>16</sup>

In 1936 the studios tried to break the Guild with a company union which competed ruthlessly with it for members. MGM producer Irving Thalberg (F. Scott Fitzgerald's model for The Last Tycoon) gave writers an ultimatum: join the Screen Playwrights or be fired. Although Guild membership suffered, the best writers stood by the Guild, which ultimately survived because its leaders--working sub

rosa--had carefully laid the groundwork for unionization. They had succeeded in establishing a National Labor Relations Board ruling that screen writers constituted a labor group and that as such, they had the right to form a union. Guild leaders also worked hard on membership recruitment. By September 1937, Hammett happily reported to Hellman (in a letter that also casually mentioned the fact that he "was divorced in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, on the 26th of last month") that "the Guild has been signing an average of 12 members a week, including a few from the Playwrights."<sup>17</sup> When an election to certify a bargaining agent was held the next year, the Screen Writers Guild won, by a five to one margin.<sup>18</sup>

Although the Screen Writers Guild was originally formed to protect the economic interests of Hollywood writers, other influences and circumstances soon altered its complexion. The Communist Party was a major factor in effecting these changes. In the early years of the decade, intellectuals' concerns were primarily focused upon the nation's economic woes. As Richard Pells explains, "Many writers . . . assumed that their country possessed both the time and emotional resources to alter its existing social and cultural institutions."<sup>19</sup> The radical vision adopted by intellectuals in the early thirties was socialist but nonrevolutionary in orientation and was characterized by an optimistic view that American society could, indeed, be reformed. However, by the mid-1930s many American intellectuals were beginning to realize that radical solutions to the nation's social and economic ills were not in the offing. At the same time, their attention was drawn away from the domestic scene by crises in Europe and the Far East that appeared to be even more urgent. As the threat of fascism provided a

new focus for radical energy and concern, the Communist Party stepped in to provide a channel through which American liberals could organize their response to the fascist menace. Therefore the party's Popular Front campaign (1935-39) not only coincided with American liberals' disaffection with the Democratic and Socialist Parties--neither of which was responding to anti-fascist demands--but also provided an effective political network through which individuals could act upon their anti-fascist principles. Although it is not within the scope of this study to examine the extent to which the Communist Party influenced the Screen Writers Guild, it is important to note that avowed communists and Fellow Travelers dominated both the Guild's leadership--Parker, Lawson, Stewart, and Hammett, to name a few--and its rank-and-file.

It is not, then, surprising that the Guild, as part of the Popular Front coalition, turned its attention to anti-fascist efforts. Moreover,

With the guild leading the way, writers in Hollywood were soon organizing groups for economic and political action designed, they said, to oppose local and even international fascism. In direct opposition to the film executives and the Dies Committee investigations, they worried over profascist organizations forming in Hollywood: Guy Empey's Hollywood Hussars, Victor McLaglen's Light Horse Cavalry, a branch of Pelley's Silver Shirts. The camaraderie of anti-fascists was intoxicating. . . .<sup>20</sup>

This camaraderie is not to be underestimated, for it helps to explain the wide participation of many individuals in a broad range of organizations and activities purporting to be fighting fascism or aiding its victims. Some of these groups were openly communist, many more were communist fronts, and some, undoubtedly, were independent of the party. Nevertheless, it was anti-fascist concerns, not revolutionary ideology, that united liberals and entangled them in this web of clubs, benefits,

committees, petition drives, and fund raisers that brought them into the communist sphere. Because individuals' anti-fascist activities and affiliations tended to be diversified, it is unlikely that any anti-fascists in the United States escaped some contact with the Communist Party. Moreover, because there was so much social pressure to be involved in anti-fascist activities, no respectable liberal wanted to be left out of the social whirl that lent status and prestige to anti-fascist activism.

As early as December 11, 1935, Hellman was speaking out publicly against fascist groups in Hollywood. "California is the home of Fascism," she told a New York World Telegram interviewer. She went on to describe anti-semitic activities which disturbed her greatly, including an anti-Semitic handbill which appeared, unexplained, between the sections of the Los Angeles Times.<sup>21</sup> A few months later, Hellman, along with John Howard Lawson, Elmer Rice, and Robert E. Sherwood, sent an urgent appeal to fellow playwright Maxwell Anderson soliciting immediate and generous support to keep the Theatre Union's anti-fascist play, Bitter Stream, from closing.<sup>22</sup> In December of 1936, she again sought Anderson's aid, this time for an anti-fascist film:

Archibald MacLeish, John Dos Passos, Joris Ivens and I are very anxious to make a moving picture of the Spanish Civil War. We feel strongly that the issues have been misrepresented and that a picture would be a great service not only to the cause of the Loyalists, but to anti-fascism all over the world. . . . We all felt that you were one of the people who would be interested in helping us . . . .<sup>23</sup>

When André Malraux visited Hollywood in 1936 to raise money for the Spanish Loyalists, he spoke to a group gathered at Hellman's home.<sup>24</sup> The following year Hammett wrote to Hellman (who was in Paris) of meeting Malraux the previous night, adding, "I gave [him] your address

and phone number." In the same letter he assured her that he had made "a modest contribution to the medical fund for Spain."<sup>25</sup> In June of 1936, Dorothy Parker and Donald Ogden Stewart organized the Anti-Nazi League, a group united to bring oppressed writers out of Nazi Germany and to educate the American public to the dangers of fascism at home and abroad. Parker wrote about these activities in The New Masses early in 1939, "It is to my pride that I can say that Donald Stewart and I and five others were the organizers of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League. From those seven, it has grown in two years to a membership of four thousand--the last figures I heard--and it has done fine and brave work."<sup>26</sup> Writing to Hellman in New York from Hollywood, Hammett praised Parker's article, "I've just read Dottie's piece in the Masses. A really fine job!"<sup>27</sup>

This broad sweep of anti-fascist activity on the part of Hellman and her intimates suggests that anti-fascist activism was not as formalized as one might suppose, but rather existed as an integral part of the social and professional network of the liberal intelligentsia. It was within this context, then, that anti-fascism became a part of Hellman's life and as such, she was equally comfortable acting upon her opposition to fascism whether she happened to be in Hollywood, New York, or Paris. Anti-fascism was, then, as Malraux described it: "un sentiment . . . une attitude . . . aussi une politique,"<sup>28</sup> rather than a structured, organizational phenomenon. The fact that the same people--ranging from Hellman's closest friends and associates to social and professional acquaintances--moved freely in these circles demonstrates the extent to which anti-fascism permeated the fabric of the American-European intelligentsia.

However, for Hellman it was her experiences in Spain that later served as her point of reference regarding the evils of fascism. Late in 1936, her friend Archibald MacLeish proposed making a film about Spain (the one referred to above in Hellman's letter to Anderson). Hellman's response was enthusiastic: "I jumped at the chance to do something. Sitting in New York it was easy enough to write a check, but too hard to write a shooting script, or even an outline, about a war I did not know in a place I had never seen" (UW, 76). Headed for Spain early in 1937, she became ill in Paris and had to return home. That summer, however, she was invited to attend a theatre festival in Moscow, where The Children's Hour was being featured. She sailed with Dorothy Parker and her husband Alan Campbell and spent a month in Paris hobnobbing with Gerald and Sara Murphy, Hemingway--who was on a holiday from the Spanish war, where he worked as a news correspondent--Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, and numerous other writers and artists before going on to Moscow. Her first night back in Paris, she dined with Otto Simon, the communist and author of The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and publicist for the Spanish Republican government. She recalls that night, "[He] persuaded me that I must go to Spain. It didn't take much persuasion: I had strong convictions about the Spanish War, about Fascism-Nazism, strong enough to push just below the surface my fear of the danger of war" (UW, 91-92).

Hellman went first to Valencia, a city under attack by Italian bombers. With German novelist and International Brigades officer Gustav Regler as her guide, she visited hospitalized soldiers of the International Brigades and was greatly impressed by their courage and conviction. In Madrid, she did a transatlantic broadcast for CBS

Radio, risking her life by going to the radio station during a bombardment in which part of the station was destroyed. She explained later that she was afraid that if she had not done so, CBS might not have granted another time for the Loyalists, who were anxious to get their message to the American people. While in Spain, Hellman visited hospitals and orphanages, recorded speeches, and broadcast an appeal to France. Her diaries describe the constant fear and privation of living in cities under attack; they also make clear the frustration she felt when wounded and dying soldiers--many Americans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade--urged her to go back and explain to President Roosevelt how desperately the Republic needed American aid. Her diary records her thoughts on this:

[T]hey said I and all like me must explain, write, plead that the United States and France must send arms immediately. God in Heaven, who do they think I am, any of us (UW, 114)?

Believing that she had done all she could, Hellman left Spain in mid-November, 1937. She had been deeply moved by her experiences there, which had enabled her to appreciate fully the implications of the anti-fascism that had for some time been a part of her political make-up. Stopping first in Paris, then in London en route home, she found herself angry with and resentful of the French and the British. The French seemed to her to be too smug, while the British were too uncaring; she stormed out of a London dinner party--overturning her chair and seriously injuring her ankle--in a rage over a comment made to her by a fellow guest. When she had mentioned to him that she had just returned from Spain, he coolly inquired as to which side she had visited. She could not tolerate dispassion over Spain, or over the broader question of European fascism.



Back in the United States, Hellman began extensive historical research for The Little Foxes, a play for which she had gotten the idea while traveling back to Paris from Spain. Yet she continued to be distracted by what she had seen in Spain. Walter Winchell asked her to write an article about her experiences there, but after she submitted it William Randolph Hearst refused to allow his newspapers to carry the piece; it finally appeared in The New Republic in April, 1938.<sup>29</sup> In July, Hellman's anger again rose to the surface when she read an account of a visit to American prisoners in a fascist concentration camp in Spain, written by a New York Times reporter who was blatantly anti-Loyalist.<sup>30</sup> Her outrage prompted her to write a scathing response castigating both the reporter and the New York Times for mongering the propaganda fed to the reporter by the Falangists with whom he fraternized in Spain. Although there is no evidence that Hellman ever sought to publish the piece, the typescript and Hellman's handwritten revisions provide interesting insight into her feelings:

In Hollywood we would say that the reason his paper prints him on the front page and comments editorially on his work, when only occasionally it features its brilliant and daring Mr. Matthews [Herbert Matthews also covered the war in Spain but was pro-Loyalist in his sympathies] is that Carney must be related to the boss. But that's silly because the Times is owned by Jews and Mr. Carney is not a Jew, and it stands to reason that every Jew must be an anti-fascist to be either a good Jew or a good American.<sup>31</sup>

Hellman had crossed out these lines, and many others that are equally venomous, in an effort to tone down the piece. Nevertheless, the remarks she deleted are likely the ones that come closest to describing Hellman's uncensored thoughts. It is clear from the above quotation, and from the remainder of this text, that she had internalized her anti-fascism to the point where she was perceiving the fascist

threat in a very personal way. It is also clear that Hellman believed that all good people should share her anti-fascist zeal.

At the time she wrote that piece, another personal encounter with the forces of fascism loomed large in Hellman's consciousness. Only a month earlier, she had traveled to London to bring home the body of her friend Julia, who had been murdered by the Nazis in Frankfurt. Julia's wealthy and powerful family not only refused to see Hellman, but would not even acknowledge having known Julia. It would be natural for Hellman to attribute their estrangement to opposition to Julia's politics, so it is likely that she perceived her affair with them as a confrontation with the forces of fascism in the United States. Thus the anger and frustration Hellman felt vis-à-vis her impotence in the face of the fascists in Spain was no doubt reinforced by the helplessness she felt in this situation. In Pentimento, Hellman recalls that she had frequently dreamed of Julia during the following weeks, and that for months she was obsessed with a sense of personal obligation to her dead friend. Her memoirs also describe this time as a period during which she, for the first time, gave serious thought to her political stance. She wrote of this period being "the root-time of my turn toward the radical movements of the late thirties." In retrospect, she added, "It saddens me now to admit that my political convictions were never very radical, in the true, best, serious sense" (UW, 132-33).

The root-time of Hellman's political consciousness coincided with the first ideas that were later to become Watch on the Rhine. In the next and final chapter, I shall trace the development of this play, placing it in the context of Hellman's political consciousness.

## CHAPTER IV

### WATCH ON THE RHINE: A CLOSER LOOK

Although most of Hellman's plays required less than a year to write, Watch on the Rhine was more than two and a half years in the making. Moreover, although Hellman is reported to have completed the play in late December 1940, the play manuscripts show that she was still engaged in extensive substantive revision as late as one month before the play premiered in Baltimore the last week in March 1941. A notation in Hellman's handwriting on a draft she labeled "Uncorrected 1st Version" indicates that the actual writing of the play--in something close to the form it ultimately assumed--began August 15, 1940.<sup>1</sup> That draft sets the play in July 1940; in the final version the setting was moved back to early spring of the same year. However, Hellman had been contemplating ideas for this play for at least two years before she wrote that draft. In addition, she had devoted considerable time to conducting background research before she began writing. The unusual amount of time it took for Hellman to see her ideas through to completion may be attributed to an ambivalence and uncertainty that she never experienced with her other plays. The attitudes that affected the play's development were undoubtedly influenced by a variety of factors which complicated the play's development.

First, Hellman was already in the midst of writing The Little Foxes when the first ideas for Watch on the Rhine came to her during

the summer of 1938. Because she was more comfortable with and more sure about both the theme and the characters for the former play, she wisely followed her instincts and finished it first. But she did not do so without a great deal of mental conflict, for she was frequently distracted by another play that was trying to take shape in her head. In Pentimento, Hellman described how certain ideas kept taking her away from the task at hand. That summer (1938) she had come to the appalling realization that many of the European refugees in America were not, as she had naively supposed, "our kind of folks." She recalled,

Few of us asked questions about their past or present convictions because we took for granted that they had left either in fear of persecution or to make a brave protest. . . . It took me a long time to find out that many of them had strange histories and that their hosts, or other people who vouched for them, knew all about their past (P, 487-88).

Hellman remembered feeling very bitter upon learning the truth about Nazi sympathizers who found or gave refuge in America. Moreover, she found herself drawn into the situation when she discovered that some distant relatives of hers, recent immigrants to America, had not left Germany for the reason she had first supposed. Indeed, they had only left when their carefully concealed Jewish ancestry was discovered by the Nazi regime they had supported. In Pentimento, Hellman recalled the sting she had felt when she discovered the truth about her own relatives, and the sense of personal violation she had experienced when the matriarch of this family denied being related to her and castigated her for claiming to be related to them. This experience undoubtedly underscored the invidiousness of the fascist menace. She explained how these ideas became the germ for Watch on the Rhine:

I wanted to write a play about nice, liberal Americans whose lives would be shaken up by Europeans, by a world the new Fascists had won because the old values had long been dead. I put the play in a small Ohio town. That didn't work at all. Then one night, coming out of a long dream about the streets of London, I knew that I had stubbornly returned to the people [a well-to-do family] and the place [Ohio] of Days to Come. I was obsessed with my dream, stopped writing for a month or so, and only started again when I found the root of the dream; I moved the play to Washington, placed it in the house of a rich, liberal family who were about to meet their anti-fascist son-in-law, a German, who had fought in Spain. He was, of course, a form of Julia (P, 488-89).

The dream to which Hellman kept returning was of a dinner party in London in 1936, a most unpleasant evening spent in the company of a Romanian prince who inspired her characterization of Teck de Brancovis. "I thought about that [evening] for years afterward and came to feel that the evening, the dinner, [and the dinner guests] were [like] characters sitting in a second-act drawing room because the stagehands had forgotten to tell them that the scenery had changed to the edge of a volcano" (P, 491-92).

A New York Times interviewer, writing in 1941, described how Hellman continued--through 1938, 1939, and into 1940--to grope for characters and a situation that would convey her ideas effectively:

She hit upon the idea of a small midwestern town, average or perhaps a little more isolated than average, and into this town Europe walks in the form of a titled couple--a pair of titled Europeans--pausing on their way to the West coast. Miss Hellman became quite excited, thought of shelving The Little Foxes to work on it. But when she did get into it, she could not get it moving. It would start all right, but always get bogged down. Another angle presented itself. "What," asked Miss Hellman of herself, "would be the reactions of sensitive people who had spent much of their lives starving in Europe and suddenly found themselves house guests in the home of a wealthy American . . . ? That idea didn't work either, but the earlier people, the titled people, kept returning continually.<sup>2</sup>

Before turning her attention back to The Little Foxes, Hellman wrote a first draft of Watch on the Rhine, which she set in an Ohio college

town. In 1959 she told an interviewer that she had thrown away this version.<sup>3</sup>

Emotional factors also slowed the progress of this play, for the time during which Watch on the Rhine evolved was an emotionally turbulent period for Hellman. In addition to contending with her feelings about her visit to Spain and her friend Julia's subsequent death at the hands of the Nazis, Hellman experienced other difficulties between 1938 and 1941. The tremendous success of her second hit play, The Little Foxes--which established her as one of America's foremost playwrights--thrust her into a position of fame and fortune to which she had great difficulty adjusting. To make things worse, Hellman's meteoric rise occurred at the same time that Hammett's writing career began to plummet. The psychological effects of this reversal in their relationship were great and undoubtedly contributed to a period of depression she experienced in the spring of 1939. It was about this time that Hellman began an extensive period of psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, she had great difficulty managing her personal life, finding that too much money and too much drinking had thrown her into a tailspin. Dashiell Hammett was one of the people who came and went in her life during this period. Her relationship with him was a complex one and the romantic part of it ranged erratically from one extreme to the other. To further complicate things, for a time she was torn between Hammett and another man--a Hollywood gossip column reported him to be her producer and friend, Herman Shumlin, and suggested that they would marry--but she ultimately chose living with Hammett part of the time over marriage to anyone else. And finally, another unpleasantness appeared in Hellman's life during this period, something that

in the coming years would totally disrupt her personal life and her career. Shortly after The Little Foxes opened, Hellman became the target of red-baiting. What began in 1939 as nasty attacks in newspaper columns increased in intensity over the next decade and a half; the blacklist was ultimately to force her to sell her farm and reduce her to working as a department store sales clerk in the 1950s. Although these early political attacks were merely verbal assaults, they nevertheless--when combined with all the other problems--contributed to a state of mind that was not conducive to sustained efforts at playwriting. Indeed, when one considers the personal background against which Hellman created The Little Foxes and Watch on the Rhine, one is amazed by her productivity during this period of great personal turmoil.

If all this were not enough to distract Hellman from her writing, a survey of her political activities during these years reveals that she expended great amounts of energy and time on political causes. Hammett's biographer writes that the summer of 1938 marked his turn toward political activism, and attributes this to Hellman's influence and example.<sup>4</sup> While Hammett's concerns seemed to focus upon civil liberties issues, particularly as they related to writers and the rights of communists in America, Hellman's efforts were mainly directed toward providing medical aid to Spain and helping to relocate Spanish refugees. Indeed, she continued to work for the defeated Spanish Republicans long after Franco's victory, raising money to get Loyalists out of European concentration camps and soliciting contributions to aid the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. The list of anti-fascist organizations and causes to which Hellman lent support is a long one; nevertheless, it gives an incomplete picture of her total political

involvement because she also extended her efforts toward various writers groups, both in New York and Hollywood. Many of the organizations with which Hellman and Hammett were associated during this period were blatantly communist, while many others were publicly berated as communist fronts. When a sensational exposé of communist activity in Hollywood during the thirties was published in 1941, Hellman was singled out as one of the most willing of the workers.<sup>5</sup> She described herself as an inveterate meeting-goer, and earned a reputation as one who could always be counted on to help with any liberal cause. During this period, Hellman also wrote a number of political pieces for Leftist periodicals, including The New Republic, The New Masses, and PM.<sup>6</sup>

Watch on the Rhine's long gestation period may also be attributed, in part, to the extensive research Hellman undertook before beginning to write the play. When interviewed for the New York Times shortly after the play opened in New York, Hellman described her method of preparing to write the play:

I made digests of twenty-five books before I started writing Watch on the Rhine. Political arguments, memoirs, recent German history. My notebooks for the play run to well over 100,000 words and, do you know, I used material from the notes for only two speeches. . . . I seem to have to do it before I can be sure that I know what I'm talking about. Also, the reading helps keep my mind on the job that I've chosen; keeps . . . the aim in view, the points to be made, straightens out the kinks, not directly but indirectly.<sup>7</sup>

Only two of Hellman's research items are included in her manuscript collection at the University of Texas Humanities Research Center. One is a spiral bound notebook in which Hellman jotted down a wide range of ideas relating to the play. None of these points are developed, but an overview of the notebook gives one a good sense of what went



through the author's mind as the play took shape. Typical notations include:

Ten years before (not ago) today  
 You speak very well French  
 11th Brigade  
 Hamburg speech was 36 or 37  
 Spain during Carlist trouble? Verify.  
 Look up in yearbook

Names

Kohler  
 Folger  
 Maerker  
 i  
 Gleechen  
 Geldern  
 David says "Mama" too often  
 "Lending money" should be changed to "looking after them"  
 Go back for Bodo's misuse of words

This notebook also includes skeletal outlines of the three acts. The other item in the collection is a single sheet of pencil scribbled notes labeled "Watch on the Rhine Embryo." Although the characters, setting, and plot hinted at in these notes bear no resemblance to the final play, they appear to corroborate Hellman's statements about her earliest ideas. The play outlined here is set in Ohio and involves Girls, Pa, Grandma, and villains. The only connection this has with Watch on the Rhine is that the villains appear to be the forerunners of the Rumanian nobility; Hellman's own statements verify this.

It is not known whether the more comprehensive studies have been lost, or whether Hellman still has them in her possession. However, in an article she wrote about Hellman for the New Yorker in 1941, Margaret Case Harriman described these notebooks in detail, concluding that:

It is uncommon to find notes for a play which could be expanded, as the notes for Watch on the Rhine could be, into a detailed history of a period covering twenty-five years. . . . Her notebooks for a play are monumental, running to two or three volumes of four or five hundred typed, single-spaced pages each, containing data on contemporary history, local customs, factual anecdotes, political aspects, celebrities of the time, and long lists of likely names for characters. In one of her notebooks for "Watch on the Rhine," three pages are filled with German first and last names . . . all of which she studied and discarded before she decided [upon the names for her characters]. Other pages carry details of the age, life, and background of the characters before their entrance into the play. Frequently there are notes like "What was he doing in Germany? Scientist? Trade Union movement? Maybe China? What was going on 1920-32? Maybe they have only been here about 6 months? What was he doing here?"<sup>8</sup>

A 115 page single space typed research notebook for The Little Foxes in the Humanities Research Center suggests that Harriman's claims are not exaggerated. Studying Hellman's research notes for her plays, while bearing in mind her explanation of how the characters take over the development of a play as she writes it, affords one valuable insight into the way Hellman's plays take shape from their raw material.

Understanding this process, one can easily see that the political aspects of Watch on the Rhine are inherent in the characters and not--as one might surmise in the case of artless propaganda--added as finishing touches to underscore the author's political stance. Indeed, the exact opposite appears to be the case with Watch on the Rhine. In the course of constant revision and rewriting, the play's artistic value slowly emerges. The manuscripts show that Hellman has

made a conscious effort to tone down and moderate her characters in order to make them less strident and one-sided. As the characters are gradually transformed from symbols to human beings, the work assumes genuine artistic merit. As the characters assume human proportions, their interaction modifies both the play's plot and its structure.

This process is perhaps best seen in Hellman's treatment of Fanny. In earlier drafts, she is a fascist sympathizer. For example, in the first act when Fanny meets Kurt it becomes clear immediately that each supported a different side in the Spanish Civil War. This conflict, coming so early in the play and before they have had time to develop respect for each other, forces them into an adversarial relationship from the beginning. Hellman wisely recognized this problem and deleted the following dialogue:

Fanny (looks at Kurt): You were in Spain, sir?

Kurt: Yes, Mrs. Farrelly.

Bodo (amazed): Papa was in Spain? Papa was a very great hero.

Papa was brave, calm, expert--in politics and in battle--

Kurt (laughs, to Fanny): My biographer. And as truthful as most.

Fanny: You fought with the Loyalists?

Kurt (after a second, he laughs): Yes. With the Loyalists.

(None of the others speak. They stare at Fanny bewildered, horrified.)

[Fanny changes the subject; orders breakfast. She attempts small talk.]

Sara (who has been looking nervously at Kurt and the children):

We didn't know there was another side to fight with, Mama.

Kurt,---

[Fanny again avoids a confrontation by screaming for David--called John in this version--and his wife, Emily--who was dropped entirely from the play--to come downstairs to welcome the Muellers.]

While Fanny does not impress us as an outright fascist, she does reveal that she identifies with the group in power, regardless of its politics. Later, as Kurt tries to explain to her his work as an anti-fascist, she lightly dismisses anti-fascism:

Kurt: I, many others, work in a ~~german~~ underground movement.

An anti-Nazi organization to attempt to teach the working mass of the German people,--

Fanny: Yes, yes. Everybody's heard about it. It ~~all~~<sup>a</sup> sounds like ~~the~~/flea on the elephant.

Gilbert [an earlier name for David]: Von Wachnau told us of your work. It's brave of you. But from here,---

Fanny: Brave! Such words. Futile. Little men running around teasing,---

Kurt (gently): It is not necessary to convince you, Madame.

Sara: I shouldn't talk like that, Mama, if I were you. It is hard to make fun of men who give their lives. It's a little too close to us. . . .

This, too, disappeared as the playwright realized that Fanny would elicit more audience sympathy if she paid lip-service to anti-fascism but ignored its implications because her own life was so far removed from fascism's threat. She would not be believable if she were to

to change from being a fascist sympathizer to being an anti-fascist; however, when she proceeds from her original apathetic stance to one of genuine commitment, her conversion is a believable one which also serves as a model for those in the audience who have not given serious thought to the fascist threat. Ironically, by making Fanny less villainous, Hellman achieved the opposite effect: Fanny's apathy was shown to be as destructive as fascism itself, and her guilt was spread among members of the audience who realized that they, too, had been remiss in insulating themselves from the realities of the world crisis. As Hellman's characterization became more finely tuned, both the aesthetic and the persuasive qualities of the work improved.

Another technique Hellman used effectively involved keeping her argument focused upon the central issue of anti-fascism. Early drafts showed her lashing out at a variety of social and economic ills, while the final version of the play had been carefully purged of extraneous kinds of criticism that would only have served to weaken the force of her plea for anti-fascist commitment. Since the failure of Days to Come, Hellman had wanted to write a good proletarian drama. Although some critics recognized and pointed out the anti-capitalist undertones of The Little Foxes, this was not enough to satisfy Hellman's desire to speak out against what she considered to be an unjust social and economic system. It is not surprising, then, that she sought to work some of those sentiments into Watch on the Rhine. For example, in an early version the children express concern about racial exploitation after first encountering Fanny's black servant, Joseph, who offers them breakfast. After Joseph leaves the room, they interestedly and

excitedly tell their parents that he is the first "negro gentleman" they have ever seen "outside of Othello that time in Stockholm."

Joshua: You saw them in Spain, Papa. You wrote to us.

Kurt: Yes. They were brave. On both sides they were brave men.

Bodo: They are among the most oppressed peoples of the world.

Is that no so, Papa.

Kurt: They share the honors.

Bodo: Therefore we cannot remain in a house which exploits a miserable peoples.

[Kurt and Bodo's siblings gently coax him into reconsidering.]

In another version of this scene, Sara is not so solicitous:

Sara (bored): He is not exploited, Bodo.

Bodo: His people are exploited. (To Kurt) I am of mixed bewilderment. I would like to consult with you about it.

Kurt: Very well. But not before breakfast, please.

However, by the time this idea reached the final version of the play, its sting was hardly noticeable:

[Joseph has been teaching Joshua to play baseball. Fanny reminds Joseph that he is not getting his work done by playing baseball.]

Bodo: Baseball players are among the most exploited people in this country. I read about it.

Fanny: You never should have learned to read.

Bodo: Their exploited condition is foundationed on the fact that--

Joshua (bored): All right, all right.

Sara: Founded, Bodo, not foundation.

Joshua: He does it always. He likes long words. In all  
languages.

This revision enabled Hellman to preserve Bodo's image as a pint-size mouthpiece for Marxist criticism while at the same time eliciting from the audience a subconscious recognition of the evils of exploitation. The fact that the discussion focused upon Joseph, yet appears to involve baseball players rather than blacks, enabled Hellman to attack indirectly America's system of racial inequality. More important, by diverting this subtle criticism toward a less emotionally-charged issue, Hellman kept her criticism of exploitation and discrimination from stealing the thunder from her major concern, anti-fascism.

Similarly, because the Soviet Union was allied with Nazi Germany in early 1941, Hellman recognized that it would be imprudent to imply a relationship between anti-fascism and communism. While early drafts seem to indicate a decidedly Marxist basis for the Muellers' attitudes and values, she excised a number of lines and references which revealed a pro-Soviet bent. Perhaps the simplest and most obvious deletion involved the mere mention of the Russian language. When the children meet their grandmother, she bemoans the fact that there is no longer anyone around with whom she can practice her languages. In an early draft, Joshua replies, "You have us, Madame. We speak ignorantly, but easily, in German, French, Italian, Russian--." Hellman's editing changed Russian to Spanish. In both versions, Kurt interrupts, "and boastfully in English." However, Bodo's next line also becomes de-Russified with revision. In an earlier manuscript, Joshua speaks: "I am sorry, Papa. You are right."

Bodo "pompously" chides his elder brother, "there is <sup>never a</sup> ~~no~~/ need for the proletariat to show off their education. It is to be taken for granted that we must be the most advanced of the earth." In the finished play, Joshua's speech has been dropped and Bodo's stripped of its revolutionary tone. He tells his brother, "There is never a need for 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."

Likewise, Hellman deleted an entire episode which offered an innocuous yet anti-capitalist observation. After having explored their grandmother's upstairs rooms and noted the single beds in the adults' chambers, Joshua comments, "It seems that in the capitalist world man and wife sleep ~~frequently~~ in separate, single beds." Babette adds, "It's ugly, Mama, isn't it? As though <sup>they</sup> ~~you~~/ don't like each other. And <sup>they</sup> if ~~you~~/ didn't like each other, why should they be married?" There are two apparent marriages of convenience in this version: that of Marthe and Teck, who are about to go their separate ways, and that of David and his "ninny" of a wife, Emily. (Emily was excised early in the development of the play.) These two marriages stand out in sharp contrast to the Muellers' relationship which is genuinely and unaffectedly loving and self-sacrificing. By forcing this comparison, and couching it in Marxist terminology, Hellman originally pushed her point too far; she ultimately made her case more effectively by not saying anything, just letting the characters speak for themselves. However, in the earlier version, Sara remonstrates the children:

<sup>now</sup>  
You're in a new world/, and you're all acting like little  
prigs. Please stop being so damn moral about everything.  
You've adapted yourselves to horse meat, dirty trains,



bombs, filth  
no water, candlelight/, and war, now try to adapt to the  
upper classes. Everything in the world isn't moral or  
pretty.

Having moved the class struggle to the bedroom, Hellman apparently realized that she had gone a bit too far. She prudently deleted the entire scene, opting instead to cast the issue in unspoken, human terms. Philosophizing upon the luxury of an electric heating pad, Bodo observes, "Man has learned to make man comfortable. Yet all cannot have the comforts. . . . Why?" And when he chides his mother and grandmother for shouting at one another, he again appeals to broad human values:

Bodo: My! You and Mama must not get angry. Anger is protest.

And so you must direction it to the proper channels and  
then harness it for the good of other men. That is correct,  
Papa?

Whereas Hellman's original text represented a Marxist critique, her modifications resulted in a critique which might more aptly be described as socialist-humanist. Consequently, she again succeeded in translating ideological interpretations of everyday situations into purely human terms which could appeal to audiences without introducing controversial associations which might have prejudiced readers and viewers against anti-fascism by connecting it with Marxism.

In addition to the fairly sophisticated techniques Hellman employed as she strove for a balance between art and polemic, she also exercised sound judgment in deleting many passages which clearly overstated her case. Often accused of being melodramatic, Hellman showed perceptive restraint in deciding what to excise from Watch on the

Rhine. Indeed, one of the most moving images was stricken from the play when Hellman decided to cut this speech she had written for Kurt to make as he sits in the living room with Fanny, David, and Sara, waiting for Teck to pack his bags and return to demand the cash that Kurt has already determined not to give him:

Kurt (as if to himself): I was the twenty-seventh man in the trench. Three machine guns, a rifle for each man, no water. Two days without water. We sat waiting for the planes to tire themselves. Staying there to wait, I thought, it is as if your side must work always with naked hands. The spirit and the hands. All is against us but ourselves. It is as if--[he turns to look toward the stairs, by which Teck will soon return]--you must put up your naked hands and tear the wings from the planes. (Smiles) It is most fortunate that for the good hours of every day, I believed that naked hands will do it. But sometimes there comes a minute--

Another melodramatic section disappeared during revisions as Hellman recognized the need to play down the Spanish Civil War and instead focus her anger on Nazi Germany:

Fanny: Well, Sara, well. Three children. You have been busy. And you have done very well. (to Kurt) You, too, sir, of course. I knew you had children, but,---

Kurt (after looking at Sara): We had another son, Madame.  
nineteen  
He would have been/~~twenty~~ last month.

Fanny!--Where-is-he?--Is-he-coming?

Sara: He is dead, Mama. ~~We-miss-him---We-are-sorry-that~~  
~~you-will-never-see-him.~~ He was a fine boy.

Joshua: Our brother died in Spain. He went with Papa. We  
 liked him very much.

Babette: He was the best of us/. ,of course

Bodo: He died on Hill 14, in the retreat from the Ebro.

Babette (moves to her mother): It used to make us cry to  
 talk about it. We don't cry anymore.

Bodo: He was brave. Even I said so. He died fighting for  
 the people. That's the way I shall die. There is no  
 other way.

Sara: I used to tell him about Papa. He read Papa's books.  
 I would have liked to have brought him here. You would  
 have liked him, Mama.

Joshua: He died before Papa could get to him. He was in  
 Papa's Brigade,---

Babette: Mama would like you not to talk/anymore. please. about it

Fanny (looks at Kurt): ~~Anise,-tell-Joseph-to-bring-my-tea~~  
 here.

This passage, appearing early in the first act, said too much too soon, without any subtlety. There are numerous other instances, throughout the play, in which Hellman's excisions resulted in effective understatement. By deleting dialogue that overtly patronized the audience, the playwright allowed the characters themselves to elicit sympathy; because the audience is able to perceive the characters and situation in purely human terms--unfettered by fulsome talk--the message of Watch on the Rhine goes directly to the heart.

Hellman thus skillfully avoided becoming entangled in ideological posturing. In an early version, for example, when Kurt tries to explain to Fanny that his full time work is fighting fascism, she asks him outright whether he is a communist. He responds, "I am not a Communist. But I work with many of them." Hellman deletes these two speeches, cleverly softening the effect by retaining what was originally Fanny's next question: "Are you a radical?" Kurt's response to this question safely defuses the word: "You would have to tell me what that word means to you." Now it is Fanny's turn to look beyond labels; after "a slight pause," she responds thoughtfully, "That is just. We all have private definitions. We are all Anti-Fascists, for example---." Sara underscores the different definitions of anti-fascist operating in the room: "Yes. But Kurt works at it."

So just as Hellman succeeded in transforming fictional characters to believable human beings, she likewise sublimated the central issues of the play. By stripping these issues of their ideological trappings, she effectively shifted the focus from politics to ethics. Enabling her audiences primarily to perceive the conflict as a moral one, she succeeded in getting them to look beyond political considerations and instead think in broad moral terms. Thus by enlarging the ethical dimension, Hellman was able to go beyond the historically specific political concerns which would have detracted from the play's universal appeal. The threat was not fascism, but evil; the dilemma was not whether one should actively oppose fascism, but whether one should be willing to act upon his moral values. This was not a new theme to Hellman, for the struggle between good and evil lay at the heart of all her previous plays. With the alternatives laid out in

such black and white terms, audiences indeed could--as Hellman had hoped--see a little of themselves in the characters. If audiences were appalled by the greed and inhumanity of the Hubbards, they were equally attracted to the virtue of the Muellers. While it is perhaps unreasonable to expect the average theatregoer to identify with such morally impeccable and heroic people as Kurt and Sara Mueller, it is not inconceivable to hope that many will be able to see themselves in Fanny and David, whose only faults are their complacency and lack of social conscience. Hellman was not appealing to her audiences to leave their homes and join the anti-Nazi underground; rather she was goading them into positive moral commitment by demonstrating how inaction and lack of commitment unintentionally detract from good and support evil. Eating the earth is not the crime here; the true evil is standing by and watching while others devour it.

Thus by framing the conflict in moral terms, Hellman succeeded in elevating the theme to a universal level. Considered as an ethical choice rather than as a political stand, the theme can be reinterpreted outside its immediate historical setting. Thus while the particular issue of anti-fascism gave the play a certain immediacy during the period before Hitler's defeat, the play's moral imperatives are equally compelling today when Watch on the Rhine is perceived mainly as an historical piece. For the particular evil of fascism is immaterial to the play's persuasiveness. As long as evil--in any form--threatens what audiences perceive as the desired human good, individuals will be inspired to take a stand against whatever manifestation of evil is presently threatening their world. Thus the play's broader implications endure.

Lillian Hellman has always eschewed political labels and based her own choices upon the ethical values that are deeply rooted in her consciousness. A political renegade of sorts, she followed her moral instincts without balking at her own political inconsistency. Perhaps this is why anti-fascism held so much appeal for Hellman; her commitment to this cause was an individualistic one, based entirely upon her moral values. When considered within the context of the influences at work prior to and during its creation, Watch on the Rhine enables one to grasp the full meaning of the anti-fascist impulse which motivated Hellman to personal commitment and action. Moreover, when viewed as a microcosm, Hellman's anti-fascism can allow us, forty years later, to know and feel something of the meaning anti-fascism held for a generation of American liberals. However, the play that evolved out of Hellman's anti-fascism goes far beyond historical representation, for it challenges contemporary audiences to apply its moral imperatives to contemporary evils. Thus the art and the message of Watch on the Rhine combine to enlighten and inform each other, and continue to inspire audiences with a theme that transcends the limitations of time and place.

## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>Lillian Hellman, Three: An Unfinished Woman; Pentimento; Scoundrel Time (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979); and Maybe (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980). Because Three contains new commentaries by the author, this edition supersedes the original editions, all of which were published by Little Brown. Hereafter, quotations from Three will be identified parenthetically in the text, with the individual works identified by the abbreviations "UW," "P," and "ST," followed by the page numbers from this edition.

<sup>2</sup>These observations derive from my systematic surveys of New York and other major newspapers; my extensive research in the archives of the New York Journal-American at the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin; and my survey of newspaper clipping files in the collections of the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, a division of the New York Public Library.

### CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>Henry Hewes, ed., Famous American Plays of the 1940s (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1960), pp. 9-10; New York Daily News, 23 April 1941; New York Times, 23 April 1941; New York Journal-American, 23 April 1941.

<sup>2</sup>Lillian Hellman, The Collected Plays (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972), p. 205. Hereafter, all references to Hellman's published plays will be identified parenthetically by page number in the text.

<sup>3</sup>PM, 2 April 1941.

<sup>4</sup>New York Times, 2 April 1941.

<sup>5</sup>New York Sun, 2 April 1941.

<sup>6</sup>"The Theater," Time, 14 April 1941, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup>New York Journal-American, 6 April 1941.

<sup>8</sup>See sources cited in note 3.

<sup>9</sup>Abe Laufer, The Wicked Stage: A History of Theatre Censorship and Harrassment in the United States (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 70-71; New York Journal-American, 14 December 1952 and 7 May 1935; and Kermit Bloomgarden, "The Pause in the Day's Occupation," Theatre Arts 37 (May 1953):33. The 1935 Pulitzer Committee had passed over Hellman's The Children's Hour--which the majority of New York critics had vociferously supported for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama--and settled instead upon Zoe Akins' undistinguished and soon forgotten The Old Maid. The committee had done this out of fear that Hellman's sympathetic treatment of lesbianism might have made The Children's Hour appear an unseemly choice. The play had been banned in several cities because it dealt with lesbianism, a verboten subject at the time. Moreover, several actresses turned down the lead roles in the Broadway production for fear of tainting their reputations.

<sup>10</sup>See newspaper sources cited in note 3.

<sup>11</sup>New York Times, 24 April 1942; Basil Wright, "The Theatre," The Spectator (London) 168 (1 May 1942):419.

<sup>12</sup>New York Times, 29 December 1943; New York Tribune, 29 December 1943; New York Journal-American, 29 December 1943; New York Daily News, 29 December 1943; and Dashiell Hammett, "Watch on the Rhine," typed motion picture script dated 20 May 1942 in Lillian Hellman Manuscript Collection, Miscellaneous File, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. Hereafter, this collection will be cited as Hellman Papers.

<sup>13</sup>New York Times, 27 December 1979.

<sup>14</sup>New York Times, 4 January 1980.

<sup>15</sup>London Theatre Record I (February 1981):93.

<sup>16</sup>Wright, p. 419.

<sup>17</sup>New York Times, 27 February 1966; see also Hellman, Three, pp. 453-55.

<sup>18</sup>"Lillian Hellman, Realist," The Playbill (November 1941):20 (from John Gassner Collection, Hoblitzelle Theatre Arts Library, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin).

<sup>19</sup>New York Tribune, 13 December 1936.

<sup>20</sup>New York Evening Post, 27 November 1934.

<sup>21</sup>Edith J. R. Isaacs, "Lillian Hellman: A Playwright on the March," in Discussions of American Drama, ed. Walter J. Meserve (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1965), pp. 49-51.



<sup>22</sup>Quoted by Richard Poirier in his Introduction to Hellman, Three, p. xviii.

<sup>23</sup>The Hellman Papers, which include exhaustive drafts of the play manuscripts, illustrate the copious revisions that went into the creation of Hellman's plays.

## CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>For the standard treatment of fascism see Ernst Nolte, Three Faces of Fascism, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: New American Library, Mentor Books, 1969).

<sup>2</sup>For a thorough treatment of this subject, see John P. Diggins, "Flirtation with Fascism: American Pragmatic Liberals and Mussolini's Italy," American Historical Review 71 (1966):487-506.

<sup>3</sup>While party and factional disagreements continued to exist throughout this period, it is important for our purposes to recognize that, despite other disagreements, anti-fascists from all camps were united by their overriding determination to eradicate fascism. The anti-fascist umbrella was a large one, offering shelter to individuals who--except for the fascist crisis--would never have admitted any common interest.

<sup>4</sup>Arthur Liebman, Jews on the Left (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979), p. 507.

<sup>5</sup>See Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, The American Communist Party: A Critical History (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1962); Richard H. Pells, Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1973); and Daniel Aaron, Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Incorporated, 1961).

<sup>6</sup>Aaron, p. 158.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Aaron, p. 156.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in Aaron, p. 156.

<sup>9</sup>Aaron, p. 159.

<sup>10</sup>Hellman relates these events in her autobiographies.

<sup>11</sup>Allen Guttman, The Wound in the Heart: America and the Spanish Civil War (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1962), p. 132.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Guttman, p. 133.

<sup>13</sup>John W. Aldridge, After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars (1951; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), pp. 16-20.

<sup>14</sup>Aldridge, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup>Harry Slochower, Literature and Philosophy Between Two World Wars: The Problem of Alienation in a War Culture (New York: Citadel Press, 1964, orig. publ. No Voice is Fully Lost, 1945), p. 37.

<sup>16</sup>Ernest Hemingway, For Whom the Bell Tolls (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1940), preface.

<sup>17</sup>Slochower, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup>The Sacco-Vanzetti case was important in politicizing American intellectuals. It involved the conviction and subsequent execution of two Italian-American anarchists for a murder which liberals believed the men did not commit. The crime occurred in 1920; Sacco and Vanzetti were convicted in 1921 but it was not until 1927 that their execution took place over loud and angry protests led by leading American intellectuals. The case was important in that it destroyed liberals' faith in the judicial system, showed intellectuals how impotent they really were in the face of governmental oppression, drew intellectuals into the class struggle and, perhaps most importantly, resulted in the formation of a prototype for the Popular Front coalition concept.

<sup>19</sup>Aldridge, pp. 71-72.

<sup>20</sup>David James Fisher, "Malraux: Left Politics and Anti-Fascism in the 1930s," Twentieth Century Literature 24 (1978):300.

<sup>21</sup>Fisher, pp. 290-302, passim.

<sup>22</sup>André Malraux, Days of Wrath, trans. Haakon M. Chevalier (New York: Random House, 1936); see also Slochower, pp. 319-331.

### CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>Hellman's autobiographies serve as the major sources for biographical information in this chapter. Hellman's biographers--Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman, Playwright (New York: Pegasus, 1972), Doris V. Falk, Lillian Hellman (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1978), and Katherine Lederer, Lillian Hellman (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979)--primarily rely upon Hellman's own memoirs. For this study I have attempted to corroborate Hellman's (and her biographers') assertions with contemporary documentary evidence (e.g., newspaper accounts and interviews, correspondence, memoirs, and biographies of her associates, etc.). The quotation is from Hellman, Three, p. 366.

<sup>2</sup>The reader may recognize this incident from the recent film, Julia, which was based upon Hellman's autobiographical sketch, "Julia," in Pentimento.

<sup>3</sup>New York Times, 20 April 1942.

<sup>4</sup>The standard biography of Hammett is Richard Layman, Shadow Man: The Life of Dashiell Hammett (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Janovich, 1981). However, a forthcoming study by Diane Johnson promises to be the definitive work on Hammett.

<sup>5</sup>Moody, pp. 28-29.

<sup>6</sup>When Gertrude Stein visited Hollywood in April 1935, she asked her hostess to invite Hammett for dinner because she was eager to meet the man who, in her opinion, was the only American male who could create well-drawn female characters. Alice B. Toklas to Gilbert A. Harrison, n.d., quoted in Harrison to Hellman, 26 September 1966, Gilbert A. Harrison Collection, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>7</sup>Hammett to Hellman, 4 March 1931, Dashiell Hammett Manuscript Collection, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. Hereafter this collection will be identified as the Hammett Papers.

<sup>8</sup>Hammett to Hellman, 5 March 1931, Hammett Papers.

<sup>9</sup>Hammett to Hellman, 30 April 1931, Hammett Papers.

<sup>10</sup>See Moody, pp. 33-34, for a synopsis of this play. The only extant copy available to the public is in the Copyright Office of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>11</sup>New York Times, 20 April 1942; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 13 December 1936.

<sup>12</sup>Lillian Hellman, "I Call Her Mama Now," American Spectator I (September 1933):2; and "Perberty in Los Angeles," American Spectator II (January 1934):4.

<sup>13</sup>Arthur F. Kinney, Dorothy Parker (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), pp. 53, 60.

<sup>14</sup>Victor S. Navasky, Naming Names (New York: Viking Press, 1980), p. 183.

<sup>15</sup>Navasky, p. 175.

<sup>16</sup>Navasky, p. 174.

<sup>17</sup>Hammett to Hellman, 9 September 1937, Hammett Papers.

<sup>18</sup>Navasky, p. 175.

<sup>19</sup>Pells, p. 293.

<sup>20</sup>Kinney, p. 60.

<sup>21</sup>New York World-Telegram, 11 December 1935.

<sup>22</sup>Hellman to Maxwell Anderson, 9 April 1936, Maxwell Anderson Collection, Miscellaneous File, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. Hereafter this collection will be identified as the Anderson Papers.

<sup>23</sup>Hellman to Anderson, 24 December 1936, Anderson Papers.

<sup>24</sup>Kinney, p. 61.

<sup>25</sup>Hammett to Hellman, 13 March 1937, Hammett Papers.

<sup>26</sup>Hammett to Hellman, 10 March 1939, Hammett Papers.

<sup>27</sup>Quoted in Kinney, p. 60.

<sup>28</sup>Quoted in Fisher, p. 90.

<sup>29</sup>Lillian Hellman, "A Day in Spain," New Republic, 94 (13 April 1938):140.

<sup>30</sup>Lillian Hellman, "Richard Harding Davis, 1938," unpublished MS, n.d., Hellman Papers.

<sup>31</sup>New York Times, 11 July 1938.

#### CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup>Throughout this chapter, the Hellman manuscripts to which I refer are her drafts and notes for plays, labeled "Works" in the Hellman Papers. Block quotations from these manuscripts will be double spaced to allow room for Hellman's additions and deletions.

<sup>2</sup>New York Times, 20 April 1941.

<sup>3</sup>Richard G. Stern, "Lillian Hellman on Her Plays," Contact I (1959):119.

<sup>4</sup>Layman, 171.

<sup>5</sup>New York Journal-American, 28 August 1941.

<sup>6</sup>Lillian Hellman, "Valley Town: A New Documentary About Labor's Oldest Lament," PM, 14 June 1940; "The Little Men of Philadelphia," PM, 25 June 1940; "They Fought For Spain," New Masses 37 (10 December 1940):11; and "A Day in Spain," see note 29, Chapter III.

<sup>7</sup>New York Times, 20 April 1941.

<sup>8</sup>Margaret Case Harriman, "Miss Lily of New Orleans," New Yorker  
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LILLIAN HELLMAN'S WATCH ON THE RHINE: THE ART AND  
POLITICS OF AMERICAN ANTI-FASCISM

by

LINDA L. NIEMAN

B.A., University of Houston, 1971

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

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requirements for the degree

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Opposition to the rise and spread of European fascism was an important political phenomenon during the period between the two world wars. In America, liberal intellectuals took the lead in responding to the threat they believed fascism posed to Western civilization. Award-winning playwright Lillian Hellman was one of the individuals most active in this fight; as a private citizen, she was involved in a wide range of organizations and projects intended to aid fascism's victims and stop its expansion. As one of America's foremost authors, she effectively used her persuasive and artistic skill to warn Americans of the fascist threat. Hellman's Watch on the Rhine, a play which won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for the best play of the 1941-42 theatre season, has survived over four decades as a play of significant artistic merit; it also serves as one of America's finest examples of anti-fascist polemic.

In an effort to understand American anti-fascism, I have selected for study this artistically brilliant yet politically loaded play in which Hellman's creative and political impulses melded in just the right proportions to produce a persuasive work of lasting artistic value. In examining the interplay between art and politics in the creation of this play, it is first necessary to consider the political and intellectual climate that nurtured Hellman's thinking. Thus my study begins--after a brief chapter providing information on the play itself--with an analysis of anti-fascism and the American Left in the 1930s. In this chapter, I describe the various manifestations of anti-fascist activism among American intellectuals, place anti-fascism in the context of Left politics in the interwar years, outline its role in the development of American literature, and discuss the influence of

European literatii upon American intellectuals' perceptions of anti-fascism.

After establishing the intellectual and political milieu in which anti-fascism flourished, I devote a chapter to examining and analyzing Hellman's own social and political awareness, assessing various forces and events in her life which made her receptive to the political and intellectual influences discussed in the preceding chapter. This examination begins with childhood influences and follows the development of Hellman's social and political thought and activism through the end of 1937, when a visit to Spain during its Civil War crystallized her commitment to anti-fascism.

In the final chapter, I focus upon the development of Watch on the Rhine, which Hellman began in mid-1938 and completed early in 1941. After an extensive examination of the personal and political factors that affected Hellman during the period when she was thinking about and writing the play, I turn my attention to the author's drafts of the play. These provide insight into the ways Hellman skillfully integrated her political passions with her artistic expression in creating the anti-fascist play, Watch on the Rhine.