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Lillian Hellman's memoirs: "Writing is oneself"

Recknagel, Marsha Lee, Ph.D.

Rice University, 1988

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LILLIAN HELLMAN'S MEMOIRS: "WRITING IS ONESELF"

by

Marsha Lee Recknagel

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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

Walter W. Isle, Professor of English, Chairman

Meredith A. Skura, Professor of English

Michele Farrell, Assistant Professor of French

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Marsha Lee Recknagel

ABSTRACT

Following Lillian Hellman's death in 1984, friends and foes alike came forward to dispute the truth of Hellman's account of her life presented in her memoirs, *An Unfinished Woman*, *Pentimento*, *Scoundrel Time* and *Maybe, A Story*. Two camps emerged: the critics who believed there was no excuse for lying in non-fiction and those who believed that by its nature autobiography is a process by which one shapes one's life, and Hellman, they argued, only re-worked her story to a greater degree than most memoirists.

The evidence is substantial that Hellman dramatized her life, creating an image of herself by both adding and deleting important information. In 1986 William Wright published Hellman's biography in which he exposed her literary inaccuracies and documented her personal flaws in detail. There was much discrepancy revealed between the "self" Hellman had presented in the memoirs and the fiery-tempered, mean-spirited woman Wright portrayed. Yet Wright failed to draw any significant conclusions about why Hellman would have felt the need to fictionalize an already fascinating life.

I focus on the psychology, on why she would have falsified and distorted her rendition of her "self." Several patterns emerge in the memoirs in the form of language, structure, and recurring themes that suggest that Hellman had severe conflicts around the developmental issues of separation and individuation. Her external self-assurance and bravado, it is argued, actually masked a weak sense of self-identity; and she used the writing of the memoirs as a means of writing through these problems, although rarely on
a conscious level. During various stages of the writing process Hellman achieved certain psychological resolutions, correcting some original, unsatisfying developmental dynamics by creating characters and situations that imitated certain childhood configurations. Through the re-defining of her relationship with Dashiell Hammett, she re-defined the childhood Oedipal phase of development; and when she writes of her childhood friend Julia, making up as a best friend a woman she apparently had never met but who in fact existed, Hellman relives the pre-Oedipal stage; she writes herself into a mother-daughter configuration with Julia, differentiating from the mother when she creates and then destroys Julia. Hellman emerges from the experience more autonomous than before, having written herself into a stronger sense of self.
Lillian Hellman's Memoirs:

"Writing is oneself"
For my father, who did not live to see this completed
and for my mother, who did not think she would.
"... although I can be sure that it was in the fig tree, a few years later, that I was first puzzled by the conflict which would haunt me, harm me, and benefit me the rest of my life: simply, the stubborn, relentless, driving desire to be alone as it came into conflict with the desire not to be alone when I wanted not to be."

*An Unfinished Woman*

"... there may be a need in many of us for the large, strong woman who takes us back to what most of us always wanted and few of us ever had."

*An Unfinished Woman*

"I do regret that I have spent too much of my life trying to find what I called 'truth,' trying to find what I called 'sense.' I never knew what I meant by truth, never made the sense I hoped for. All I mean is that I left too much of me unfinished because I wasted too much time. However."

*An Unfinished Woman*
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Chapter One

Psychological Truths Behind Literary Fictions

Lillian Hellman began what many critics call "a second career in American letters," which notes her shift in genres from drama to memoir, in 1969 when at the age of sixty-three she published her first memoir, *An Unfinished Woman*. A second, *Pentimento*, followed in 1973. *Scoundrel Time* was published in 1976 and then the last, *Maybe, A Story*, came out in 1980. In the past few years, especially since Hellman's death in 1984, the question of the veracity of the memoirs has tended to overshadow discussion of the literary achievement of the works, although they received much critical and popular acclaim over the years. Since the publication of *Scoundrel Time* there had been rumblings, primarily from the inner circle--the literati--that Hellman had tampered with the truth in the memoirs; but initially the charges could be discounted possibly as the result of professional infighting bred from jealousy or political and personality conflicts--which seems to have been part of the case with her early vocal detractors, Mary McCarthy and Martha Gellhorn, Hemingway's widow. But after Hellman's death it became, as one critic termed it, "open-season" on Hellman (Clemons, 76). Following her death many people spoke up who had been afraid before to challenge or confront Hellman about her version of "reality"--from her relationship with Hammett, to the identity of Julia, to her recollection of the political events in the 1950's. Hellman and the veracity of her memoirs became the topic in a variety of forums, from the popular magazine *Vanity Fair* to the prestigious *Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History* (CLIO). Diane Johnson, who wrote a biography of Dashiell
Hammett, wrote the article for *Vanity Fair* in which she detailed the trouble she had with Hellman who she said tried to suppress the facts in order to perpetuate the legend of her and Hammett's relationship (78-81, 116-119). In an article for CLIO, Anita Susan Grossman used Hellman's memoirs as an example with which to open a general discussion of autobiography. Grossman raised many questions about readers' expectations when they approach a text, expectations which are set depending on whether the book is expressly titled fiction or whether it purports to tell the "truth," as in memoir or autobiography. Grossman posed the question about whether the newer theories of autobiography--especially the deconstructionists' theories that see little distinction between fact and fiction, between novel and memoir--justify or legitimize falsifications in autobiographies (289-305).

Instead of becoming embroiled in the on-going argument about whether or not Hellman "lied" in her work, I chose to look at Hellman, the memoirs, and the probability of her fictionalization from a psychoanalytic perspective. To some extent I agree with the theoretical stance that all writing, even the writing of autobiography, is artistically shaped therefore can never replicate the author's exact experience; but I also agree with Grossman who does not want such theories to justify overlooking or ignoring gross inaccuracies or historical inconsistencies in autobiography. In my study, Hellman's deletions are as important as her repetitions, her structure as important as her lack of structure, her questions as important as her answers.

The evidence is substantial and convincing that Hellman did more than shape her life into a comprehensible narrative in the memoirs, that instead she dramatized her life, creating an "image" of herself. She both added and deleted important information, sometimes from one memoir to the next. For example, she had several lovers during her long relationship with Hammett, but she chose not to write of them, possibly
because she thought it would diminish the "story" of her unique commitment to Hammett. In June, 1984, Samuel McCracken, who is assistant to the president of Boston University, published a well-researched article in *Commentary*, appropriately titled "Julia and Other Fictions by Lillian Hellman." He worked like a detective, checking dates, train and boat schedules from the '40's, and London mortuary addresses to prove that Hellman was often not where she claimed to be at certain times of her Julia story; but his main point was to refute the fact that Julia--as the childhood friend of Hellman--existed at all. This article generated other articles as well as much talk. Many people began to believe that Hellman had, in a sense, made herself up. "Making herself up" are my words and my slant; many critics call it lying. In his 1986 biography, suitably titled *Lillian Hellman, The Image, The Woman*, William Wright reveals the many discrepancies between the image of Hellman held by the public and substantiated and elaborated on in her memoirs and the "real" woman. He exposes her literary inaccuracies at length and documents her personal flaws in detail--her terrible temper, her penny pinching, her promiscuity. But he fails to draw any significant conclusions about why Hellman would have felt the need to fictionalize an already fascinating life. Along with other critics he concludes that it is just not right to mislead your readers; he moralizes lamely that "a problem with making up stories like 'Julia' is that the discovery of their falsity discredits stories that are perhaps true. . . ." (430).

In my approach to Hellman's memoirs I want to try to avoid the moral judgements and focus on the psychology, on why she would have falsified, fictionalized, distorted and dramatized her rendition of her "self." And, in fact, several patterns emerge from the memoirs in the form of language, structure, and recurring themes that indicate that Hellman had severe conflicts around the developmental issues of separation and individuation. It seems apparent that she used the writing of the memoirs as a means of
writing through these problems, although rarely on a conscious level. She wrote both out of and about this personal dilemma that revolved around her fears, her feeling of loss of "self" when among, confronted, or in an intimate relationship with "the other." Hellman's writing did not "cure" her of these problems, though I do believe that at various stages of the writing process Hellman achieved certain psychological resolutions, particularly in the creation of Julia, who functioned for Hellman as an idealized mother figure. I think that looking at the memoirs from this psychoanalytic perspective helps illuminate the questions about the fictionalization and brings a certain cohesion to the reading of the memoirs that I believe has been missing thus far.

In 1966 Lillian Hellman wrote an introduction to *The Big Knockover*, a collection of short novels and stories by Dashiell Hammett which she had edited and published after his death. Her introduction is a eulogy, a remembrance, a tribute to a man who had been her lover, friend, on-and-off live-in companion and toughest literary critic for over thirty years. She writes that "it is only right to say immediately that by publishing them at all I did what Hammett did not want to do..." (Hellman, 276). And, she implies that he did not want her to do it either. Yet she did, and the importance of this decision cannot be overestimated because Hellman rarely went against the wishes of Hammett, even after his death. In 1979 a television interviewer, Marilyn Berger, said, "You speak of Hammett still interfering with you and still dictating the rules after his death." Hellman replied, "Very often [he] does. Very often [he] does, and I often get very annoyed... I'll find myself doing something and hearing a voice behind me telling me what to do, or make fun of me, or tease me and I'll get very angry about it, and actually have conversations with it" (Bryer, 244). From the beginning of their relationship Hammett was the teacher and Hellman was the student. He discovered the English court case on which her first play, *The Children's Hour*, was based, suggesting to Hellman that it
would make a good drama. In 1968 an interviewer prefaced his talk with Hellman with the remark that *The Children's Hour* "might never have been written had not Dashiell Hammett, a close friend of Miss Hellman's urged her to try her hand as a serious writer" (Bryer, 107). In his biography of Hellman, Wright says that Hammett is frequently given credit for Hellman's emergence as a playwright, but that he believes that Hammett was actually a collaborator in another, deeper sense of the word. Wright says that Hammet was "a collaborator in the creation not so much of the plays as of Lillian Hellman herself" (64).

But I believe the relationship was more complicated than just an older man remaking and refining a younger woman--there was a symbiosis between them in which they both gained and lost themselves. In her account of the writing of *The Autumn Garden*, produced in 1951, Hellman remembers her nervousness as she watched Hammet read her first draft, just as he had read the first drafts of all of her plays. "He had always been critical," she writes. "I was used to that and wanted it. . . ." But this time Hammett's criticism was "sharp and angry, snarling." When he finished reading, he told Hellman, "You started as a serious writer. That's what I liked, that's what I worked for." She says that he spoke as if she had "betrayed" him (287). Hellman rewrote the play to his satisfaction, but this incident illustrates that certainly there was a blurring of boundaries between them. In the introduction to Hammett's collection, which later became a chapter of Hellman's first memoir, Hellman writes that "winter was the time of work for me and I worked better if Hammet was in the room" (Hammett, xiv). In this intimate union, a merger unspoken but mutually agreed upon, Hellman's independent "self" developed but also suffered. Hammett was repressed and extremely repressive. For example, his idea of good writing was a tough, tight prose and his idea of revision meant editing: Johnson writes that in regard to his work "he suffered an almost compulsive destructive
need to minimize, reduce, destroy..." (155). He applied his own need to Hellman's work. One has to wonder how much better her plays would have been if she had not been reined in creatively by Hammett. In a review of the last memoir, Vivian Gornick, writing for The Village Voice, writes that "... Hellman's plays, among which there is no single great one, have little to recommend them" (46). The memoirs seem to me to be more interesting and important than the plays. The play that is most like the memoirs, The Autumn Garden, is, I believe, her best play; it is often spoken of in terms of its Chekhovian lyricism.

In An Unfinished Woman Hellman writes that she cannot write a biography of Hammett, although in fact she returns again and again throughout the memoirs to Hammett and their relationship. She explains that "I will never write that biography because I cannot write about my closest, my most beloved friend. And maybe, too, because all of those questions through all the thirty-one on-and-off years, and the sometime answers, got muddled, and life changed for both of us and the questions and answers became one in the end, flowing together from the days when I was young to the days when I was middle-aged" (276). What actually "became one in the end" was Hellman and Hammett, and it is important that Hellman chose not to write a Hammett biography, that instead she decided to write of herself in relation to Hammett; therefore, in a certain sense, in the memoirs she wrote herself away from Hammett and into a separate selfhood.

If the relationship with Hammett represented the way Hellman "fused" in relationship, which I think it does, then it is no wonder that she often fought angrily and bitterly against entering a relationship in any form, from collaborating in the theater--"... I'm not by nature a collaborator"-- to dealing with people on the street--she once hit a young man on the street over the head with an umbrella for running into her-- or even friends--
friend at her funeral said, "Lillian left a lot of corpses," meaning that she had injured many with her "rampage anger." One friend is still troubled after twenty years remembering Hellman screaming that she was a liar in front of a roomful of people (Wright,423). And all during her life her anger confused and saddened her because she was not sure of its source. A friend told Wright that Hellman seem to use her anger "as a way of keeping things in order by getting angry at what seemed to make no sense" (377). One critic described what eventually happened was that Hellman "took pride in her anger that was without psychological understanding, and then romanticized her ignorance" (Gornick, 46). I believe that much of her anger came from a confusion of self--when she experienced her "self" as embattled, whether over small or large issues, she had to demonstrate her strength of self--to herself and to others. This notorious Hellman behavior--her "capacity" as Wright described it, for "tantrums and raging battles"--was perceived, incorrectly, as a form of self-assurance (349).

Her real self-assertion was rooted in her writing, all of her writing, but especially the memoirs; it was here that she pursued a definition, acquisition, and understanding of a sense of identity. The 1966 reverie on the past with Hammett grew into one memoir after another over the next ten years. It seems that when her mentor and critic was gone, she spoke more freely--in a new voice and in a new style. Although, as I will show, Hellman incorporated the stern voice of Hammett as a sort of shadow supervisor of her work, she branched out into a form and style that would not have met Hammett's approval. The memoirs are loose, anecdotal, sometimes stream-of-consciousness, always self-questioning. There are vestiges of the "well-made"-ness of the dramas she was known for, but, for the most part, the prose is radically different from that of her plays. Hellman says that she began the first memoir from the momentum of writing the piece on Hammett and because she was "feeling bad about doing nothing and not
knowing where to turn . . . " (Falk, 101). With Hammett dead she had no one to "turn to" so she turned in on herself. The stylistic departure marked a philosophical one as well.

During her playwriting days Hellman often spoke in interviews of the importance of the separation of the personal from the artistic, and she prided herself on her success at this division. In a 1952 interview she said, "One thing that has struck me about The Children's Hour is that anyone young ordinarily writes autobiographically. Yet I picked a story that I could treat with complete impersonality. I hadn't even been to boarding school . . . " (Bryer, 229). Initially for Hellman impersonality and objectivity were valued over the personal and subjective. One reason for this was that Hammett was an extremely private person and Hellman wanted to be like Hammett, whose silence she took—or mistook—as a sign of great inner resources. "He was almost totally self-contained," she once said (Bryer, 242). But I think that the more fundamental reason that earlier in her life Hellman did not write out of her experience, out of her "self," was because she did not have an adequate sense of that self.

In a 1975 interview Hellman said that one of her regrets was that she had been "slow in coming to certain conclusions. Slow in knowing myself. . . " (Bryer, 188). Although she went through years of psychoanalysis (a rather fragmented version since she traveled so frequently), she joked that Hammett always said he learned more about himself through her analysis than she learned about herself (Bryer, 201). But writing the memoirs forced Hellman to analyze herself in ways that she had avoided before, but which she could not avoid if she was to be the main character and focus of her new work. There is a questioning tone to the books which suggests the internalization of the often questioning, seldom answering Freudian analyst. In the memoirs Hellman is analyst and analysand, looking at herself from different angles, looking at herself in
relationship, comparing her present self to the one of the past. Richard Poirier, a literary critic and personal friend of Hellman's who wrote the introduction to the collection of memoirs, *Three*, says that the beauty of the memoirs lies in the style: "... the structure of her sentences allows one to feel, in the very movement of the prose, a mind at work on itself" (Poirier, xi).

Yet writing the memoirs as a means of self-discovery was not Hellman's stated or even acknowledged goal and when self-knowledge was sometimes the result, Hellman did not to realize it on a conscious level. It was the same with her psychoanalysis as with her writing: of her psychoanalysis she wrote that "it was a long, painful business. Then it is over and you can't fit the pieces together or even remember much of what you said or what was said to you" (Hellman, 226). Elsewhere she said, "Things are changed without your knowing exactly how. It's an evolutionary process, ..." (Bryer, 201). Similarly, one can trace changes in Hellman's understanding of her "nature" over the course of the memoirs, over the course of the writing, but she seems strangely unaware of her own revelations and transformations. In her book *The Female Imagination* Patricia Meyer Spacks notices Hellman's "selective blindness--a curious quality of the memoirs" (297). And Richard Moody, in his 1972 study of Hellman's work seems puzzled that "frank and honest as she is in juxtaposing the odd pieces of her life [in the memoirs] ... she often stops short of full revelation." He notes that "large stretches of her remembered landscape are shielded from view" (347). In her critical review of Hellman's works, Doris Falk comments that in the memoirs Hellman leaves the reader with a sense of "mysterious undercurrents of meaning" that seem to flow beyond our reach, beyond Hellman's reach (101).

To understand Hellman and her memoirs one must understand such "resistance" from a psychoanalytic context. Hellman was against psychological interpretations of
literature, frequently referring to these approaches to people or literature deprecatingly as the practice of "Woolworth Freud" or "ten-cent Freud" (Bryer, 45). But from the nature of her resistance I believe much can be learned about her nature and that of her fears. It upset Hellman when the psychological critiques of The Little Foxes came in and did not match her conscious intention. She had meant for people to laugh at the character, Birdie, not cry (482). This misreading made Hellman angry, a response I believe that was generated by the fear of her own misreading of her emotional history. She was not cognizant of the emotion that went into the creation of Birdie; she did not see how much Birdie was like her mother, just as she had not understood her mother. Hellman once said, "I don't think characters turn out the way you think they are going to turn out. They don't always go your way. At least they don't go my way . . . . Drama has to do with conflict in people, with denials . . . ." (Bryer, 57). Freud writes that self-knowledge can seem dangerous, "threaten unpleasure," as he puts it—the ego will draw back in alarm in resistance to facing facts (General Psychological Theory).

Hellman was "resistant" on many levels, and when she wrote she had to battle her own resistances. She was a strong woman whose internal battles were often publicly displayed, but both she and the public often misinterpreted the display. She dealt with the symptoms instead of the cause when she spent her life trying to control her environment, her press, her image. Johnson was surprised to discover that "an idea" of Hellman existed "even among those who had not read her" which had to do with "her courage and spunkiness and right principles as set forth in Julia and Scoundrel Time" (79). This legend served a purpose: it was like protective armor—an armor that was difficult even for Hellman to shed when she approached the task of writing out of and about herself in the memoirs. Diana Trilling once said, "Lillian was the most powerful woman I've ever known, maybe the most powerful person I've ever known" (Wright,
373). Sadly, much of Hellman's creative energy was spent on cover-up and resistance. But in her work, her true "self" often demanded to be heard.

And not surprisingly, Hellman was often afraid to "hear" what her unconscious self had to say. For example, in the preface to Three she wrote that "nothing seems to explain the stubbornness of the fight I make against going back to anything I have written, returning in any form to finished work . . . . I think it's mainly because I'm just plain nervous: if the work has been good, then maybe I can never be that good again; if it is not good then I am no good, and that had to be faced and is painful" (4). Her close identification with her work frightened her: the fusion both attracted and repelled her--just like her experience with involvement with "the other"; and one way she dealt with this conflict--the intense desire to fuse, mixed with the terrible fear of merger--was to try to maintain control of herself and others. She once abruptly stopped the direction of an interview by sharply saying, "...I don't really know much about the process of creation and I don't like talking about it" (Bryer, l23). For many years her legendary temper and tendency to seek revenge worked as a deterrent to the critics who might want to probe deeper into her psyche, or even into her work.

One notices Hellman's "influence" in Falk's defense of Hellman's right to privacy in the introduction to her study: she writes that it is beyond the scope of her book "to attempt a psychoanalysis of Lillian Hellman . . . . Such presumptuousness," she continues, "always results in what Hellman called 'Woolworth Freud.'" Falk says that Hellman has told us "a great deal about herself in the memoirs, and I leave it to the reader to go beyond what is written there to find the 'real' Lillian Hellman." Falk displays a curious lack of distinction between herself and her subject when she makes the admonishment: "She, herself [Hellman], might say to the reader--with justice--'That is none of your business'" (103). Here we see Falk identifying with Hellman to such an
extent that she not only appropriates Hellman's phrase--Woolworth Freud--but she also imagines a Hellmanesque response. Falk becomes a collaborator in Hellman's defensive pose. Perceptively, Falk writes that Hellman, "consciously creates a legend and is as jealous of her privacy as she is conscious of the legend." But Falk succumbed to the power of Hellman's "character," and I use the word "character" for its dual meaning as in "strength of nature" and "created personae".

Diane Johnson was another critic who discovered Hellman's powers of persuasion while researching her work on Hammett. Hellman would charm and court Johnson, then criticize her and create roadblocks to her research. "Some of your research is just plain no good," Hellman wrote her, "and some of your research comes from people who do not know what they are talking about . . ." (116). Hellman's tactic was to alternate between being tough and being vulnerable. Johnson says in Vanity Fair that much to her surprise she realized that Hellman had altered and influenced the Hammett biography in ways that Johnson was unaware of initially. She writes that ". . . since her [Hellman's] death last summer, I have reflected that had she died before the book was written, it might well have included a story it presently does not, an intriguing story of a powerful woman's struggle to possess and command at last the elusive ghost of a man about whom she was insecure in life. It is a story which seems to me to be about love, to be sure, but also about control . . ." (79). Clearly, Hellman had a version of her relationship with Hammett that did not match the one Johnson was discovering through letters and interviews; and as Johnson grew more determined to get at the "truth" of Hammett, Hellman became more and more nervous. People began to ask Johnson what sort of things she was "having to leave out" of her book. She was insulted by these implications because, she says, she did not intend to leave anything out. At one point during her research Johnson says that she happened to learn of a "horrible" rumor, the
gist of which was that Hellman had driven a promising young critic to suicide. Evidently the critic had written a "mildly critical" review of Hellman's work for which she had marshalled her influential friends to denounce him (116). Johnson does not reveal the source of the rumor, only its impact on her; but one must wonder if Hellman was not the one behind this newfound knowledge. Although Hellman did not like psychology used on her or her work, she was not opposed to using it for her own purposes.

Christine Doudna relates how Hellman controlled a 1976 Rolling Stone interview from the inception to setting up the meeting for the actual "event." "We had," she writes, "a series of rather ill-fated phone conversations over a period of a couple of months trying to arrange a time for the interview . . . . Some of these calls left me," she says, "feeling like I had been through an intense sparring match and would never reach the main event. It seems I could never satisfy her--I either called at the wrong hour or on the wrong day, and once made the mistake of addressing her in a letter as 'Ms.' rather than 'Miss'" (Bryer, 193). Doudna approached her first meeting with Hellman with "a mixture of fear and admiration," emotions often elicited by Hellman. She recalls that throughout the conversation Hellman projected "the sense of control that comes across in her writing." There were topics Hellman refused to discuss and, Doudna says, "at a certain moment she announced that our conversation was over for that day . . . ." (194). Control was crucial to Hellman in all of her relationships. Her need for control not only had reverberations for others' work, but, as I will show, also for the direction and structure of her own work as well.

From Hellman's earliest memories, recorded in the memoirs, one can see the roots of her desire for control, the need for which will gradually develop over her lifetime into a rigid set of boundaries around her "self" which will both protect but also entrap her.
The famous, or infamous, rigidity and wilfulness were defensive postures for a woman who often felt on the verge of losing control of her "self," even losing the sense of herself which was manifested in spells of dissociation. Hellman was an only child who for years performed a tense balancing act. In the family she suffered a troubled marriage, becoming an essential element without which the family unit might fall apart. She was caught between a passive but manipulative mother and a dashing, charming but very spoiled father. When only a young girl, she discovered that her father was unfaithful to her mother, a discovery which must have come as a shock since the father seemed to dote on the mother--the threat to Hellman being in the fact that he also doted on her--and so he could possibly betray her also. In the larger world, Hellman balanced precariously between half a year in New York and half in New Orleans, shuffling with her parents from one set of relatives to another, from one school to another. There were extreme "differences" in these dichotomies--Hellman adored her father's family in New Orleans, and disliked and feared her mother's family in New York. In the New Orleans school she was an advanced student whereas in New York she found herself ill-prepared. The difference between her mother, for whom she had little respect or admiration, and her beloved wetnurse, Sophronia, was also great--one was white, one black; one weak, one strong. In the memoirs Hellman expresses fear of difference--it comes out in both apparent and subtle ways throughout--that perhaps stems from this early experience with extreme polar opposites. For Hellman, differentiation became equated with frightening extremes.

Hellman's relationship with her parents was problematic and intense. According to her own accounts, as a child and then as an adolescent, she was "openly rebellious against almost everything . . . ." When charting her course toward adulthood Hellman makes much of two quarrels with her father, which are, in fact, two examples of healthy
differentiation. The strong bond that existed between her and her father she relates in a straightforward way: "It was not unnatural that my first love went to my father's family. He and his two sisters were free, generous, funny" (15). But it is with much more ambivalence that she writes of her connection to her mother: "But as I made my mother's family all one color, I made my father's family too remarkable, and then turned both extreme judgments against my mother" (15). Hellman says she was often irritated by her mother's passivity and neuroses. "... she was a sweet eccentric, the only middle-class woman I have ever known who had not rejected the middle class--that would have been an act of will--but had skipped it altogether. She liked a simple life and simple people, and would have been happier, I think, if she had stayed in the backlands of Alabama riding wild on the horses she so often talked about..." (15). Yet Hellman opens the first chapter of the first memoir with the recitation of her mother's geneology and uses the word "mother" in one context or another over twenty-five times in that short, seven-page chapter. She confesses her conflict, writing that her mother was "dead for five years before I knew that I had loved her very much" (17).

Certainly Hellman's mother must have had conflicting feelings about her daughter, judging from what Hellman writes in the memoirs. She says that her mother's childbearing "had been dangerously botched by a fashionable doctor in New Orleans, and forever after she stood in fear of going through it again, and so I was an only child" (18). To her mother Hellman would represent pain, and a reason to fear further sexual relations--perhaps this is the reason Hellman was an only child. And Hellman would also become another person with whom she had to share her husband, Max Hellman, who was already adored by his two maiden sisters. The boarding house cook once told Hellman, "Miss Jenny and Miss Hannah been in love with your papa since the day he was in his cradle. Your mother been in love with him since the day she first laid eyes.
Most women, I guess, though I sure don't know why" (Maybe, 82). All of this—the womanizing husband, the possessive aunts, her own tyrannical family—had an effect on Hellman's mother, Julia Newhouse Hellman, which was reflected in her odd behavior. She would often stare into the black recesses of womb-like spaces: "Windows, doors, and stores haunted her and she would often stand before them for as long as half an hour, or leaving the house, would insist upon returning to it while we waited for her in any weather," Hellman writes (16). She collected sad, middle-aged ladies from park benches and brought them home for dinner. Several times a week she dropped into churches of various denominations (although the Hellmans were Jewish): "I didn't know what she was saying," Hellman writes of her mother's silent praying, "when she moved her lips in a Baptist church or a Catholic cathedral or, less often, in a synagogue, but it was obvious that God could be found anywhere, because several times a week we would stop in a church, any church, and she seemed at home in all of them" (18). Hellman draws her mother as a woman distracted, unfocused, marginal.

As an adult Hellman would become known and criticized for the creation in her dramas of sharply defined characters. Her tendency to break the world and its people down into categories of good and bad, heroes and villains perhaps developed from the anxiety provoked by her mother's lack of definition. She writes of her mother that "...simple natures can also be complex, and that is difficult for a child, who wants all grown people to be sharply one thing or another" (16). A child's identity, of course, develops from the response he or she receives early in life. To an extent, one's sense of self begins by the cues one reads in one's mother's eyes— one looks for one's "reflection" in the mirror of the mother's eyes. Hellman's mother was not seen clearly by Hellman, and, it would seem, Hellman was not "seen" by her mother. The lack of visual reciprocity in early life may have resulted in the patterns I see in the memoirs,
patterns in which Hellman repeatedly looks to the "faces" of others for identification and in her often repeated desire to see more clearly. Actually this might have been a projection in which she really longs to be seen more clearly. She opens Pentimento with the expressed desire to "see what was there for me once, what is there for me now." In the memoirs she looks for her own identity through the portraits--the faces--of the people who had been important to her.

The idea of "the other" in relation to "self" was the source of enormous conflict for Hellman. She experienced an intimation of this conflict when she was a child hiding and daydreaming in a fig tree. Alone in the tree, isolated from others, she would, she recalls, suddenly be struck with what she calls "the ill hour":

> It is too long ago for me to know why I thought the hour 'ill,'" she writes, "but certainly I did not mean sick. I think I meant an intimation of sadness, a first recognition that there was so much to understand that one might never find one's way and the first signs, perhaps, that for a nature like mine, the way would not be easy . . . . I can be sure that it was in the fig tree . . . .

> that I was first puzzled by the conflict which would haunt me, harm me, and benefit me the rest of my life: simply, the stubborn, relentless, driving desire to be alone as it came into conflict with the desire not to be alone when I wanted not to be. I already guessed that other people wouldn't allow that, although, as an only child, I pretended for the rest of my life that they would and must allow it to me (22).

Hellman understands that her "nature" is one in conflict about herself in relation to others; there is her fear of striking out alone in a world where "one might never find one's way," and the realization that one might be compelled to depend on "others" for help on the journey. It was a balance she could never easily strike.

As a child Hellman realized that literature could be a means for joining with others while remaining at a safe distance from them. In An Unfinished Woman Hellman describes her childhood home--the boarding house full of odd relatives, eccentric tenants, nannies, and cooks. Between this home and the unpleasant school situation,
she created an alternative, imaginary world in the fig tree. In the "arms" of the tree she
learned to read--this takes her into a world of others but under manageable
circumstances: "It was in that tree that I learned to read, filled with the passions that can
only come to the bookish, grasping, very young, bewildered by almost all of what I
read, sweating in an attempt to understand a world of adults I fled from in real life but
desperately wanted to join in books" (21). She wants to forge a separate identity, a self
apart from the parental figures surrounding her; at the same time, she senses the need to
connect with others. Looking at her choice of words, one can see that Hellman
perceived the process of separation and connection in dramatic, tumultuous terms:
"passions," "grasping," "bewildered," "sweating," "attempt," "desperately," "fled,
"join." As I will demonstrate at length later in my work, Hellman saw few options
between fleeing and joining with others. By hiding in the tree Hellman separates herself
from others, comforts herself with books which serve as transitional objects (as her own
work will) , and expresses her ambivalence about differentiation by giving the tree an
obvious maternal personality. "I had," she writes, "through time, convinced myself that
it wanted me, missed me when I was absent and approved all the rigging I had done for
the happy days I spent in its arms . . . " (21). She told an interviewer that "I was at one
with that tree" (Bryer,157). In these lines one senses a yearning for the return to the time
when there was a perfect undifferentiated union between mother and child. The regret
and longing for this lost state appears in her frequently expressed love for Sophronia,
from whom she was separated when the Hellman's moved to New York. At one point
in the memoirs Hellman says, "There may be a need in many of us for the large, strong
woman who takes us back to what most of us always wanted and few of us ever had"
(24). In the fig tree, Hellman had a perfect mother, one created imaginatively. In the
memoirs other needs of Hellman's will be assuaged with fictions and even certain
psychological, developmental stages will be re-created through the writing process. In my study I will examine the stages Hellman "writes through" and examine her particular patterns of expression and how they relate to and parallel these developmental stages.
Works Cited


Chapter Two
Tripping Over Old Roots

Throughout the memoirs, Hellman recalls her many accidents, and the pattern that emerges shows that many of her physical twists and turns parallel her emotional and psychological convolutions—a tendency to stumble, fall and injure herself when she was in situations where she felt she must defend or assert herself. One of her friends said, ". . .there never was a woman who fell down as frequently as Lillian did: fall down, lie there for a moment, and get helped back up to her feet" (Wright, 402). The accidents, and remember Freud said there are no such things, are often physical manifestations of her conflicts about separation and individuation. Recovery from the accidents expresses, in metaphor, Hellman's recovery of and struggle for self-possession, a sense of autonomy strived for and often attained in the writing of the memoirs.

The first accident Hellman includes in the memoirs involves her beloved fig tree. When Hellman discovers her father stepping into a taxi with another woman, an "other" than Lillian or her mother, she goes into a characteristic "black rage;" she is "filled with fears I couldn't explain, with pity and contempt for my mother, with an intense desire to follow my father and Fizzy to see whatever they might be doing and to kill them for it." As an alternative to patricide, she throws herself out of the tree, breaking her nose. Faced with the idea of separation, that her father is actually separate from the family, or that the family might be separated, Hellman hurls herself in a symbolic separation from the maternal tree. Her reactions to others are often similarly misdirected; in Scoundrel Time she will write of her "inability to feel much against the leading figures of the period, the men who punished me" (603). In this case, she turns her anger toward her
mother and in on herself; she inflicts "hideous pain" on herself rather than confront her father.

After the "fall", Hellman immediately goes to Sophronia, who had been her nurse from the time she was a small child and whom she describes as "the first and most certain love of my life" (24). Hellman rejects the mother tree and the natural mother for an idealized version of mother, Sophronia. In the memoirs Hellman relates only a few lines of dialogue between the stern and taciturn Sophronia and herself, but these lines are held in reverence by Hellman, quoted to us with the same awe and respect for their wisdom as shown for the words of wisdom from Hammett. But oddly enough one can detect little real warmth in the actual exchanges between Sophronia and Hellman, and I believe that much of the relationship was in Hellman's imagination, constructed out of a need for a mother. Later, in *Pentimento*, Hellman, the grown professional woman known for her independent spirit, writes in a burst of emotion, "Oh, Sophronia, it's you I want back always. It's by you I still so often measure, guess, transmute, translate and act. What strange process made a little girl strain so hard to hear the few words that ever came, made the image of you, true or false, last a lifetime?" (255). Her question encompasses the answer. Sophronia and Hammett were people of few words and Hellman filled their silences with what she wished, or desired.

When Sophronia learns that Hellman's fall was not accidental, that her injury to her nose was self-inflicted, she decides not to take her to a doctor. She instructs Hellman to say nothing "to anybody ever" about Fizzy, who was a boarder in the Hellmans' boarding house (25). Sophronia's final command reverberates in Hellman's mind forever, appearing in her letter to the House Un-American Activities Committee: "Don't go through life making trouble for people" (25). Sophronia then sends the troubled and injured little girl home.
In the second chapter of *An Unfinished Woman* Hellman tells of a quarrel with her father that included many of the elements that will mark her numerous battles with others over her lifetime. The argument with Max Hellman revolves around a broken wristwatch, a gift he gave Hellman for her birthday. Later, Hellman's boyfriend gave her a lock of his hair which she then placed in the back of the watch, which stops the watch. Forgetting about the lock of hair, Hellman lets her father take it to a jeweler who makes the discovery of the hair. When her father returns home, he demands an explanation, but Hellman cannot respond. There is a hint of Oedipal conflict in this story as well as the more general masculine/feminine conflict that will appear frequently in the memoirs. Here her father gives her the gift of Father Time, a device to order her time--Hellman has already told us in the memoirs of her concept of time, a hazy, non-linear affair made up of "ill-hours" in the fig tree. She tells us that during this particular difficult time of her childhood she had lost track of time--"I had, one night, fallen asleep in the fig tree and, coming down in the morning, refused to tell my mother where I had been;" she had spent a great deal of her time away from the family--"And I was now spending most of my time with a group from an orphanage down the block" (29). Perhaps her father wanted to keep the time between them nondifferentiated, but the plan goes awry when another person, a boy, comes between them, so to speak.

Time will also become an issue of difference between Hellman and Hammett; at one point Hammett tells her to go ahead and travel to Russia and have "a good wasted time" but not to continue justifying the trip as work (84). In *Hellman in Hollywood* Bernard Dick is annoyed by Hellman's last work, *Maybe*, because he says, "...she squeezes time into a ball as if it were a play thing" (142). For Hellman's father, and later Hammett, and male literary critics, such as Dick and Samuel McCracken, time is a serious concept, to be used, not dallied with. When Samuel McCracken attacks
Hellman and her work in his article for *Commentary* the substance of the piece is to compare dates and times to prove Hellman could not have been on this train or that boat at the time she said because he has traced all the schedules, and they do not match Hellman's chronology. "Miss Hellman could not, therefore, have carried out the entire program she describes in her memoirs in the time she said she had for it. Some of these events, if they happened at all, must have happened at times and in ways other than she says they did" (emphasis added). The reader becomes overwhelmed with figures, with the seriousness with which McCracken views correct "time." "In time," he concludes, "if literary historians learn to use her cautiously, her contaminating effect on our knowledge of our times may prove minor" (43; emphasis added). This is a male orientation toward time, an orientation that I will discuss further in Chapter Four where I will relate it to Hellman's writing style.

In this particular battle with her father, Hellman attempts to "stand up" to him, but she falls, literally as well as metaphorically. She remembers that "what started out to be a mild reproof on my father's part soon turned angry when I wouldn't explain about the hair" (30). He became so angry that "he forgot that he was attacking me [verbally] in front of the boarders" . . . . "I sat on the couch astonished at the pain in my head. I tried to get up from the couch, but one ankle turned and I sat down again, knowing for the first time the rampage that could be caused in me by anger. The room began to have other forms, the people were no longer men and women, my head was not my own. I told myself that my head had gone somewhere and I have little memory of anything after . . . . But I knew that soon after I was moving up the staircase, that I slipped and fell a few steps . . . " (31). Often in threatening situations, such as here where she feels misunderstood and wronged, where her self is under attack, she experiences a sensation of dissociation. Faced with defending herself, she loses herself. Hellman is struck
mute, loses her voice; perhaps in defense she retreats to a preverbal time when explanations were not demanded, when the "me" did not collide with the "not me." To remain fully conscious and autonomous would mean that Hellman would have to act, become separate from her father, make deliberate, adult decisions. Trying to explain her father's own rampage anger, Hellman writes: "My father was often angry when I was most like him." Probably, when she was most like him was when she was most independent, and this was what really frightened and angered him.

After the wristwatch incident, Hellman runs away from home and has a terrible night of misadventures in the French Quarter, each encounter a revealing expression of Hellman's conflict about growing up, and, therefore, "away" from her father. She sees a policeman (a symbol of patriarchal authority) and hides from him in a famous doll's-house on St. Charles Avenue: "If I had known about the fantasies of the frightened, that ridiculous small house would not have been so terrible for me. I was surrounded by ornate, carved reproductions . . . scaled for children" (31). But she cannot escape back to childhood: "I crawled out." She crawls out into a world of difference--she begins to menstruate but does not realize what is happening to her. She goes to a Negro boarding house where she knew Sophronia had friends, another retreat into connection with the maternal. But a black man in the house, scared of trouble, tells Hellman to go away: "This is a nigger house," he yells at her. Resourcefully Hellman responds, "I'm part nigger" (35). To bond herself with Sophronia she has fictionalized her tie, making it a stronger one of blood and birth. Later when her father finds her, she confides in him: "Papa, I'll tell you a secret. I've had very bad cramps and I am beginning to bleed. I'm changing life" (39). Even her father notes the specificity of Hellman's wording: "Well, it's not the way it's usually described, but it's accurate, I guess," he says. The choice of expression is very important: Hellman will not allow life
to change her; she will change life, gaining a control over her world with her manipulation of language. In this minor reversal of what really happened—in fact, the night has changed her—we can see the seeds for what will be a major tendency to solve with fiction unmanageable facts.

In an episode similar to that with her father which also involved rage and dissociation, Hellman writes of a London dinner party that she attended a few days after she returned from the Spanish Civil War. What had been only an abstract political cause to her had become uncomfortably real during her visit; she had recognized the reality of war—"the filthy indignity of destruction." The actual war, seeing soldiers horribly wounded, being caught outside in an air raid, experiencing hunger, had jolted Hellman into a reassessment of her life. In a later preface to *An Unfinished Woman* she writes: "My pieces... about Spain do not say all or even much of what I wanted to say. I knew it when I first wrote them,... Somehow they do not include the passion that I felt, my absolute conviction that when the Spanish War was lost, we were all going to be caught in a storm of murder and destruction in another, larger war" (129). Adjustment to the separation from those committed to a cause in Spain made it difficult for her to tolerate the cocktail chatter of the upperclass English at the dinner party. When the guests made small talk about the war, revealing not only their ignorance but also their indifference to the issues at stake or the suffering of the Spanish people, Hellman grew angry. The hostess announced that Hellman had recently come from Spain. Hellman writes that a "man to her right said the English version of 'Really' several times," and then turned to her and said, "I've never been able to fathom the issues" (131). A woman asked airily if Spain was an "interesting" place to visit now, and Hellman did not reply. At this point a "titled gentleman" said, "You didn't answer my wife's question." Hellman discovered that "the words would not come." And she was
in "the kind of rampage anger that I have known all my life, still know, and certainly in those days was not able, perhaps did not wish, to control." She regained self-control at the expense of her "voice" and to the detriment of her body, again turning her anger against herself: she rushed from the party, threw herself first into the winter night without a coat, and then threw herself onto the hotel bed with such force that she slipped to the floor, breaking her ankle.

Once in an interview Bill Moyers pointedly told Hellman, "You don't like confrontations." It was an assumption he made, he said, from the fact that she often rushed from rooms, even flew out of cities to avoid conflict. Agreeing with his assessment, Hellman added that she did not like confrontations that she could lose. "What," persisted Moyers, "was behind this moving on, getting away from some place in a hurry?" "I think," Hellman said, "perhaps, in a sense, the fear of anger, that if I stayed, I'd be out of control. And that I better move as fast as I could, and as far as I could and forever as I could" (Bryer, l45). Hellman's usual defense in a fight, a quarrel, a perception of "difference," was to flee the confrontation, but when she stayed, the ensuing fight was usually extremely bitter, her reaction seemingly all out of proportion to the situation. In an observation about psychotic patients, which seems to apply on some level to Hellman, Edith Jacobson writes: "We find...fears of accepting and acquiring likenesses to others, in conjunction with an inability to perceive and tolerate differences from them, and to relate to them as separate and different individuals. Likeness and difference are equally frightening, because likeness threatens to destroy the self, and difference the object" (The Self and the Object World, 37).

Psychoanalytic theory holds that unconscious infantile struggles are often mapped on future relationships: we seem destined to replay, repeat, rework certain struggles throughout our lives in hopes of changing the original, frustrating outcome. We do this
in our day and night dreams--gaining satisfaction from the fulfillment of fantasy wishes. But writers can, in a sense, rewrite these scripts. One can master what one can name. In *Fiction and the Unconscious* Simon Lesser says that through a description of an experience writers can master the experience. If time after time in real life Hellman could not express herself, if she lost the ability to voice her opinions, she corrected the original experience in the telling, in the writing, where her voice is in control. It was also through her writing that Hellman took tentative steps toward relating to others, and also toward understanding "otherness." Initially in her plays she created characters that were in families; this way she could explore various familial configurations--the Hubbards in *The Little Foxes* for instance, and the Berniers of *Toys in the Attic*--and she could experience relationships vicariously like a child playing with dolls. That her emotional conflicts were somehow worked through by the writing appears in her description of her experience with *The Little Foxes*, a play she called "the most difficult play I ever wrote." She believed "some of the trouble came because the play has a distant connection to my mother's family and everything that I had heard or seen or imagined had formed a giant tangled time-jungle in which I could find no space to walk without tripping over old roots, . . ." (474). Making no conscious connection, just an observation, Hellman says in the first chapter of *An Unfinished Woman* that "after *The Little Foxes* was written and put away, this conflict [her fascination and hatred toward her mother's family] was to grow less important, as indeed, the picture of my mother's family was to grow dim and almost fade away" (15). The space she cleared in order to walk freely, without "tripping over old roots," was in the form of the manuscript. In *Pentimento*, in a chapter called *Theatre*, Hellman writes that "the manuscript, the words on the page, was what you started with and what you have left. . .and the pages are the only wall against which to throw the future or measure the past" (453). The "wall," the
fixed boundaries, the bound editions of the plays and memoirs served as barriers against confrontation and violation. Hammett once told her, and she repeats it in the memoirs—"The truth is you don't like the theatre except the times when you're in a room by yourself putting the play on paper" (85). In "a room of one's own" Hellman had the most control, removed from the challenges presented by others--readers, literary critics, directors, actors, actresses.

Because of Hellman's reputation for independence, readers are often surprised at the way she bowed to the will of Hammett. Throughout the memoirs she remembers her silence before his pronouncements, his challenges. "We never spoke of it again" is a refrain in the memoirs and in their relationship. Released from prison where he was held for refusing to turn over information to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), Hammett continued to teach at the Jefferson School, which was highly suspect because of its Marxist teachings. Hellman was anxious for him, his health had declined in prison, so she nagged him about the teaching. One day on a walk, after she had again expressed her fears, he turned to her and said, "Lilly, when we reach the corner you are going to have to make up your mind that I must go my way. You've been more than, more than, well, more than something-or-other good to me, but now I'm trouble and a nuisance to you. I won't ever blame you if you say goodbye to me now. But if you don't, then we must never have this conversation again" (134). Another time she writes of haranguing him, unhappy about his drinking, his other women, "his sharpness with me but not with himself," until he stopped the conversation by grinding a burning cigarette into his cheek. Appalled she asked, "What are you doing?" "Keeping myself from doing it to you," he said. Hellman writes, "We never again spoke of that night . . . "(212). Sometimes the memoirs seem a long-overdue response to Hammett, like the last word in a long argument. For many years she allowed him to suppress or
control her "voice." "He used his age to make all the rules," she writes (212). But with his death she broke into a new form, the prose of the memoirs, and discovered a new freedom, and with that, sometimes, a new understanding of herself. "There are a thousand ways to write," she says in an 1968 interview, "If you can break into a new pattern along the way, and it opens things up, and allows you more freedom, that's something" (Bryer, 123).

In *An Unfinished Woman* she recalls a lonely night in a Budapest hotel room; a longtime lover, R., has just told her he plans to marry a young woman, Hammett is gone, having been dead for six years, and she is drunk, depressed and full of memories of their relationship. Sifting through the past becomes painful: "... remembering how hard the early years sometimes were for us when he didn't care what he did or spoiled, and I didn't think I wanted to stay long with anybody ..." She asks herself why she had been so frightened of marriage, a question worth asking, but Hellman cannot bring herself to answer. "Who the hell did I think I was, alone in a world where women don't have much safety ..." On the third night of her drunken reverie she falls asleep and awakes to a cigarette burn on her chest. She recalls thinking, "That's what you deserve for wasting time on stuff proper for the head of a young girl" (211). In her reproach to herself one hears an echo of Hammett, whom she has obviously internalized, and who would have been critical of her sentimentality and self-pity. The injury replaces Hammett, it brings her soul-searching to a abrupt halt, just like her hurt ankles, bumped head, cut knees demand her immediate attention, thus deflecting her thoughts away from her dilemma of the moment, her need to make a decision. Hellman circles the truth: she thinks that she is "ashamed that I caused myself to lose so often" in her power struggles with Hammett, and she sees the same pattern in the relationship with R. But, she concludes: "All I mean by it now is that I don't have the final courage to say that I refuse
to preside over violations against myself" (213). Many of her accidents seem to be just that—violations against herself.

In *Pentimento*, the second memoir, Hellman continues to stumble through her life and letters, injuring herself along the way. In *Pentimento* Hellman presents us with portraits which make up four of the seven chapters: there is one of Bethe, a distant German relative who was sent to America to marry a well-to-do third cousin, but who leaves her unhappy, arranged marriage for true-love with a New Orleans mobster; one focuses on Willy, Hellman's uncle, who made and lost a fortune from a Central American import company; then there is the most well-known portrait, that of Julia, which was made into the movie, *Julia*, that starred Jane Fonda as Hellman and Vanessa Redgrave as Julia; this is the portrait that has been at the center of the controversy about Hellman's veracity; Hellman says that Julia was her childhood friend although she does not appear in the early memoir; but there is a girl much like her, in *An Unfinished Woman*, named Alice. Julia supposedly went to Oxford, then to medical school in Austria, where she was analyzed by Freud, and where she became a leader of the resistance movement prior to World War II. The last portrait is of the eccentric Arthur W.A. Cowan, a lawyer and investor, a world-traveling dandy, who also, not incidentally was a lover of Hellman's before and after Hammett's death. Instead of writing about them from within her relationship with them, Hellman writes from without; in fact, she chose people who touched her life peripherally or sporadically, people who influenced her—like Bethe and Willy—in ways she was not aware of for years. Often when she relates her actual involvement with them, the points where their lives connected with hers, (especially with Bethe, Willy, and Julia), she portrays herself as awkward, trembling, confused, running this way and that way.
In Willy's portrait we see that Hellman chooses a man who is unreliable, known for his infidelity to his wife, for the object of her first adolescent crush. She does, of course, set the stage for her rejection; and the inevitable outcome will confirm for her what she already assumes about the impossibility of a happy union between people. She is unaware that she has unconsciously contrived the situation so that the outcome will be self-fulfilling. One must remember Hellman's experience of her father's philandering. With Willy, I think, she repeats a familiar but traumatic situation perhaps in hopes she can change the outcome, rectify what had occurred between her own father and mother. She wants to win Willy as she would have liked her mother to win her father away from his "other" women. Again in this portrait of Willy we see Hellman on the verge of a self-awareness that she avoids by "revenging herself on herself."

Hellman was fascinated by and drawn to Willy's New Orleans household, a place seething with undercurrents of sexuality. There are several complex relationships going on within Willy's family which are difficult for the young Hellman to understand. There is Aunt Lily, Willy's wife, who drifted dreamily around the house in a drug and alcohol induced coma; then there is Honey, the son who once captured Hellman on a dark stairwell and exposed himself to her, lifting her dress and shouting "Open up, open up;" Flo Ducky, a cook lives there as well as her mother, Caroline Ducky, an old woman who occupied the attic, did the "fine sewing," and knew everything that went on in the household; finally, there is Peters, the "wheat-colored" chauffeur, who had a relationship with Aunt Lily; Hellman incorporated a similar relationship between a driver and his white employer in *Toys in the Attic*. But as a teenager Hellman only senses the sensuality permeating her surroundings; she cannot untangle what she intuits any more than she can understand its grip on her. This lack of understanding about Willy and her feelings toward him--then as it was happening, and later as she was almost seduced by
him as a young woman, and in the writing about it, exemplifies in the particular what is a peculiarity of the memoirs in general. Hellman writes with awe and understatement about her feelings for Willy, admits that she became involved with him again when she was committed to Hammett, but she writes in a way that indicates it is still a mystery to her. But even we can see the situation for what it was--stripped of the "mystery" it is the story of a lecherous, rather immoral man, and she was a lovestruck adolescent blinded by her infatuation, and by her unconscious need to repeat the past.

Hellman impulsively goes off with Willy to his hunting camp, without telling her parents, and unaware that he keeps a woman there, a Cajun mistress. She describes the wild Southern bayou country--its "undergrowth of strange and tangled roots"--in a way that corresponds to her state of mind at the time. It is in this earthy setting, "swamp oak, cypress, . . . roots above ground and small plants and ferns pushing against the wild high dark green leaves of a plant I had never seen before," that Hellman experience emotions she has, in a sense, never "seen" before either. She writes, "My pleasure in food and wine was, of course, my pleasure in Willy . . ." (38). After a day of duck-hunting together, they sit on a porch, Willy drinking whisky, growing drunk as dusk descends. Soon after sunset, a young woman arrives and Willy goes off into the woods with her, forgetting Hellman sits in the dark next to him. Hellman describes the emotion that overcomes her as an "irrational feeling of rejection." She writes that "my head and body seemed not to belong together, unable to carry the burden of me. Then, as later, I revenged myself on myself." She runs away, heedless of the danger of the jungle in the dark, and "didn't care" when she stumbled on a snake. A truck comes by and picks her up, and she rides back to New Orleans. "I had been walking in the wrong direction," she writes. "It is possible to feel many conflicts and not know they are conflicts when you are young," she concludes. Hellman's running toward and running
away from relationship is a physical rephrasing of the conflict she wrote about earlier in the memoirs--"the driving desire to be alone as it came into conflict with the desire not to be alone . . . ." The fear of being rejected made her feel, as she says in the Willy section, "at one minute less than nothing . . . . , and the next minute, in defense, growing powerful, through anger--". . . powerful enough to revenge myself with the murder of Willy" (384). But she "ran" from both prospects--"as fast as I could and forever as I could" (Bryer, 145).

Through Bethe's experiences Hellman sees the power of sexual passion and the sight sends her reeling. Bethe leaves her husband for love, which unfortunately came in the form of a mobster; thus Bethe's "affair" became a popular topic for gossip in the Hellman house and also around town, although everyone thought they concealed it from young Lillian. Hellman becomes obsessed by her need to "know" more about Bethe and her lover Arneggio, and while tracking Bethe, who has disappeared, Hellman is apprehended by the police. She is taken to the police station where she is asked why she went to the store where Arneggio lived. During the questioning, Hellman thinks to herself that she is near to "a truth" she can't name--"so close to it, so convinced that something was being pushed up from the bottom of me, that I began to tremble with an anxiety I had never felt before" (344). The policeman, who is in fact investigating Arneggio's murder, though Hellman does not know this yet, says, "Answer me young lady. Why did you go there today?" Hellman writes that "My voice was high and came, I thought, from somebody else. I don't know . . . Love, I think, but I'm not sure" (344).

The truth that Hellman seeks but fears is a truth about herself that has been revealed to her by the relationship between Bethe and Arneggio. Once while at dinner with Bethe, Hellman saw Bethe gaze at Arneggio across the restaurant, where he was sitting
alone. "I... found her staring at the man, her lips compressed... her shoulders rigid against the chair. The man turned from the wall, the eyes dropped to the table, and then the head went up suddenly and stared at Bethe until the lips took on the look of her lips and the shoulders went back against the chair with the same sharp intake of muscles." Terrified, Hellman writes that "... I knew I was seeing what I had never seen before and, since like most only children, all that I saw related to me, I felt a sharp pain as if I were alone in the world and always would be" (332). She is upset about being shut out of the union, giving her a sense of her own autonomy, her own separateness; she has seen what is very much like an act of intercourse, and she is the child looking on, traumatized by the sight of two people becoming like one. Again we see Hellman's dual fears--her fear of being "alone in the world" coupled with the fear of being merged with another. Responding to this sudden insight, Hellman pushes her dinner plate forward, spilling the plate, a symbol, perhaps, for pushing the unpalatable truth away. ". . . I pushed the heavy paste stuff in front of me so far across the table that it turned and was on the tablecloth" (332).

She records in this section that in the 20's she and her friends had wanted to marry poets. Not a particular poet, just a poet. "One of us did marry a young poet but he killed himself a few months after the marriage over the body of his male lover" (329). Hellman repeats this story three times in the memoirs; it seems to hold a "truth" for Hellman, it has a rhythm to it as in a fairy tale where the moral is that unions end in disaster. The tale of Bethe and Arneggio has a similar bitter ending which fits Hellman's psychological schema of relationship and explains its inclusion in the memoirs. Arneggio is found buried in a backyard, chopped into pieces by rival gangmembers.

"... I found out that pieces of Arneggio had been discovered... in the backyard of the store... " (344). Thinking about Arneggio's fate and Bethe's love for him Hellman
writes: "... I think of it now as the closest I have ever come to a conscious semiconsciousness, as if I were coming through an anesthetic, not back into a world of reality, but into a new body and time, moving toward something, running back at the moment I could have reached it" (345). Hellman thinks of Bethe, not surprisingly, on the day of her wedding to Arthur Kober: "I thought of her as I got dressed for my wedding, deliberately putting aside the pretty dress that was intended and choosing an old ugly gray chiffon. As it went over my head, I heard myself say her name, and I saw again the man, Arneggio, in the restaurant" (345). Again Hellman does not, so to speak, bring the pieces together into any kind of coherent understanding; there is no indication of self-knowledge. She knows this incident was important to her, she thinks of it on "the first afternoon she slept with Dashiell Hammett," but she only understands it as a reinforcement of her fear and cynicism about union with others. And each time her fears are confirmed—that unions lead to separations that are inevitable and inevitably violent and painful (like birth), she experiences a temporary sense of fragmentation: "conscious semiconsciousness."

Many years later Hellman visits Bethe with her aunts. She then returns the next day alone. "The next morning I went back to Bethe's, losing my way on the turn of the dirt road, then finding it again. As I came toward the house, I turned and ran from it ... ."

Once Bethe had revealed something to Hellman about love and relationship, but in Hellman's mind it is still a confusion. After running away from Bethe, she accidentally runs upon her, "She was naked and I stopped to admire the proportions of the figure: the large hips, the great breasts, the tumbled auburn hair...." When Bethe hears her and looks up, Hellman shouts, "It was you who did it. I would not have found it without you. Now what good is it, tell me that?" She speaks here of the difficulty of relationship (351).
In the memoirs Hellman writes of breaking her nose, twisting her ankle four times, breaking an ankle once. She almost drowns twice, writing of the times in *Pentimento* and *Maybe*. In the preface to *Three* she relates a long anecdote in which a woman makes a sexual advance toward her in a taxi cab at which point Hellman stammers incoherently and then falls out of the cab, injuring herself instead of facing the woman and the situation. On page one of the cookbook which came out posthumously, *Eating Together*, Hellman tells of a dinner with her co-author and friend, Peter Feibleman, during which she went to the ladies room and fell: "I fell on a stone step, cut my knee very badly and was knocked unconscious for a minute or two." Doris Falk wrote that "most readers responded to the books [the memoirs] not as great literature, which reviewers sometimes made them out to be, but as a group of entertaining stories, some about well-known people and past events, but most of them about a person--or 'persona'--named Lillian: a neurotic, rebellious character who stumbled from turned ankle to turned ankle in the general direction of heroism" (98). At the 1981 revival of *The Little Foxes* in Washington D.C., Hellman fell when she entered the theater; she was taken to the hospital after sitting through the first act. A journalist wrote, referring to the accident, that Hellman was "a trouper to the last, despite her mishap ..." (Bryer, 284). In fact it seems that Hellman's success--personally and professionally--came despite her many mishaps; she managed to express herself often in spite of herself.
Works Cited


Chapter Three
Self in Chaos/Self in Creation

Hellman begins to tell the story of her life in chronological order, but when she opens Chapter Nine of the first memoir, An Unfinished Woman, we see that she makes a sudden, and, I believe, revealing departure from the chronology. In this chapter she returns to the same time and subject of Chapter Eight—the Civil War in Spain. This is, so to speak, the fault-line of the text, the place where Hellman wavers, betraying a doubt, possibly about the best way to tell a story, her story, her "self." The chapters that follow, nine through thirteen, until chapter fourteen entitled "Dorothy Parker," are dense, chaotic, full of stories that span the Spanish Civil War years up to World War II. The reader, sent back and forth, and then back again, is forced to continually check the dates; one must turn back the pages to see whether it is 1937, 1945 or 1967. Chapter Ten consists of diary entries written during her 1945 Moscow trip, whereas Chapter Eleven is her present recollection of that same trip. Again, in Chapter Twelve, she writes in the present of her past, this time of the 1967 Moscow trip. Then she devotes Chapter Thirteen to another view of the 1967 trip, this time combining present recollection with old diary and notebook entries. The reader must, in some ways, go through a similar task that faced Hellman when she began the memoirs, the process of mentally backtracking through the years of memories, notes, letters, journal entries, and, most importantly, a lifetime of relationships. These chapters are frustrating to read and revelatory of Hellman's own frustration. The difficulty was that if she was to write of herself, she must also write of her relations to others, which will recall painful memories of conflict and of separation. In these five chapters—through the wealth of material, the
chaos, the choice of words and phrasings, anecdotes and vignettes--one gets a remarkable sense of the developmental problems of separation and individuation that marked her life and her work.

For example, when Hellman returns to Moscow after twenty-two years she is upset that the stewardess chooses to announce their arrival with what Hellman calls "a mournful sentence in English"--"And now we have come to the end of the road," the stewardess says," and we must take our parting." Leaving the airplane Hellman tells the stewardess that she must "find another sentence" to express herself (131). Chapters Nine through Thirteen are full of Hellman's own "mournful sentences" of loss. She writes of her old friend Sergie Eisenstein, recalling his death which she read about in the newspaper soon after she received a cable from him requesting thirteen mystery stories. After a reunion in 1967 with an old Russian friend, Captain K, she ends a chapter with the realization "that I had no address for the captain and no way to find it" (201). She tells us that she learned years later that the general who took her to the Russian frontline died two days after capturing Warsaw; in Chapter Twelve we learn that her father loses his mind--to senile dementia--and then dies. She writes, ". . . thus I lost my father, as he lost his mind, . . . " (190). The list goes on and on, but the point is that Hellman's writing in these chapters was dominated by memories of loss and separation from family, friends, even brief acquaintances. She also mourns the loss of her past self--the tears that accompanied her arrival in Moscow, she writes, "had to do with age and the woman who could survive hardships then and knew she couldn't anymore" (181). Again, when explaining the sale of her land, she writes: "There could never be any place like it again because I could never again be that woman . . . ." (185). Hellman ultimately wrote herself through and beyond the fascination and/or terror of these separations that suffuse the text. Hellman progressed from the disorganization of these
chapters to the choice of the "portrait" as a structuring device, writing almost all of the rest of *An Unfinished Woman* and *Pentimento* in the form of a sequence of portraits. Chapter Fourteen is a word-portrait of her friend Dorothy Parker following with ones of Helen, Dashiell Hammett, Bethe, Willy, Julia and Arthur Cowan. And the way out of the chaos came in the form of the very image she used repeatedly in these chapters, in the focus on the individual human face.

Often throughout the memoirs, Hellman used the term "face" in its various grammatical constructions to speak of her behavior under stress, such as--"I was packing and unpacking . . . doing the fussy things I have done all my life to avoid facing the turmoil . . . ."--"I did not wish to face a life without her [Helen, in this instance]--Zilboorg, her analyst, tells her that "You must face it . . .," referring to her father's illness--but in these five chapters there is a concentration of descriptions of human faces, as well as, and in addition to, the verb forms. The individual face provided a point of focus while simultaneously being a source of comfort for Hellman when confronting what was a problematic dialectic between herself and others.

In his book *Fictions in Autobiography* Paul John Eakin contends that the writing of autobiography parallels and, in his words, "formalizes" a psychological schema that unfolds in life. He sees "the autobiographical act (when it occurs) . . . as a . . . culminating phase in a history of self-consciousness that begins with the moment of language in early childhood . . .." (9). In studies of early human development psychologists and linguists have linked language acquisition with the emergence of self-awareness. Therefore, putting one's life into story form, into language, into images can repeat or in some cases enact for the first time certain developmental stages. One critical development stage is the visual recognition of the other as "other." A child's identification with others begins with visualization, with a focus on the face of the
primary caretaker, who is usually the mother. Gradually this focus fans out to include others. Object relations theorists call this moment of seeing others and of seeing yourself in others "the mirror phase" (Winnicott, Gallop, Klein, Lacan).

In Chapters Nine through Thirteen there are many examples of the way Hellman used this concept of mirroring for identity formation and/or confirmation. In these chapters, Hellman is often like a child discovering faces for the first time; she experiences identifications with the faces in the form of gut-felt epiphanies. Or sometimes she looks to the faces of others--Hammet, primarily--for an identity that she feels she lacks, feeling more "whole" in the complementary reflection of the more complete other (which of course, can be a perceptual illusion). In a certain way this organizing principle--the human face--brought unity to a previously chaotic work, just like the focus on the human face helps bring an infant out of the blurry chaos of his surroundings into the knowledge of others.

If one follows along with Hellman through the memoirs, one face at a time so to speak, a pattern evolves that in many ways parallels the psychological, developmental stages of childhood. In the first stages of life a child sees the human face as a blur, and, in a similar way in the first "childhood" chapters of the memoirs, Hellman presents her early memories of those around her as a blur of aunts, uncles, parents, housekeepers, and boarders--few individual, particularized faces are described. Initially the portraits are simple: her grandmother had "a lined, severe face. . . ." A girl who worked for her aunts had "a flat, ugly face." Sophronia had a "brooding face." But, as the memoirs progress, there is also a progression of perception whereby Hellman grows increasingly fascinated and drawn to human faces. Of a Russian friend, she writes in Chapter Thirteen-- "Elena, who is about my age, looks very like my father's mother--a fine, craggy face filled with life that was life that is" (221). Also in Chapter Thirteen she
writes of the Russian poet Olga Bergholz, "...the face has turned old-child peevish."
When on a picnic with her Russian cabdriver and his two girls she writes: "The child is
grinning, but when I smile back, her face goes cold and she slumps in her seat" (214).
"Dash", she writes, had a "long, thin, handsome face" (217). In *Pentimento* Hellman's
attention to faces is reflected in the much greater detailed descriptions: Of Julia, she
wrote: "There are women who reach a perfect time of life, when the face will never
again be as good, the body never as graceful and powerful. It had happened that year to
Julia." Again: "I don't know when I stopped listening to look at the lovely face propped
against the pillow... I don't know if I knew or had ever used the words gentle or
delicate or strong, but I did think that night that it was the most beautiful face I had ever
seen" (418). Uncle Willy had a good-looking jolly face. Arthur W.A. Cowan, a lover,
had a face that, Hellman wrote, she "came to know...as well as my own" (515).

In fact, Hellman had trouble connecting with or recognizing her own face. In the
second chapter of the first memoir she writes of one arduous, coming-of-age night in
which she began to menstruate on the same night she had a fight with her father and ran
away from home. After a night of being scared by rats in Jackson Square and by a man
who exposed himself to her, she went to the train station restroom. She writes that
"after a while the cramps stopped, but I had an intimation, when I looked into the mirror,
of something happening to me: my face was blotched, and there seemed to be circles and
twirls I had never seen before, ..." (34). In an interview Hellman confided that her
analyst once told her that she was the only patient that he had ever had who talked about
herself as if she were another person--"he said I look at myself as though I'm a total
stranger" (Bryer, 201).

In Chapter Nine Hellman uses the word "face" as a verb or as the more usual
noun form, as in the human face, over ten times, beginning the chapter like this:
Most people coming out of a war feel lost and resentful. What has been a minute-to-minute confrontation with yourself, your struggle with what courage you have against discomfort, at least, and death at the other end, ties you to the people you have known in the war and makes, for a time, all others seem alien and frivolous. Friends are glad to see you again, but you know immediately that most of them have put you to one side, and while it is easy enough to say that you should have known that before, most of us don't, and it is painful. You are face to face with what will happen to you after death (130).

In the particular words and phrases of this opening paragraph one can see Hellman's preoccupation with self and others, the "ties" one has with others, and the painful separations that occur at death or even when friends have had different experiences. A war situation—a group effort in which people fight for a common goal—is like a family, or at least like Hellman's fantasy of family. She feels comfortable in a war because it is an inclusive experience in which she becomes a part of "most people." Elsewhere in the chapter she writes of how "lonely and useless" she felt when Hammett enlisted for service during World War II: "I watched other people go to a war I needed to be part of." Hellman had a strong desire for merger with something "other" than herself, which transcended herself, in other words perhaps she longed for the pre-Oedipal state of oneness with the mother. This would explain her political activism which often seemed to be based more on emotionalism—instinct—rather than in informed knowledge.

The HUAC committee listed her as belonging to over 30 political organizations. William Wright says that even her close political allies could make little sense of her political beliefs, but they could attest to her political passion (435).

Hellman writes that when she leaves Spain and the war behind she felt "lost and resentful." "All others," she writes, "seem alien and frivolous" to her—in other words "different." To be within the group of "most people" involved in a war—and then to come out—to differentiate—brought Hellman "face to face with what will happen to you
after your death." To Hellman, differentiation from an intense bond, a fusion, is equated with death: one is left utterly alone--face to face, not only with death, but with oneself. Hellman is not secure with individuation, judging from how she handled herself away from Spain, away from the family. She writes that "the few weeks I spent in Paris when I came out were unpleasant. . . ." . . . . "But Paris was never my city, and at the time I told myself that was in part my reason for depression over . . . the fashionable parties . . . ." To try to escape her depression she traveled to London. In the "psychohistory" of Isak Dineson, who was also a compulsive traveler, Judith Thurman writes that often travel functions as a psychological defense mechanism: the traveler flees from an external situation that she believes is the source of the tension when it is actually an inner turmoil that sends her packing (449). In Hellman's case, she went from Paris to London where she does not feel any better, nor does she get along any better with "others" of London. In fact, as noted in Chapter Two, she went into a rage at a London cocktail party when the guests expressed no concern for the Spanish crisis: she ran away from the party, later breaking her ankle. Much of her anguish here, I believe, stemmed not from the place or the politics but from her separation anxiety from the familial "most people" involved in the war in Spain. From this perspective, seeing her political affiliation as a sense of a family bond with the Spanish war effort, helps clarify the strange conclusion to Chapter Nine.

At the end of Chapter Nine Hellman takes us back to Russia and presents us with two powerful images that revolve around two particular human faces. One is the face of her face in relation to an orphan and a picture of his mother. She writes:

And I know the name, because it is written down, of the three-year-old fat, blond orphan who threw himself at me the first time I ever saw him and who, when I went to see him twice every week, would sit on my lap and feel my face because the lady who ran the orphan school said I looked like a picture of his mother, but I couldn't know then that I would think about
him for years afterwards, and dream as recently as last month that I was
riding with him on a toboggan (146).

Here we see a love and desire that springs from the memory of the early vision of the
"other" as the comforting mother-figure. The memory of the orphan comes to Hellman
at the end of a long paragraph that documented her strongest memories of Moscow, the
memories of her friends: of "... Raya, the remarkable young girl who was my
translator-guide," of "a State Department career man whose future ... went down the
drain [because of her friendship with him, which she does not explain here] ... Sergei
Eisenstein and our daily cup of tea ... " Then, after this record of past loves and
present separations, there is the orphan, who functions in her memory and in the text as
a consolation. The original nurturance and symbiosis between mother and child is
reenacted, first in the actual encounter in Russia, and again in the repetition in her
dreams and then forever in the writing. In the reading--and re-reading--the image works
as a transitional object for Hellman that reminds and binds her to the mother.
Symbolically it is important for Hellman that the child is an orphan. Early in the
memoirs Hellman wrote that she longed to be an orphan like the children who were her
first friends from the orphanage down the block from the boarding house: "... to be an
orphan seemed to me desirable and a self-made piece of independence" (29). To
Hellman to be an orphan would be to be independent, separate, autonomous; there
would be no need for the grueling work and terrible pain of separation. It is after a
review of her losses that her mind turns to the image of the orphan, but the orphan
longs for a mother, which represents Hellman's own contradictory feelings--her desire
to be "a self-made piece of independence" coupled with her desire to mother and,
significantly, to be mothered. We will see how this desire influenced the writing of
Julia--the story and the character.
There is one last "face" in Chapter Nine, a haunting image that dramatically concludes her reminiscences of Russia. In the last paragraph of the chapter Hellman takes us directly from the fat face of the loving orphan to the disturbing vision of the face of another blond boy; but this time the face is disfigured, horribly wounded in the war:

I had gone to a hospital for the severely wounded and was making the handshaking, false-smile clown-sounds that healthy people make when they are faced with the permanently injured, when suddenly a man came into the room. I think he was in his late twenties, I think he was blond, I think he was tall and thin. but I know that most of his face had been shot off. He had one eye, the left side of a piece of a nose and no bottom lip. He tried to smile at me. It was in the next few hours that I felt a kind of exaltation I had never known before (146).

This is a strange and worrisome passage, but, read in the context of the beginning of Chapter Nine, it makes sense psychologically. Hellman must have felt recognized by the soldier. By his smile the soldier accepts her, acknowledges her as part of the family, the family of brave soldiers like the ones she left in Spain. From the acceptance, the union, the identification, Hellman experiences "a kind of exaltation I had never known before." For an instant Hellman feels whole, or a part of a whole; she is no longer lost and resentful, lonely and useless. Perhaps Hellman also identified with the soldier in terms of his fragmentation—he is also only a part left from a once whole human being. But on both levels there is a return to a memory the early developmental stage when mother and child—in the child's "eyes"—were one.

According to the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, human desire springs from the discovery of a lack, a loss, a disjunctiveness perceived between one's self and others. Often Hellman perceived certain qualities that she wanted for herself in the faces of those on whom she chose to focus—in her life and in her work. Once someone caught her eye and imagination, he or she was usually captured forever, as a friend, cherished memory, part of her story. It is significant, I believe, that Hellman fell in love with
Dashiell Hammett at first "sight." She wrote that when they were introduced at a Hollywood restaurant the attraction was immediate and strong. Hammett was debonair and handsome, socially at ease, a celebrity, a political activist, and a writer. And at the time she met him she was none of these. It speaks to the nature of the reciprocity between them that she went on to become a celebrated writer who was politically active, whereas Hammett became reclusive, suffering a 27-year writer's block. But her initial image of him was set and never really changed. When asked in an interview in 1979 what kind of man was Dashiell Hammett? she replied: "He was a very good writer for one thing, I think. And while he was not of the very top level, he changed the face of much of American fiction, . . ." And then she added: "He was a very remarkable looking man, which in his case, honestly had something to do with the whole thing, as it does with most people's lives, of course. He was an extraordinary [sic] tall and extraordinary [sic] thin and very distinguished looking" (Bryer, 241-2). Hellman speaks first of the impact Hammett had on the "face" of American fiction, and then proceeds to explain the effect his face had on others. "The whole thing" she refers to is the charismatic power Hammett had over everyone he met, but she also refers, I believe, to the "whole thing" they had together as a couple.

In his book Wright remarks that "Hellman . . . never mentions her looks, which, for one so amorously inclined, must have been a cause for some reflection." It is curious that he should use the word reflection, which is the process by which she corrected her sense of inadequacy. Wright ponders--crudely I believe--Hammett's attraction to Hellman; he writes of Hammett's "unshakable fascination with and dependence on Hellman," which he contends, "defies several laws of natural selection . . ." (67). Later he writes that the public liked Hellman--"the tough, ugly little woman, the steel-trap mind, . . . ." On many levels Hammett's reflection served as a complement for
Hellman, but his **handsome** reflection worked particularly to complement her sense of her appearance.

In the memoirs Hellman is often drawn to a beauty she does not have. One of her first childhood friends, Frances, she described as "a dark beauty of my age" who "queenited it over the others . . ." This was a power Hellman recognized and respected. There is a story that once when Hellman was at dinner with one of the many handsome young men who accompanied her in her later years she stared into the young man's face for a long time, and then said, "I wish I looked like you" (Wright 376). The young man's relation to Hellman, like Hammett's relation to others, like Frances' position "over the others" gave them a power that I believe Hellman felt she lacked. Between Hellman's idea of herself and her idea of others there was often a great deal of longing, a longing that was powerful in itself; and this powerful sense of longing suffuses the memoirs.

One can see it in a passage in Chapter Twelve where she once again records, in a long sequence, her memories of her Russian visit:

...I remembered all the dinners, sometimes pleasant and homey with Harriman, his daughter, . . . And I remembered a small, crazy dog that lived in the room next to mine; and the visits to the house of the great dancer who, wherever she sat, alway faced a mirror, her eyes unwavering; and siphoning off gasoline from the embassy car to clean my hair, and falling over and over again in the courtyard as I practiced walking in flat, high felt boots; . . . and a hundred other faces and voices of long ago (194).

In her parallel construction, between her view of herself and her view of the dancer, Hellman reveals a disjunction: unlike Hellman, the dancer is someone who is obviously in control of her movements, her body, her balance; and she can also face herself directly, she can gaze steadily, "unwaverering" at the image of herself reflected back to her. In contrast, Hellman, by her own admission, does not like to face herself, difficult
decisions, or others--this is illustrated in the image of herself she presents here of the awkward, funny, unglamorous (washes her hair with gasoline) woman who slips and slides on ice, and, it is implied, through life.

To a great degree Hellman depended on her sight, her unique way of seeing, to give her access to "the other." From the language of the memoirs there is a sense that Hellman felt that sight is the key to insight, possibly to the knowledge or "truth" of self; but there is also an indication that she felt that "others" saw the world with more clarity than she did or could. Oddly enough both men who were important to her--Hammett and Eisenstein--were intrigued by and studied the human eye (292). Hammett, she wrote, once spent "a long year of study on the retina of the eye. And Eisenstein--"that winter of 1944"--talked to Hellman "about the picture [Ivan the Terrible], and his other pictures, and his Baltic youth, and his studies of the human eye, . . ." (196). Hellman wrote with admiration that Hammett saw "this world for what it was. . . .," and her friend Nathanael West, who wrote The Day of the Locust, "saw" Hollywood "through his own wonderfully original mind . . ." (73). But, in contrast, the people of Hollywood saw her, she wrote, as "a tight, tense sightseer . . ." (73). The fact that she repeats the observation reveals a certain acceptance of its truth. In the preface to Three, written after reviewing her work and titled "On Reading Again," Hellman writes about memory and her work in terms of "seeing." Marcel Proust she says, once wrote a friend that "the eyes of memory see nothing if we strain them too hard." "I don't believe that to be true, . . . ." Hellman writes. "In my case Proust's 'nothing,' or almost nothing, comes after the first strain, after the work is over, performed, published or put aside," she says. "Then the eyes of memory are not strained into nothingness, but into questions about nothingness. What didn't I see during the time of work that I now see more clearly?"
As one can "see" in the preoccupation, Hellman strived for a particular vision in her work, "strained" to see the many layers of reality, and the reality of her relationships.

She opens *Pentimento* with the expressed desire to *see* a certain way--through the paint of the years: "The paint has aged now and I wanted to see what was there for me once, what is there for me now" (137). But she says in the preface that "I see now, in rereading, that I kept much from myself, not always, but sometimes." Hellman wrote that often parts of the memoirs seem to her "to have been written by a woman I don't know very well" (9). Hellman's blind spots have now been documented laboriously by William Wright, Martha Gellhorn, Samuel McCracken, Diane Johnson and many others. To Wright, Hellman's fictionalization destroys the work--"Once distrust takes hold of a reader," he argues, "he finds himself in an unmarked wonderland" (430). But it is from this so-called "unmarked wonderland," the wonder of Hellman's unconscious, that so much can be learned, not only about Hellman's writing, but about the nature of the creative process itself.
Works Cited


Chapter Four

The Portrait of "The Other"

This Self of which we take possession... is a character we spend our life designing... our actions write our autobiography, which is, of course, a fiction.

Regis Michaud
The American Novel Today

On page 232 of the 300 page memoir, An Unfinished Woman, Hellman stops the chronological march of the story of her life to write of her friend Dorothy Parker. She calls the chapter "Dorothy Parker," thus setting the pattern that begins the sequence of portraits that will conclude the first memoir and begin, as well as dominate, the second. It is in these portraits that Hellman’s writing takes on a new quality of clarity: the focus becomes narrower, revolving around single individuals, and therefore sharper. Hellman now writes not only out of her conflicts about relationship, as she did earlier, but she also writes more directly of those conflicts. This was not necessarily her intent but was ultimately the result of the choice of the portrait which brings with it an inherent structure. Defined by this structure, Hellman’s particular conflicts of separation-individuation emerge and appear more easily identifiable than was the case in the preceding material. It is even symptomatic of Hellman's difficulty with separation that one book, An Unfinished Woman--with portraits of Parker, Helen, and Hammett--literally merges with another, Pentimento, which begins with the portrait of Beth, Hellman's German cousin, and then includes ones of Willy, her uncle; Julia, her childhood friend; and Arthur Cowan, a lover. In the decision to reveal herself through the portraits of "others," she enters into a new realm of thinking about identity,
acknowledging in the choice of the structure, the subjects, and images that human identity is made up of the interplay between self and other—and for Hellman this interplay was often extremely conflicted. It was a coming to knowledge that was difficult for Hellman to accept; she thought in absolutes and this applied to her ideas of "self." The contradictory ideas—that there is one, inviolable, true self or there is a self ever-changing from contact with the world of others—were ideas that were always under the surface of Hellman's writing and which affected the direction and tenor of the various portraits. Initially, there is a progression within the group of portraits in which Hellman began to perfect her relationship with the "other" by ironing out, or rather, writing away the messy conflicts that she alludes to frequently in the first three portraits. For example, in the Parker portrait she tried to write "difference" away by the use of descriptives that apply more to her in order to present an idea of Parker. Parker is shaped into the image of Hellman by Hellman's use of language. But after writing the portraits of Parker, Helen and Hammet she took even more control of her material by substituting fiction, maybe better called wishful-thinking, when the facts of the relationships did not suit her.

In the portraits of Parker, Helen and Hammet, Hellman writes openly of her feelings about the "difference" between herself and these "others," and it is apparent that she was simultaneously attracted by, but primarily disturbed by "difference." Hellman concludes the Hammet portrait, which is also the end of An Unfinished Woman, on an uneasy note. She writes: "I do regret that I have spent too much of my life trying to find what I called 'truth,' trying to find what I called 'sense.'" I think that during, or out of, the writing of these first portraits, she realized, with sadness, that relationships defeat logic, are complicated by subjectivity, and therefore elude "truth." Hammet, Helen and Parker seldom conformed to Hellman's line of thinking in life and now they were being
recalcitrant individualists in the telling. Hellman was often criticized for the one-dimensional characterizations in her plays; and in the memoirs she says that as a child she wanted "all grown people to be sharply one thing or another." Also her fondness for plot caused her to be called to task by drama critics for too neatly tying up of loose ends; she was often chastised for writing what the critics labeled "melodrama." Both of these Hellmanesque tendencies appear in the memoirs in the way Hellman tackled the problem of "real" people whose lives refused to conform to plot, whose complex natures refused distillation. She returned to her reliable skills, honed in the playwriting days, of dramatic fiction-writing. In Pentimento she regained control of her "characters" by making her connections with Bethe, Willy, Julia, and Arthur Cowan dramatic, portentous, and symbolic in ways that seldom occur in life. She gave plots to their lives which may not have been realistic--especially in the case of Julia--but which were nonetheless dramatically captivating for the reader and at the same time psychologically satisfying for Hellman.

In a 1975 interview, given before the heat of the controversy about the fictionalization, Hellman said, "I look back on the body of my work and see so many, many things I'd redo" (Bryer 181). As I have noted before, one tenet of psychoanalytic theory stresses that people are trapped psychologically by the past to a greater or lesser degree. There is a need to repeat old patterns of behavior, usually learned in the family of origin, in hopes of satisfying old emotional frustrations. In a book that deals in depth with this process, Necessary Losses, Judith Viorst writes that we repeat the past by reproducing earlier conditions. One tactic we use is to superimpose parental images onto present relationships. This is what Hellman did with Hammett and Julia most noticeably, with Parker and Helen more subtly. (Willy and Bethe were childhood influences and fit another pattern which I discussed at length in the first chapter; for these
reasons I have left them out of my discussion of the portraits.) Understanding the psychology of repetition that is at work in Hellman's writing makes the portraits of Hammett and Julia appear in a new light. From this perspective the numerous criticisms seem warranted but in some sense no longer applicable. The portraits of Hammett and Julia have drawn the most critical fire over the last few years on several counts. Hellman has often been accused of romanticizing, even mythologizing, her relationship with Hammett. For many readers, especially budding feminists of the 70's, the Hammett/Hellman union represented the perfect, modern relationship. But Nora Ephron, a journalist who chronicled her failed marriage to Watergate star reporter Carl Bernstein in her book *Heartburn*, speaks for many when she complains that she was duped by Hellman's "romantic fantasy about her involvement with Dashiell Hammett that is every bit as unrealistic as the Doris Day movies."

And with "Julia," Hellman has been charged with appropriating as a best friend Muriel Gardiner Buttinger, a woman Hellman probably never knew except by word-of-mouth by way of an attorney they both shared. Hellman's story of Julia's affiliation with the Austrian resistance to the Nazis before World War II parallels almost exactly Gardiner's own activities at that time which she wrote about in her 1983 memoirs, *Code Name, Mary*. Hellman's biographer, William Wright, and many others, including the director of the Austrian Archives of the Resistance, say that it is not possible that two such distinctive women--both active antifascists and medical students at the University of Vienna--existed at the same time (164-167; 403-11). In his book *Hellman in Hollywood*, Bernard Dick has an insight about "Julia," the movie, that hits on something at the heart of Hellman's story of Julia. He praises the film as groundbreaking because of its portrayal of "a genuine friendship between women." He writes that it is rare in a movie for a woman to have a woman friend who is a "second
self" (163). For Hellman the Julia of the memoirs was indeed a "second-self" in that she was an imaginary friend, a transitional object, a perfected mother-figure who "allowed" Hellman to be a perfect daughter. Hellman, as I have reiterated, needed mothers. She longed for the symbiotic state represented in her mind by her wetnurse Sophronia, from whom her separation was traumatic when the Hellmans moved to New York. Also, Hellman never successfully separated, in the psychological sense, from her natural mother, either, because her mother was not enough of a presence to separate from. At the same time her attachment to her father was intense and charged but she exercised some powers in differentiating through her many quarrels with him. Yet, judging from her difficulties in her alliance with Hammett, much was left unresolved between the father and daughter. According to Freud via Viorst, when we repeat painful experiences we are in effect refusing to lay to rest our childhood ghosts. But it seems that Hellman had an extremely strong drive to "right" these past relationships, and it is this impulse that accounts for her rewriting the past configurations. The subjects of the portraits play multiple roles drawn from Hellman's past familial relationships. There are stand-ins for mother, father, wetnurse, imaginary friend and combinations thereof. Critics are outraged that she allegedly rewrote her personal history. Wright surmises that she fabricated the memoirs to stave off psychosis (414). Wright's conclusion has some truth to it which fits with my premise that Hellman did have an urgent need to rewrite the past, but the past I refer to and the past she rewrote was her psychological past.

For instance, Julia may not have had an historical truth, but in the creating and in the creation, she the woman and she the text gave Hellman an important emotional truth. This truth Hellman gained solace from--in the writing of and in the final object--in a way that functioned for her both as a transitional phenomenon and a transitional object. It was through the writing of "Julia" that Hellman returned to the pre-Oedipal period and
relived this time. In "Julia" she writes herself into an individuated state by violently separating herself from the mother-figure, Julia, when she literally and symbolically kills her at the end of the portrait. And in the Hammett portrait she reworks or re-plays the Oedipal conflict brought from her past which had plagued her present with Hammett. In the memoirs she writes herself apart from Hammett through her choice of writing style, so different from his, and by her choice of particular words. After she wrote the portraits of Hammett and Julia she proceeded to the portrait of Cowan, a man who seems to have had many of her "bad" qualities--impulsive anger, poor memory, even a broken nose--but whom she loves and remains a friend to in spite of his "nature." In some ways, Hellman writes a loving acceptance of her "self" in the Cowan portrait; she sees herself more clearly by "knowing" another. By the conclusion of Pentimento Hellman has written herself to a point of grudging acceptance of others and her need for them. It was a rather bitter "truth" for her and not the truth she had spent her conscious lifetime seeking. And the melancholy tone of the last chapter, "Pentimento," bears this out.

The first portrait, which is a word-sketch of Parker, is one of Hellman's shortest, most straightforward recollections; she gives a fairly well-rounded personality description with little indication that there are very powerful ulterior (conscious or unconscious) motives being written out. But it is in this early portrait that the problems Hellman had with "difference" are easily apparent. She opens the portrait with the memory of her first meeting with Parker, who she describes as "a small, worn, prettyish woman" whom Hammett never liked. Hellman believes that Hammett did not like the two-faced behavior, the biting wit and cutting remarks for which Parker was and is best known. Early in the portrait Hellman querulously writes that it was odd for her and Parker to have struck such an enduring, satisfying alliance: "It was strange that we did like each other, that never through the years did two such difficult women ever have a quarrel, or
even a mild, unpleasant word" (233). Pondering this paradox Hellman writes that "much, certainly, was against our friendship." What Hellman perceived as "against their friendship" were the differences between them which she carefully documents: "we were not the same generation, were not the same kind of writer, we had led and were to continue to lead very different lives, often we didn't like the same people or even the same books, but more important, we never liked the same men" (233).

Hellman is like a child in her wonder that their friendship could survive these differences, and, at first glance, it does seem a wonder. But, on the other hand, they had much in common, and also, as I have pointed out previously, Hellman was a woman in search of complementary relationships and Parker filled a need. In some ways Parker was a role-model and mother-figure for Hellman; she was an accomplished writer when Hellman met her, older and tougher than Hellman--who would become both--and someone whom Hellman could aspire to be. Hellman injects the idea of "mother" into the portrait in a direct description of their relationship, and again when she includes the last letter, written in Moscow, that she ever wrote Parker: it was a long funny story about a Russian mother and daughter relationship. Hellman was more sensitive and attuned to the differences between them because of her perception of Parker in the context of a mother-and-daughter configuration. Hellman's ideas about the perfect family relationship made differences inexplicable. For example, in the Cowan portrait she explains that when she discovered that she and other intellectuals held different views during the McCarthy period she felt "deprived of a child's belief in tribal safety" (Pentimento, 525). The tribe, according to Hellman, should be of one mind. Transpose "familial" for "tribal" and I think one gets a fairly accurate perception of how Hellman felt about difference. And there is evidence in the Parker portrait that Hellman attempted to dissolve just such differences between herself and Parker by the writing.
In Parker's profile there are many phrases and descriptions that could actually be used interchangeably for either Parker or Hellman. Hellman writes that Parker had a great affection for her husband, Alan Campbell, "and certainly great dependence on him" (233). Of course this was the distinguishing characteristic of the Hammett/Hellman union. Twice Hellman mentions the contradictions in Parker's nature: "It was Gerald," Hellman writes, "who told the story that always seemed to sum up the contradictions in the Parker nature" (237). Again: "But she was, more than usual, a tangled fishnet of contradictions . . . " (238). Hellman also had a contradictory "nature" that is well-documented by herself and others—even the word "nature" itself seems to belong to Hellman, who had an idea of a "nature" as a sort of mold of self. In an interview she speaks of herself and her "nature" in a characteristically objectified way: "It is an unhappy nature, I guess, to think that everything good is going wrong all the time." The interviewer added that "it has often been said that many of Lillian Hellman's characters share her own nature . . . " (Bryer, 222). To some extent Parker becomes a character who Hellman writes into "sharing" a nature with her.

Hellman also writes that Parker had a complicated reaction to wealth and the wealthy: "She liked the rich because she liked the way they looked, their clothes, the things in their houses, and she hated them with an open and biting contempt " (238). There is an echo of familiarity here that sends one back to an early point in the memoirs when Hellman describes her response to her mother's family's affluence: "But that New York apartment where we visited several times a week, the summer cottage where we went for a visit each year as the poor daughter and granddaughter, made me into an angry child and forever caused in me a wild extravagance mixed with respect for money and those who have it. The respectful periods were full of self-hatred . . . " (15). Hellman writes that Parker "had been loved by several remarkable men," in a phrase that
corresponds exactly to an early self-description of Hellman's: "And thus," Hellman writes, "like so many lady extremists, I began a history of remarkable men . . . " (64). (This, I might add, is another example of Hellman's separation-individuation conflict; her tendency to deny what is obviously a uniquely individual trait by including herself in a group, here that of "lady extremists.") Hellman writes that as Parker grew older she drank too much and that her "old age made rock of much that had been fluid, and eccentricities once charming became too strange for safety or comfort" (242). It is no coincidence, I believe, that this is a foreshadowing of how Hellman would be in her own old age--a fact chronicled in Wright's biography. Although Hellman begins the portrait with the focus on difference she writes herself into a more comfortable position, through her choice of descriptions, in the form of symbiotic identification.

More to the point, Hellman writes that she and Parker "were affectionate about each other's jokes, even when they weren't very good . . . ". And, she says, they would repeat them "endlessly . . . to other people with the pride of mothers" (244). There is a mutuality indicated here that I think was important for Hellman which not only played a large part in her relationships in life but which also influenced her writing. Hellman needs the experience of playing mother and being mothered--she seems to have had this reciprocity with Parker and she tended to recreate it in the writing process. The dynamic of such a process is explored and explained by Judith Kegan Gardiner in her article about female identity and how it shows itself in women's writing. She writes that an author may define herself through the text while creating her female hero. Gardiner sees the relationship between the author and her creation as an active relationship in which there can be an evolution of self: "This can be a positive, therapeutic relationship, like learning to be a mother, that is, learning to experience oneself as one's own cared-for-child and as one's own caring mother while simultaneously learning to
experience one's creation as other, as separate from the self." (Writing and Sexual Difference, 187). In the Parker portrait we see this process taking place on a relatively small scale but later in "Julia" it is more dominant. Looking at the Parker-Hellman friendship from the perspective that Hellman experienced it in terms of a mother-daughter configuration, it makes more understandable that when Parker lost her strength, both mental and financial, Hellman's feelings for her changed. "But mainly, plainly," she writes, "I did not want the burdens that Dottie, maybe by never asking for anything, always put upon her friends." The problem was not, I think, that Parker never asked for anything but more that Hellman felt her need and did not like it. Hellman writes that "I was tired of trouble and wanted to be around people who walked faster than I and might pull me along with them" (242). Thus Hellman presents an image of a child and mother walking, and Hellman, it seems, preferred to be the one pulled along, not the one needed. Hellman might have denied such a role preference, but her secret wish slips out here in the form of the written image.

In the structure and language of the next portrait, "Helen," we see again Hellman's tendency in writing, as it was in life, to force certain "others" into specific roles. Helen was her housekeeper for many years and because of this role and because of her blackness she kept alive Hellman's connection with the other black woman in her life, her childhood wetnurse, Sophronia. Hellman replicates in the telling the way she apparently manipulated Helen Jackson in the relationship. For instance, the portrait is entitled "Helen" although much of the chapter is devoted to Hellman's recollections of Sophronia; memories of Helen seem inevitably to lead to memories of Sophronia, with the latter being the ideal which the former does not measure up to. Hellman's direct, "conscious" interpretation of her and Helen's conflictual relationship reads like this: "I don't know what year Helen came to work for me. We never agreed about the
time. . . . The first months had been veiled and edgy: her severe face, her oppressive silences made me think she was angry, and my nature, alternating from vagueness to rigid demands, made her unhappy . . . " (252). But it is in an earlier line that Hellman goes to the real heart of the problems that beset the two. She writes: "One has been dead three years this month and one has been dead for over thirty, but they were one person to you, these two black women you loved more than you ever loved any other women, Sophronia from childhood, Helen so many years later . . . " (250). Despite all the evidence to the contrary, despite all the obvious differences between Sophronia and Helen, in Hellman's mind they were one person. The conflicts between Helen and Hellman revolved around Helen's determination to be herself, not Sophronia or any "idea" that Hellman had about black people, and Hellman's emotional hardheadedness in her continued need to have Helen be Sophronia or Sophronia's substitute. In the midst of detailing one of the many arguments she had over the years with Helen, Hellman admits: "I was in a sudden bad humor, maybe because she wasn't Sophronia" (262). For Helen this was not an act of rebellion but what came naturally for this woman who was, as depicted by Hellman, a powerful presence with strong opinions and the voice to express them.

In Helen, Hellman had truly met the "other" and the stories of their clashes reverberate throughout the portrait. Periodically the tension is broken, for Hellman and for us, when Hellman twists off into the relief of the fond memories of her perfect mother, Sophronia. Embroiled in the retelling of yet another confrontation Hellman breaks in with the exclamation: "Oh Sophronia, it's you I always want back" (255). The writing, like Hellman when faced with such evidence of difference, is confused and convoluted. Images spark different, seemingly unrelated images, just as Helen always evoked the presence of the longed-for Sophronia. It clearly disturbed Hellman that
Helen would not bend to her will by fulfilling her wish for the symbiotic union she imagines she had with Sophronia. "With Sophronia nothing had ever been bad." she writes. When writing of her turbulent relationship with Helen, Hellman continually hits on the "truth" of their conflict, but not directly; in fact, the portrait is written in the form of a meandering line of questioning. Why, Hellman wondered, did Helen make her so angry? "What excuse . . . for irritation with a woman almost twenty years older than I, swollen in legs and feet, marrow-weary with the struggle to live . . . " (251). She formulates various answers, even at one point writing: ". . . the answer there is easy" in regard to one facet of the question; but one must doubt the "easy" answers since nothing seems to ever have been easy between them. The "real" answers come out in the asides that Hellman quickly tosses off and then moves away from.

It is in the very opening paragraph of the portrait that the fundamental source of the conflict between the women is subtly presented to us--subtly because of Hellman's "slant" toward the truth of her relationship with others. The slanted approach might be indirect but somehow it directly communicates an emotion. Hellman opens with:

In many places I have spent many days on small boats. Beginning with the gutters of New Orleans, I have been excited about what lives in water and lies along its edges. In the last twenty years, the waters have been the bays, ponds and ocean of Martha's Vineyard, and autumn, when most people have left the island, is the best time for beaching the boat on a long day's picnic by myself--other people on a boat often change the day into something strained, a trip with a purpose--when I fish, read, wade in and out, and save the afternoon for digging and mucking about on the edge of the shore. (249)

It is within the parenthetical phrase--"other people often change the day into something strained, a trip with a purpose"--that Hellman reveals that her involvement with others can often turn into a struggle for control, here expressed literally as a struggle for control of the day. Hellman's day on the boat has an actual set purpose, that of daydreaming,
and the day would only become "something strained" if she finds herself at cross-purposes about the day's agenda with "other people." The thought that "others" tend to spoil a day pops out parenthetically in much the same way that she describes the way she discovers her beloved sea-finds, or the way her solutions come to her in dreams. This parenthetical phrase is like these other "finds" in that it illuminates a problem, giving us insight into the nature of the struggle that ensued between Hellman and Helen for control of the household. "Other people on a boat" seems to broach the subject of the portrait--Helen--and place the relationship within an apt metaphor.

There is another admission in this opening paragraph, again indirect, in Hellman's statement that "my knowledge of the sea has grown very little with time, and what interested me as a child still does . . ." (250). Hellman has not developed very much from the narcissistic child she described at the beginning of the memoirs who enjoyed the pleasures of solitary daydreaming around the gutters of New Orleans. Then all she had to contend with was her reflection. But her fantasy of happiness still seems to be of "a long day's picnic by myself" near the water. When life does not match Hellman's fantasies, whether of the wetnurse with whom "nothing was ever bad" or the blissful days by the water away from parents and schoolteachers, then she often becomes angry and frustrated. But her anger also made her sad, because, as she often said in the memoirs and interviews, she did not understand from where the anger sprang. Sophronia had tried to warn her about the destructiveness of the anger. Sophronia thought, Hellman writes, that "I might blow up my life with impulsiveness or anger . . ." (240). One hears in the portrait of Helen the angry tone coupled with the sadness. From the portrait one understands that the grief, along with the anger, stemmed from her early separation from Sophronia.
"What strange process made a little girl strain so hard to hear the few words that ever came, made the image of you, true or false, last a lifetime?" she asks herself in the portrait. "I think," she writes, "my father knew about that very early, because five or six years after I was separated from Sophronia by our move to New York . . . he shouted at me one night, 'To hell with Sophronia. I don't want to hear about her anymore!'" (An Unfinished Woman, 256) Hellman was traumatized by the separation, but her father did not realize the extent and was impatient with her histrionics. The premature "separation" left her with an intense longing that surfaces often in this portrait. "... there may be a need in many of us for the large, strong woman who takes us back to what most of us always wanted and few of us ever had," Hellman writes in a conjecture about why her friends eventually grew to like Helen in spite of her "stern face" and "crisp words" (254). Thus Hellman puts into words her own infantile desire. When she explains the roots of her liberalism, Hellman writes that it was "bred, literally, from Sophronia's milk" (265). Hellman recollects the time that she tried to make Sophronia sit in the front of a New Orleans streetcar, which caused them to be practically thrown off by the conductor. Hellman remembers that then she cried to Sophronia that she wanted to "go away with you for always, right now . . . I want to live with you the rest of my life . . ." (259). Sophronia, understandably angry about the scene, tells Hellman that she must "straighten things out in your own head. Then maybe you goin' to be some good and pleasure me." Later, when they reconcile, Sophronia kisses the young Hellman who writes that "certainly I have had happier minutes since, but not up to then" (261). "Why had these two women come together as one for me?" Hellman asks herself about Sophronia and Helen. The answer seems to because she so deeply wanted it to be. It is this same willfulness, the desire to shape a more palatable reality, which influenced her ultimate fantasy of Julia.
There is an important example of revisionism at work in Hellman's assertion: "but with Sophronia nothing had ever been bad . . ." (251), which is quickly followed by the description of the streetcar quarrel with her. Within this same paragraph there are several other examples of the way that Hellman's prose parallels her confusion, particularly about her sense of herself in relation to others:

How often Helen had made me angry, but with Sophronia nothing had ever been bad . . . But the answer there is easy: Sophronia was the anchor for a little girl, the beloved of a young woman, but by the time I had met the other, years had brought acid to a nature that hadn't begun that way--or is that a lie?--and in any case, what excuse did that give for irritation with a woman almost twenty years older than I, swollen in the legs and feet, marrow-weary with the struggle to live, bewildered, resentful, sometimes irrational in a changing world . . . . (250).

Looking closely at the line "by the time I had met the other years had brought acid to a nature that hadn't begun that way . . .," one can notice that the "nature" referred to could be that of Helen or Hellman. My point is that the structural confusion between the referents reflects Hellman's own confusion about her identity, especially when it meets, in her words, "the other." Hellman was intensely connected to Helen because of her long association with her, but also because of the association with Sophronia; Hellman loses perspective when intimately connected with an "other," as demonstrated in the sentence. But Hellman does have a rather gnawing awareness of her manipulation of the truth, an awareness that appears in the vacillation of the line "or is that a lie?" Within the vacillation is a similar confusion to the one I noted earlier. It is difficult to know what she is referring to here--is which a lie? That 1) nothing had ever been bad with Sophronia, or 2) that the answer is easy, or 3) that Helen had not begun this life with such an acidic nature but came to it after a rough life, or 4) that all of this reasoning about the source of her anger with Helen is just a lie. Possibly for a moment Hellman doubted all truth as she will come to do by the time she writes her last memoir, *Maybe, A Story.*
But the insertion of the very word "lie" is important because it shows Hellman had a certain level of awareness of the possibility and potential for lies to intrude into the writing of one's self.

In the realization of the complexity of the nature of Helen--the "other"--comes to Hellman slowly and is begrudgingly acknowledged. Writing of a visit from Sophronia's grandson, Orin, Hellman portrays herself as a rather incompetent naif in comparison to Helen's sudden strength in the face of a crisis. Orin is, Helen explains, "a no good punkie-junkie." Hellman is more startled by these unfamiliar words coming out of Helen's mouth than by the content. "The words were so modern, so unlike her," Hellman writes. Faced suddenly with a difference between them, Hellman writes that she "stared, amused and puzzled that there was a side of her I didn't know" (268). Later, after Helen's death, Hellman is shocked further when a mutual friend of hers and Helen's, George, reveals much about Helen's life that Hellman did not know. She learns that for years Helen had kept in contact with Sophronia's grandson, giving him money, bailing him out of jail. She learns that Helen had nursed George after an operation--Hellman did not know either that Helen had nursed him or that he had had an operation. These revelations obviously startle Hellman, who begins to question George about Helen's last days. She discovers that Helen knew she was about to die and gave George orders to pack her clothes and mail them to Georgia. She finds out that she left money for Orin. "Orin? Orin?" Hellman asks in disbelief. These "unknowns" leave Hellman surprised and shaken, and she communicates her fears to the reader when she writes of her last conversation with George before he leaves: He said to her, "'Next time I'm here, I'll come to see you.' 'But he has never come to see me again'" (274). to Hellman, death and differences are similar in that they lead to loss and separation; if she did not really know Helen then all foundations became unstable. "But he never has
come to see me again" is Hellman's attempt at courageously facing the facts of life, the facts of separation, but clearly such facts take on the quality of tragedy in Hellman's psychic schema. But as the portrait progresses and comes to an end, Hellman writes more and more conciliatory reassessments of the relationship--"It's hard to know what strong people would want . . . . You think they're trying to tell you something, . . . but you don't know--"--she writes of Helen. She was beginning to reveal some acceptance of the need for reciprocity and an understanding that difference between individuals is inevitable.

The "significant others" in Hellman's life can be counted as, of course, Sophronia, her father and Hammett. In the final portrait of An Unfinished Woman, entitled "Dashiell Hammett," the word "other" is used seventeen times. In one example, when writing of their first meeting, Hellman says: "We talked of T. S. Eliot although I no longer remember what we said, and then went and sat in his car and talked at each other and over each other until daylight" (279). There were echoes of the primary paternal relationship in the Hammett/Hellman unit with Hammett being the exalted other, just as once her father was. But what no critic has recognized is that in the writing of the memoirs--and in this portrait--Hellman writes herself away from Hammett by the choice of the language she uses to tell her story. In The Female Imagination, Patricia Meyer Spacks chastises Hellman for "her yearning for masculine accomplishment," her desire to create a character in the memoirs "to meet masculine standards" (299). But in truth, Hellman's prose actually fits feminine standards for autobiography. In her article "On Female Identity," Gardiner states that "autobiographies by women tend to be less linear, unified, and chronological than men's autobiographies." She continues to the point, saying that women's autobiographies are often novelistic. Because of the "continual crossing of self and other, women's writing may blur the public and private and defy
completion" (185). According to these definitions, Hellman's feminine self, or one could say her true self, appears in the structure of the memoirs, in the title *An Unfinished Woman* and in the prose itself. I will show how in the last paragraph of the Hammett section, which is also, importantly, the last paragraph of *An Unfinished Woman*, Hellman goes her own way, a way that could be described as an acknowledgement of her "difference" from Hammett and an assertion of her real "self."

There is an evolution in the writing in the Hammett portrait that reveals the undercurrent of a developmental struggle for autonomy from the father-figure. The last two paragraphs of *An Unfinished Woman* were added to the original text in 1973. The original was written in 1966 as the introduction to Hammett's collection of short stories. Then in 1979, when *Three* was to be published, Hellman included another five pages to her ruminations; thus we see a written example of the continual re-defining that was their relationship. In her life Hellman was defined by Hammett but over the several years that she wrote the memoirs she began to define her self through the process of defining the relationship. In the last addendum she writes: "I did not wish, I do not, every wish to write about Hammett again, but these many years later, perhaps I should say some things about myself that perhaps I knew and suppressed or maybe never knew at all" (*Three*, 301). Contrast the structure and complexity of this sentence to a few of the first lines of Hammett's stories and novels: "I found Paddy the Mex in Jean Larroy's dive" (Hammett, 353). Or, "We expected them home yesterday,' Alfred Banrock ended his story" (Hammett, 74). Or, from *The Glass Key* : "Green dice rolled across the green table, struck the rim together, and bounced back." There is no place in Hammett's world for the "perhaps(es)" or "I knews" or "maybe never knews." Hammett's continual editing was legendary. He once said: "I bet if I worked hard enough on those few pages, I could whittle them down to a phrase" (Johnson, 155). Johnson writes that
Hammett did not talk about things that truly mattered to him. "... his innermost thoughts were sealed within him, trapped by a habit of silence..." (259).

Hellman mistook his silence for strength, his rigid principles for self-assuredness. Hellman writes that when she met Hammett she was "going under." She had, she says, "sought in good books and trash books and talk something to believe in and had found nothing."... "This is tough for a nature given, without knowing it, to absolutes." In Hammett she found a man "who had formed a set of principles... by which he stood in eccentric isolation..." "I had come across what I needed," she writes. "I had found somebody who stood by himself, who was himself" (An Unfinished Woman, 304).

What Hellman admired about Hammett was what she struggled to acquire for herself--a sure footing in the world and a model for "making up" what one lacks. The irony was that to separate from Hammett was synonymous with losing the qualities he "stood for."

In the first part of the portrait she writes that when his drinking was very bad--between 1945 and 1948--she knew that "I had to go my own way." But, in the next line, she steps back from the strong stance when she says: "I do not mean that we were separated, I mean only that we saw less of each other, were less close to each other."

This was her characteristic approach to the human dance between separating and merging with loved ones.

And "I mean" is a characteristic subject/verb construction in Hellman's memoirs. Within the statement--I mean--we sense a desire for the simplicity of a singular "meaning" or "truth"; but in the repetition--"I do not mean," "I mean only," Hellman refutes the possibility of one truth. In the last paragraph of An Unfinished Woman she captures this conflict in the rhythm of her prose:

But I am not yet old enough to like the past better than the present, although there are nights when I have a passing sadness for the unnecessary pains, the self-made foolishness that was, is, and will be. I do regret that I have
spent too much of my life trying to find what I called "truth," trying to find what I called "sense." I never knew what I meant by truth, never made the sense I hoped for. All I mean is that I left too much of me unfinished because I wasted too much time. However. (300)

In the construction of the sentences and the word choices lies an opposition between stasis and flux, a self in truth as opposed to a self in search of truth. In this paragraph we see "I am not," "I have," "I do," "I have spent," "I called," "I never knew," "I never made the sense," "I left " and "I wasted." These are definitive, strong statements of condition of self. Compare these to the other verbs and adverbs in the paragraph and one notices an undercutting of the declaratives: "although there are," "was, is and will be," "trying to find," "however," In the comparison one sees the contrast between two ways of approaching the world and the conflict is between Hellman's longing for "finish" and her desire to remain "unfinished." Both words have multiple connotations. "Finish" can mean a superficial layer over an original work or, following Hellman's metaphor in Pentimento, it can mean the last layer applied to a canvas replete with revisions. It can also mean "to end," which in the context of the painting metaphor, means to decide to go with the final perspective, to end the seeing and seeing again.

In her language as well as in her actual lament, Hellman opts to remain "unfinished." To be unfinished is to be open-ended, in search, in the process of being "self-made" with all the "foolishness" that would entail. It is between these poles that Hellman vacillates--but it is in the vacillation that her nature emerges. She writes out her conflict as well as of her conflict when she concludes An Unfinished Woman, (or rather refuses to conclude) in the final word "however." Much hinges on the word "however" which quivers at the end of the book, leaving us with no "sense of an ending." Instead, with this word, Hellman locates herself in the world of alternatives, vagaries, and the continuation of being "unfinished." This, I conclude, marks a break from Hammett and much he represents--it is another form of "going her own way."
I noted that in *The Female Imagination* Spacks writes that Hellman's central effort in her life and in her memoirs was to create "a character to meet masculine standards." In essence, Spacks is saying that Hellman rejects her femininity, rebelling against all it represents, for a masculine self that is capable of standing up, or standing with, the Dashiell Hammetts and Ernest Hemingways of the world. Yet in this last paragraph there is a male presence that Hellman seems to be defending herself against. "I do regret that I have spent too much of my life trying to find what I called "truth," trying to find what I called "sense" . . . , " she writes. "All I mean is that I left too much of me unfinished because I wasted too much time" (300). Who would have berated Hellman for her poor use of time? Who is she having a mental conversation with? Hammett, of course. Earlier in *An Unfinished Woman* Hellman quotes a letter from Hammett in which he tells her not to try to justify her trip to Moscow as work since it is obvious (to him) that it is a journey for the sake of the pleasure of travel. "So have a good wasted time but stop telling yourself you want to see the theater" (84). His judgement of such frivolity is apparent. And Hellman's guilt at the end of *An Unfinished Woman* about "wasted time" could very possibly stem from her internalization of Hammett's voice--something she told an interviewer she often did. "Do you sometimes measure what you do against what he would have thought about it?" the interviewer asked. "Sometimes." Hellman says. "Sometimes I can't afford to. I know so well he would disapprove. Including possibly talking about him now" (Bryer, 244). In Hammett's eyes, writing one's memoirs might be analogous to taking a trip for pleasure. Hammett, it seems, believed that there was a proper use of time. And in this last paragraph we see juxtaposed in the words "finished" and "unfinished" two different concepts of time, possibly his and hers. In *The Representation of Women in Fiction*, Nancy Miller makes a distinction between masculine and feminine time, writing that men have "before" and
"after" but no "during" time (124-45). In *Women’s Autobiographies*, Estelle Jelinek notes that in their autobiographies, men write about who they are whereas women tend to write themselves into being (1-38). At this point in the memoirs, the end of *An Unfinished Woman* coinciding with the end of the Hammett portrait, Hellman separates her self from her masculine role model and complementary self. Earlier we read of her separation from her father—when she hurled herself from the tree after seeing him with a mistress, and then later in her adolescence when she ran away from home after a quarrel with him. It is in the language of the Hammett section that we see Hellman re-create and (somewhat) resolve the Oedipal conflict in the choice of feminine process over masculine desire for finish.

If in the Hammett portrait we see Hellman repeat and redo the Oedipal phase, then it is in the "Julia" section of *Pentimento* that we see her act out the drama of the pre-Oedipal period. The pre-Oedipal mother-daughter relationship precedes and underlies the Oedipal phase. It is the time of intense attachment to the mother, often referred to as symbiosis. During this turbulent period the child is preoccupied with the sense of intimacy and merging with the mother, with the comforting sensation of being at one with another. But these feelings are coupled with ambivalent feelings, such as the desire to be independent from the all-engulfing primary love object; the child has aggressive, hostile fantasies toward the mother. During this time a child usually chooses a transitional object—a blanket or soft toy at first, an imaginary friend might come later—to bridge the frightening gulf between the mother and the world (Barkine, Chadorow, Winnicot, Klein). Hellman returns to this childhood state of connection to a mother-figure in *Julia*. In writing *Julia*, Hellman wrote a new version of her original pre-Oedipal experience when she creates a mother in Julia. She then attempts to relate to and separate from the mother-figure more successfully than had been the case with her
natural mother. But Julia also functions as a transitional object. One object-relations theorist writing of the role of transitional objects says: "The transitional object gives the child confidence that through holding, possessing, and acting on it and with it, he is able to recreate himself and his mother" (Barkin 71). This symbolic object can survive ambivalent handling—it can be cuddled and maltreated alternately. The character Julia is loved and hated, touched lovingly and destroyed brutally by Hellman. But the text survives.

Hellman uses her writing of *Julia* as a defensive mechanism to help her master her separation-individuation problems. One can trace several facets of the pre-Oedipal phase in the text when read through this lens. Hellman begins the story with a description of a trip to another country with a group of "others"—Parker and her husband. Hellman drinks a great deal on the trip but one day, on awakening from another drunken night, she has an urge to get in touch with Julia. She writes: "I had a fine time, one of the best of my life. But one day, after a heavy night's drinking, I didn't anymore. I was a child of the Depression, an kind of Puritan socialist..." (403). And so that morning, Hellman, or "the child" in Hellman, "called Julia to say I would come to Vienna the next day..." (404). The residue of the pre-Oedipal state remains and influences one's adult life in a variety of ways. It leaves one with longings for merger which are felt as the desire for loss of self, for a form of transcendence from the "ordinary" self. Writing, painting, or other forms of creative expression are some of the ways these impulses are satisfied. Less "healthy" ways might be to lose one's self in drink, a tendency we have seen in Hellman before and see here (Barkin). Hellman went on this trip, she explains, in 1937 after writing her first play, *The Children's Hour*, and her second, *Days to Come*. From the memoirs, interviews, and the biography, we know that this was a frightening time emotionally for Hellman because *Days to Come* had been a critical and
popular failure and it was to be two years before she wrote another play. Her
collection of this time leads her to "recall" or rather, as we know now, "make up"
Julia.

Hellman wants to get into the safe structure of a mother-daughter configuration—she
writes herself into it—yet, at the same time, the structure, by its nature, will confine her
to the role of the unequal, less powerful one—the child. In the story Hellman dutifully
adopts this role in her relation to Julia during their espionage encounter. And this
actually gives the section an endearing quality: Hellman is center-stage as the frightened,
comically awkward yet heroic child traveling via train across the country borders while
holding a box of candy and a large fur hat. The counterpoint to Lillian is the wise,
content Julia who has recently borne a child and who sits in a restaurant waiting for
Lillian to deliver the money. When Julia receives the money, she swiftly and
competently secrets it out through the restaurant's restroom. She does this more
gracefully than anything Hellman has done so far, and she is on crutches. All the while
she exchanges news and orders caviar and wine. This is a mother to adore and abhor.
Hellman concludes the pre-Oedipal phase of her writing in the portrait by the (necessary)
act of freeing herself from this overwhelming "too good" mother. Hellman has Julia
murdered. The separation is violent—we have had a foreshadowing in the loss of Julia's
leg—but from the viewpoint of a child as from the perspective of the unconscious, such a
separation from such a mother is perceived as a wrenching, violent experience. It is
important that after Julia's death, Hellman remains intact and even ennobled. One can
see in the Julia scenario that Hellman reenacts the worst fears—that one will not survive
separation (she could be caught by the "authorities," the Nazis) and the good
fantasies—that one can act autonomously with courage—that are characteristically
generated by the pre-Oedipal stage of human development.
In many and various ways throughout the portrait Hellman superimposes the maternal image onto Julia. First of all, she names Julia after her mother, Julia Newhouse Hellman. But the Julia who Hellman writes into being in the portrait is drawn in sharp contrast to Hellman’s natural mother, who is described as a wistful, ephemeral character. Julia, who was played by Vanessa Redgrave in the movie, is described as large, strong and beautiful. One recalls from the Helen portrait Hellman’s longing for "the large, strong woman who takes us back to what most of us always wanted and few of us ever had" (255). Earlier in the memoirs Hellman had complained that as a child she was "puzzled and irritated by the passivity of my mother . . . ." Her mother was, Hellman writes, a simple-natured woman. But, she continues, "simple natures can also be complex, and that is difficult for a child who wants all people to be one thing or another" (16). In order to define one’s self one must have someone definable to separate from. In contrast to the real Julia Hellman, Julia of the portrait was characterized by the strength and clarity of her views, particularly her political beliefs. Hellman remembers that as a teenager on holiday in Egypt, Julia took snapshots of the poverty; one picture was of two blind children in Cairo, instead of the "beauties of Europe." Julia Newhouse Hellman had a more vague, indecisive approach to life--"she was a sweet eccentric, the only middle-class woman I had ever known who had not rejected the middle-class--that would have been an act of will--. . . " (An Unfinished Woman, 15). As far as her beliefs, Hellman’s mother thought God could be found anywhere--"several times a week she would stop in a church, any church . . . " (16). One the one hand we have Julia Hellman’s passiveness and on the other we have Julia’s extreme activeness: "Julia had left college, gone to Oxford, moved on to the medical school in Vienna, had become a patient-pupil of Freud's." " . . . she had become . . . a socialist, and lived by it, . . . " (Pentimento, 407). And in another important gesture,
Hellman dispenses with Julia's mother. In the story Julia's mother leaves Julia's care to teetotalling grandparents while she travels and ultimately remarries in England. Writing of a visit Julia made as a teenager to her mother Hellman says: "Once she returned with a framed photograph of a beautiful woman who was her mother . . . . I asked her what she felt about seeing her mother--in all the years I had never heard her mention her mother . . . " (415). Julia's mother is conveniently insignificant, freeing her to mother herself, possibly in preparation for the role of motherhood that Hellman will give to her.

Despite the fact they are the same age Hellman sets up a relational structure between herself and Julia, as I've noted, in which she has the role of the fearful, sleepy, ever-questioning child while Julia functions as the courageous, competent, teaching "other." These roles are parcelled out in the childhood-adolescent-teenage vignettes and remain true for the adult years. Hellman reveals the power structure in the lines that describe their childhood campfire chats: "I would ask questions and she would talk" (407). Hellman uses the camping trip to illuminate the nature of their relationship--during these trips, Hellman writes, the two walked and fished but, "we seldom did it side by side." This was Julia's choice, Hellman explains, and Hellman concurred because "I believed she was thinking stuff I couldn't understand and mustn't interfere with . . . " (417). Hellman "recalls" the dialogue between herself and Julia in which Julia tells Hellman that the world consists of teachers and students and that Hellman is a student. In what seems a classic mother-daughter repartee Hellman asks Julia: "Am I a good one?" and Julia replies, "When you find what you want, you will be very good" (417). Hellman writes that at this intense juncture she reached out, touched Julia's hand and said, "I love you, Julia." Then, Hellman says that Julia "stared at me and took my hand to her face." In a notable repetition later in the portrait Hellman will reach out and touch the face of the dead Julia. (The same maternal cycle is also
repeated between Hellman and the German orphan which she relates in *An Unfinished Woman.* The mother-daughter overlay seems explicit--and the desire for the very early infant-like reaching out for the "other"--is powerful and poignant--more so in the almost certain fact of the fiction of the relationship.

In *The Hidden Order of Art* Anton Ehrenzweig describes the artist's relationship to his or her "artifact" as "a good relationship" in which the work acts as "an independent being." He compares evolving artwork to "a good nursing mother" who willingly accepts her child's aggression. By allowing the child his or her hostile, aggressive feelings the mother facilitates the child's development into a whole person, a person who has both hostile and loving feelings (185). Julia, the fictional character, is a good mother who nurtures, encourages, and instructs Hellman through a sort of developmental rite of passage--a trip across the German border with $50,000 for a group who worked against Hitler. Julia sends a friend, Johann, to Paris to explain he plan to Hellman. He delivers a note from Julia that reads: "This is my friend, Johann. He will tell you. But I tell you, don't push yourself. If you can't you can't. No dishonor . . ." (405). Julia's love is unconditional. It is this good mother that Hellman ultimately "aggressively" destroys.

Hellman, the dutiful daughter, completes the task; she brings the money to a Berlin restaurant where she sees Julia sitting across the room. "I went through a revolving door and was so shocked at the sight of Julia at the table that I stopped at the door. She half rose, called softly, and I went toward her with tears . . ." When Hellman goes through the "revolving door," she enters the primal world of mothers and daughters. She says to Julia: "You look like nobody else. You are more beautiful now." Throughout the reunion Julia is serious and maternal: "... stop the tears. We must finish the work now. Take off the hat the way you would if it was too hot for this place.
Comb you hair, and put the hat on the seat between us" (437). Julia tells Hellman that with the money she brought "we can save five hundred, and maybe, if we can bargain right, a thousand people with it. So believe that you have . . . done something important" (439). Then, Hellman writes that Julia said she had read The Children's Hour. "She was pleased with me," Hellman writes, "and wanted to know what I was going to do next." For Hellman, "the work" of this fictional last encounter is to unite intensely, to merge with, this loving mother. The drama, in effect, operates simultaneously on two levels; on one level we have the climax of the external plot--Hellman risking her life to deliver money to Julia; on a second level we have the culmination of the internal plot of the pre-Oedipal mother-daughter relationship with the "resolution" taking place in the restaurant.

The main "work" accomplished in the meeting is that Hellman is absolved by her stand-in mother for what she sees as her worst flaw--her anger; she also receives a motherly affirmation of her "self" when Julia decides to give Hellman her baby, named Lilly. Lilly, of course, was Hellman's first name, the name she was known by as a child and by close friends as an adult. In the emotionally-charged, short meeting in Berlin, Julia brings up the subject of Hellman's temper, or her anger. "Are you as angry a woman as you were a child?" she asks. Hellman says, "I think so, . . . I try not to be, but here it is." Then Julia tells her that "I've always liked you anger, . . . trusted it . . . . Don't let people talk you out of it. It may be uncomfortable for them, but it is valuable to you . . . ." Hellman's anger and her feelings about mothering are linked. Possibly Hellman believed her short temper made her unfit for motherhood. During her life she had one abortion, which she wrote about in the memoirs. She shocked an interviewer in 1977 when she announced that she had also aborted a child of Hammett's (Bryer, 215). But in 1966 she has Julia approve of her anger in one breath and announce in the next:
"Yes, I'll leave the baby with you." This is not in spite of her anger but rather because of it. Julia "rewards" Hellman for being a strong, angry, individual by placing her confidence in her ability to be a good mother. Julia's absolution, or acceptance, of Hellman's anger takes place in the middle of an exchange about Julia's daughter. "She's fat and handsome," Julia explains. Hellman says that she wants very much to see her. At this point Julia tells her she will bring her when she comes to the United States for a new leg. "... she can live with you, if you like," she says. Julia thinks Germany is on the brink of war, thus no place for a child. Julia continues to consider the child: ". . . Maybe, when I come back for the leg, I'll leave her with you" (439-40). Hellman says that she does not have a permanent home at this time but will get one if Julia brings the baby. This surprising gesture, the gift of a child, and the calmness with which Hellman accepts it, can be understood better if the baby is seen as a symbolic gift. In a sense, with the offering of the child, Julia communicates to Hellman that she is worthy of motherhood. Also, since the child is named Lilly, it seems that Julia is telling Hellman to accept herself, to love herself as a mother would love a child. Hellman uses the fiction to explore a possibility she found extremely frightening in real life—judging by the abortions.

Even in fiction, though, Hellman's ambivalence about mothering, which is tied up with her insecurities about herself, emerges and remains consistent with her "real" life. After she learns of Julia's death, she goes to London to retrieve the body, and she forgets about the child who Julia had told her lived with a family in France. She writes: "I should, of course, have gone to Mulhouse before I came home from London, but I didn't, didn't even think about it in those awful days in London or on the boat" (445). She did write some letters of inquiry, but, she writes, "three months later the war broke out and I never heard from anybody in Western Europe until . . . 1944." Julia was
killed in 1938. On a trip to London, after the publication of Pentimento, Hellman received a phone call from the son of the coroner who had received Julia's body. The father had his son tell Hellman that Julia's baby and the family she boarded with were killed by Germans early in the war. Hellman writes in an addendum in Three: "It is awful to say I was happy about the news of a baby's certain death, but I was. There had, in the end, been nothing I could have done and guilt was gone now, on this phone call" (452). Reading "Julia" as fiction and within the context of the pre-Oedipal conflicts helps in the interpretation of such a startling admission. Obviously Hellman's conflicts about the mother-daughter relationship remain strong even after she has written herself through an identification and then rejection of the mother. But it is not my contention that she resolved the self and other, mother and daughter conflicts, but that her writing comes out of these issues and can be better understood through a recognition of the issues.

In fact, her preoccupation with the idea of separation/individuation is reflected in the many separations throughout the portrait of Julia. In his biography, Wright remarks off-handedly that Hellman's memoirs were hazardous "for even its walk-ons" (412). And chapter endings, he says, are the most dangerous for Hellman's acquaintances as they tend to be killed off as a way to end chapters. Separations were so frightening for Hellman that she was preoccupied with them. It is possible that as Hellman drew near to the end of a chapter there was a feeling of loss which corresponded and reminded her of other losses she had experienced, such as the loss to death of dear friends. The portrait of Julia is full of separations that grow increasingly more brutal and terrifying. At this point in the memoirs there is a different energy which builds toward the final loss. In a sense, in "Julia," Hellman displaces a child's fears of the sensation of the loss of the mother onto Julia, possibly in order to cathartically diffuse the fears. This is the role that
fairytales fulfill for children, and, in many ways, the story of Julia resembles a fairytale. Hellman brings to life her fears of separation and lets them loose on her "characters," possibly in an unconscious attempt to diffuse them. A child's worst fears are realized and lived through. Again, the story functions on several levels: Hellman projects onto Julia what she imagines would be her fate if she lived a separate, autonomous existence cut apart or individuated from "others," particularly the mother. The conclusion of the portrait develops into a nightmare in which the good Julia is destroyed by the bad Nazis. And Hellman's description of Julia's fate is of such a graphic nature that one senses an intense identification by Hellman with the maimed Julia:

I have no diary notes of that trip and now only the memory of standing over a body with a restored face that didn't hide the knife wound that ran down the left side. The funeral man explained that he had tried to cover the face slash but I could see the wounds on the body if I wanted to see a mess that couldn't be covered. (444)

"Julia" is a story of a child's separation from childhood and entry into adulthood. Early in the portrait, Hellman writes that "childhood is less clear to me than to many people: when it ended I turned my face away from it for no reason that I know about."

This paragraph about memories of childhood is defensive:

I think I have always known about my memory: I know when it is to be trusted and when some dream or fantasy entered my life, and the dream, the need of dream, led to distortion of what happened. And so the rampage angers of an only child were distorted nightmares of reality. But I trust absolutely what I remember about Julia. (412)

This reverie holds the key to what the story of Julia is: a distorted nightmare of reality. I believe the only thing to be "trusted" is the intensity of emotion that suffuses the portrait which grows from Hellman's turning her face back for a look at a childhood that was, to
The last portrait in *Pentimento* is of Arthur W. A. Cowan, a Philadelphia businessman who befriended and courted Hellman for two years before Hammett's death and for a few years after. Cowan came to an untimely, mysterious death which fit into and reinforced Hellman's fears of and obsession with loss and separation and which made him a very likely candidate for inclusion in her memoirs. As I have pointed out, Hellman's memoirs are, among other things, a chronicle of life's losses—real, imagined, feared, realized. They are also about what comes before the loss, which is the relationship. The Cowan portrait marks an important transition from the fantastical story of Hellman's relationship with Julia to an account of a relationship that has not been so obviously, compulsively "shaped." In fact, in *Lillian Hellman, The Image, The Woman*, Wright notes a difference between the Cowan portrait and all the other portraits when he writes that "in none of these tales do the other characters emerge with any sharpness, except for Arthur Cowan, who appears to be the only one Hellman set out to portray" (345). I conclude that the writing of "Julia," with all its psychological ramifications, made it possible for Hellman to write a very honest portrait. In doing so she understands her relation to an "other," to Cowan, in a new and different way than was true before and the final result is that she also succeeds in communicating a better and more honest portrayal of herself. It seems to me that after writing the Julia and Hammett portraits, Hellman emerged from the realm of primal fantasies, from the murky world of "pentimento" shadings, with the ability to see herself more clearly because of her journey.

In describing Cowan, Hellman writes that "I came to know his face as well as my own" (515). In this line Hellman again links her knowledge of others with the human face and her recognition and identification with the face (discussed in Chapter Three). Also, this sentence reveals that Hellman realizes that self-knowledge is intertwined with
the relationship between herself and the other. But this time the "other," in the person of Cowan, is a character who differs from Hellman's previous "characters" in the memoirs in that he is loved by Hellman because of her identification with him. "Molly said she thought maybe Arthur was just plain crazy, but I think both of them were saying they would understand if I wrote him off, but they hoped I wouldn't. I didn't," Hellman writes (527). Instead of appropriating a "self"--as in the case of Parker--or gaining self-esteem by reflection and complement--as in the case of Hammett and Julia--Hellman identifies with Cowan, flaws and all, and what is significant is that she not only identifies with him but she loves him. This indicates an acceptance of self, an acceptance of her "self," that has not been present before.

In Cowan, Hellman met a psychological as well as a physical soulmate. In the portrait, Hellman recognizes their kinship by word-choice--"I came to know his face as well as my own"--instead of directly commenting on what seems to be surprising similarities of "nature" between the two. Wright says that Cowan was "erratic, funny . . ." (287). The dark side of him was "brash, unpredictable and prone to public scenes." Wright speaks of him as a man who "was able to vent fury, however unreasonably, when every social convention forbade it" (350). Neither Hellman nor Wright seem aware of how much Hellman and Cowan were alike. In this portrait Hellman does not seem to be writing someone into a position of similarity, as she did with Parker, (Wright's research verifies the parallels which Hellman traces), but instead she is documenting a really difficult relationship between two difficult individuals. Hellman wrote that Cowan had a broken nose, spoke of himself as an orn'tan, liked expensive things, traveled extensively, had temper tantrums, one of which she described as one of the many "storms that came across the ocean of his years . . . ." " . . . more out of control than I had ever seen before." They did not talk politics together, Hellman
says, because "the mishmash he talked was too hard to follow" (524). Of their exchange of personal histories, Hellman writes that she "could follow very little of the mishmash of what he said" (517). One remembers, earlier in the memoirs, her own account of her struggle to reconstruct a particular number of years; she said then that she was in a kind of "pain" at summarizing the past, complaining that her attempt resulted in a "mishmash." There is an echo of this in her complaint that it was difficult for her "to construct any history of Arthur." One reason for this, she writes, was that he traveled so much, but the primary reason was that "he talked of his own past and present in so disjointed fashion . . . " (519). He also had, according to Hellman, "no sense of time: he did not know whether he had met people last week or many years before . . . and once he told me he had been divorced for three years when, in fact, he had been divorced for fourteen" (519). Hellman writes that she wrote him "constantly," revealing much of herself, but she wonders about the veracity of his self-revelations. ". . . and the things he told me as well--true or false? To this day I do not know which" (528). Wright concludes from Hellman's portrayal of Cowan that he represented "the sort of truth-eluding figures that are the preoccupation of her last book, . . . Maybe " (287).

But I disagree. I think that these "truth-eluding figures" that Hellman became preoccupied with were actually aspects of herself, parts of herself that she had not acknowledged in life. In recognizing and writing of Cowan as a person who hedged on the truth, she came to a better understanding of this facet of her own personality; this led her to address the issues of truth, self knowledge, and knowledge of others in Maybe, A Story. Thus the Cowan portrait exemplifies my premise that Hellman's psychological underpinnings were restructured by and through the art of her writing, although not on an entirely conscious level, and that her friendship with and her writing of Cowan
marked a coming to knowledge of self for Hellman that is reflected later in the dominant themes in *Maybe, A Story*.

The conclusion to *Pentimento*, appropriately called "Pentimento," brings together several of the themes I have traced throughout the memoirs. Slowly but surely Hellman has maneuvered herself through the writing to a tenuous acceptance and understanding of the individual's dependence and need for others. Hellman opens *Pentimento* by explaining that a few weeks after Hammett's death she moved to Cambridge to honor a teaching obligation at Harvard. When she accepted the position she expected Hammett to accompany her, and they had arranged for him to stay in a nursing home. Now in Cambridge, not far from the nursing home, she explains that she got in the habit of going out at night two or three times a week "to stand in front of it." She writes that "I would walk to the house Hammett had never seen, stand until I was too cold to stand any longer, and go back to bed" (589). Notice the multiple uses of "to stand." She *stands* in front of empty windows where Hammett's face might have been if he had not died until she cannot *stand* the cold any longer. The passage recalls a parallel image found earlier in the memoirs in which Hellman's mother stands in front of windows and doors. "Windows, doors, and stores haunted her and she would often stand before them for as long as half an hour, or leaving the house, would insist upon returning to it while we waited for her in any weather "(16). In "Pentimento" we find a repetition but also a correction of this behavior. One night Hellman goes to the nursing home after it has snowed all day. She finds "the few blocks hard going and slippery." Hellman does not fall, which has been her usual fate throughout the memoirs, but she does turn back, another characteristic defense, "for a reason I didn't as yet know." In Chapter Two I discussed Hellman's frequent decisions to turn back, to flee from certain situations, often ones in which she would have to face a complicated relationship.
There is a distinctive difference in the nature of the turning back in this conclusion: she turns away from an old relationship and faces a present relationship which is vital, complicated, and difficult. "Long before I reached the corner I saw Helen, looking very black in her useless summer raincoat, standing with a tall boy . . . " (590). Hellman has been followed and she feels, she says, a "combination of gratitude and resentment." Hellman has come to an important point of being able to acknowledge her need for others and her complex emotions about such a need: she is both grateful and resentful of her dependence and their interference. Now Hellman writes of an interesting turnabout: "I heard them behind me as I reached the courtyard . . . then I heard a misstep and a sound. As I turned, Helen had slipped, but the boy had caught the great weight and was holding to her, sensibly waiting for her to straighten herself" (590). Jimsie catches Helen from falling just as Helen and Jimsie have, in another sense, kept Hellman from falling back emotionally into the past, or fantasies of the past, by being there for her. Hellman has somehow struck a balance in her relation between self and other which is reflected in the image of her being capable of standing alone while also accepting—albeit with resentment but also gratitude—the safety net of the two people who stand guard over her through her nightly vigils.

But still, Hellman does not actually express her needs; she projects them on Helen who she says needed Jimsie: "I had come to like the boy and to understand she had needed him at a lonely time in her own life, in a strange city, living with a woman who did odd things at night" (591). But Helen is not the only one who needed someone. Jimsie was a young black student at Harvard from a poor background and on scholarship in physics. Over the year Jimsie and Helen developed a friendship which Hellman observed (always the "sightseer"): "Jimsie would drop in at least three or four times a week to see Helen, carry her packages from the market, borrow his roommate's
Hellman observed (always the "sightseer"): "Jimsie would drop in at least three or four times a week to see Helen, carry her packages from the market, borrow his roommate's car to take her on small trips" (593). After a year of watching Jimsie and Helen's friendship grow, Hellman takes one more trek to the nursing home before she leaves Cambridge--"certain that I would never go again." She writes: "I stood in front of it for a long time, and when I turned to go back, Jimsie was directly behind me." She surmises that Helen has telephoned him. Hellman says she hears herself say to him "Pentimento." Then when he asks, "What's that mean?" she responds, "Don't follow me again, Jimsie, I don't like it." But "pentimento" is her first response and for Hellman this word connotes layer painted over original layer, both existing simultaneously, just as her need for and resentment of her need for others exists at once. It is the layers of relationships that have built up around her like a safety net that make it possible for her to turn away from the empty window (which is like an original layer representing the emptiness her mother gazed at absently) toward Jimsie. Hellman began the memoir with the explanation that for her "pentimento" means that the paint of her life "has aged now and I wanted to see what was there for me once, what is there for me now." What is there at the conclusion of the memoir is the relationship with Jimsie: "We have become good friends, although now, twelve years after I met him, I don't understand him ..." (595). So Hellman closes Pentimento with the recollection of a dinner with a man whom she finds difficult to understand because he is so very "different" from her; yet she is in the relationship and accepts him as a friend. At dinner they reminisce about Helen, and Jimsie says, "I loved Helen." Hellman chastises him, saying, "Too bad you never told her so. Too late now." But Jimsie corrects her. "I told it to her," he said, "the night I looked up your word, pentimento." Although there is self-chastisement embedded in her charge against Jimsie for not speaking his love and some confusion
about the difference between herself and Jimsie—she assumes he has not, as is the case with her, expressed his true feelings to Helen—Hellman has given Jimsie the word that leads him to self-expression. And also, most importantly, she ends the memoir in relationship and on a note of acceptance of difference.
Works Cited


Chapter Five

Taking a Stand Against Scoundrels

Hellman's next memoir, Scoundrel Time, stands out, stands apart and could even stand alone when read in the context of the previous memoirs. And in this sense it mirrors Hellman's characteristic stance when challenged or confronted by others. This is also, basically, the structural plot of Scoundrel Time--Hellman alone and at odds with the world. Her voice is self-righteous, the tone diffident, the structure tight. In this work there is no "writing through" toward an understanding of the self and the times, and there are few questions about memory and truth. Instead the story, conventionally constructed around a beginning, middle and end, marches on toward a destination. Hellman, like a warrior--Wright describes the dress she wears to testify as "stylish armor"--defends her position in the war with "them." "Them" is a pronoun Hellman frequently uses in Scoundrel Time to refer to the men on the Committee as well as to anyone else who disagrees with her. Ironically, the way in which the country became polarized by McCarthy parallels the way Hellman saw the world long before Joseph McCarthy's reign; McCarthy and his committee merely supplied her with further evidence to support the ideas she already held. In Scoundrel Time Hellman describes a world made up of diametrically opposed people and positions; in this Hellmanesque realm there are "them" and "us," scoundrels and heroines, combative "others" and the lone, defended "self". McCarthy, like Hellman, also saw the world in black and white terms, the good guys versus the bad guys, but to him, in a complete reversal of Hellman's politics, the heroes were the anti-communists and the villains were communists. The clash that resulted between the two rigidly opposed mind-sets made for good melodrama; and Scoundrel Time reads much like a Little Fox-ish play in
which Hellman is a character in performance, delivering her best lines in her famous letter, her "soliloquy."

Taken on the most literal level *Scoundrel Time* is an account of a very specific time of crisis in Hellman's life, the time in 1952 between her subpoena to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee and her ultimate appearance. William Wright describes the slim volume as, among other things, "mostly an account of Hellman's experiences during an extremely difficult time in her life" (244). But it was read by many others, Wright included, as an indictment of her contemporaries, the intellectuals of the Left who adopted an anti-communist position. Hellman concludes that it was this faction that opened the door for the Vietnam War and Richard Nixon when they failed to "stand up" to Joseph McCarthy and his committee. In a recent article on Hellman, history, and autobiography, Anita Susan Grossman says that it was *Scoundrel Time*, with its eventual "storm of criticism" that led to the serious questioning of Hellman's veracity as an autobiographer. Grossman writes that Hellman was accused by many of her critics of "reducing a complex era in American political history to the crudest melodrama with herself as heroine" (289). Her "accusers" launched an attack on Hellman that Wright terms "an all but unprecedentend outpouring of political argument and analysis of a book..." (357). Diana Trilling, who was "named" along with her husband as a semi-scoundrel in Hellman's book, worried that Hellman's version of these times would become definitive; in a chapter of her 1977 book, *We Must March My Darlings*, she explains the complexities of the time, saying that she felt compelled to make "at least some small effort of historical reconstruction" on behalf of the many who held and hold different political opinions from Hellman (42). *Scoundrel Time* was attacked variously by a Harvard historian, a New York University philosophy professor, by Hilton Kramer writing for *The New York Times*, by William F. Buckley, Alfred
Kazin and many others. Kazin minced no words in his summation that the book was "historically a fraud . . . " (Wright, 362).

Yet there were many ahistorical approaches to the work. When first published Scoundrel Time received laudatory reviews and remained on the bestseller list for 23 weeks. But Grossman claims that many reviewers did Hellman a disservice when they treated her as "merely a literary icon" (303). One such critic, Linda Wagner, makes no mention in her 1983 Southern Review article of the controversies surrounding Hellman's veracity even though the piece is entitled "Lillian Hellman: Autobiography and Truth." Instead, she summarizes Scoundrel Time--"told in all its innate poignance"--as the "story of Hellman's courageous stand . . . and the circumstances leading to it . . . ." This story, she writes, "makes informative and involving reading" (283). At least, Grossman argues convincingly, the many critics who called Hellman to task paid her the "ultimate compliment of taking her ideas seriously . . . " (303). But Hellman, of course, did not value the "compliments" which she perceived as unwarranted, wrong-headed onslaughts on her self by others, an eerie repetition of what she thought happened to her in 1952. And it is from this psychological perspective--Hellman's compulsion to break the world down into polarities--that I want to look at Scoundrel Time; such a perspective does not deny the historicity of the work but simply adds the important psychological factor to the interpretive quotient.

Hellman opens Scoundrel Time with these lines: "I have tried twice before to write about what has come to be known as the McCarthy period but I didn't much like what I wrote. My reasons for not being able to write about my part in this sad, comic, miserable time of our history were simple to me, although some people thought I had avoided it for mysterious reasons. There was no mystery. I had strange hangups and they are always hard to explain. Now I tell myself that if I face them, maybe I can manage" (603). The "them" in this last sentence refers to her hangups, but as we have
seen before with her pronouns, she leaves us an option in which "them" can also refer to the "them" who persecuted her. From this opening paragraph alone one could have foreseen Hellman's response to the questions and charges that ensued after the publication of *Scoundrel Time*. Her decision to dig in, to maintain "an imperious silence," rather than to open herself up to the discourse generated by the book is how Hellman characteristically handled confrontation with others when perceiving a threat to herself and her opinions (Wright, 369). She responded in extremes--she either controlled herself to a point where she lost her "voice" or she would totally lose control and lash out angrily. "Mine is often an irritable nature," she writes in *Scoundrel Time*. "... I am, as I have said, sometimes out of control" (621). In *Scoundrel Time* she is controlled and angry.

Hellman's anger is present and compressed in her developmentally regressive vision of a world of persecutors, a world full of antagonistic "others"--THEM (Jacobson). Hellman uses the pronoun "them" sixteen times in the work and there are numerous other constructions and/or descriptions that strip people of their individual identity by grouping them into a category of "them." One can see this process at work in certain descriptions like the one of the movie moguls who were friendly witnesses: "They were one man with minor variations and quirks," she writes (636). At one point the whole world seems to her to consist of "them." For example, when she writes of the movie producers who attended a meeting to learn McCarthy's guidelines for moviemaking, she says, "It is plain that the producers at the Waldorf meeting, called by 'them,' did not know how to carry out the plans that 'them' forced upon them. And most of them didn't want to know" (642). The late but loud outcry by many in the intellectual community was also a psychologically predictable response. The unprecedented "avalanche of well-researched indignation from formidable intellects..." was the
response to being reduced to a faceless entity—it is possible the "intellects" felt the need to assert their individuality (Wright, 358).

There is a real sense of fear in Hellman's descriptions of the men on the HUAC committee; she calls them-- "the men who punished me," "all of them," "the McCarthy group--a loose term for all the boys, lobbyists, Congressman, State Department bureaucrats, CIA operators . . .," a "group of political villains," and "scoundrels" (603, 604). At one point she writes that "none of them, even on the bad morning of my hearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee, interested me or disturbed me at a serious level. They didn't and they don't. They are what they are, or were, and are no relation to me by blood or background . . ." (606). Here she sounds like a child full of false bravado in the face of a fearful situation. To comfort herself she thinks in terms of "family." For Hellman, to be within a family, to be of the same "blood and background," is to share the same opinions, to be loyal. In Hellman's world of absolutes, of good and bad, the family is good.

"I have written before that my shock and my anger came against what I thought had been the people of my world. . ." she writes, referring to the intellectual community that she thought were like family—"the people of my world;" but when they were different from her, differences that became apparent when staged in the public arena of the Committee, they became non-family by their "differentiation." She writes: "Simply, then and now I feel betrayed by the nonsense I had believed" (606). Hellman felt betrayed by her belief in the family, by, in other words, the fantasy she had about family. After reading an article she disagreed with by Lionel Trilling, she says that she had to go home where she spends "the rest of the day asking myself how Diana and Lionel Trilling, old, respected friends, could have come out of the same age and time with such different political and social views from my own" (650). It seems it never crossed her mind that she should not spend her day asking herself the question but
should ask the Trillings this question, which, in fact, Diana Trilling addresses in *We Must March My Darlings*. She says, "... Miss Hellman’s expression of honest puzzlement about my husband’s and my politics is difficult for me to ignore since I have myself for so many years lived with a bewilderment, the obverse of hers but similarly burdensome, about the many friends and acquaintances who--in all conscience, I prefer to assume--have held political views not inconsistent with Miss Hellman’s and therefore alien to mine" (42). For Hellman such difference is intolerable, therefore incomprehensible. In *Pentimento*, she writes of the effect of the McCarthy period: "... it was as if I had been deprived of a child’s belief in tribal safety. I was never again to believe in it and resent to this day that it has been taken from me" (525). I have quoted these lines before and quote them again because of the way they reveal Hellman’s child-like vision of the world, her desire to remain fused with a family unit. For a long time her response to the shock of this experience of differentiation was "to shut up about the whole period." But she takes a crucial developmental step when she decides to write about this critical time. Left to fend for herself, or to defend herself, outside of the safety of the family, she eventually turns to her writing: "I tell myself that this third time out, if I stick to what I know, what happened to me, and a few others, I have a chance to write my own history of the time" (607). This is an explicit example of the way the writing process served as an individuating process for Hellman who, abandoned by family, must become her own person, must write her "own history...."

In this history, Hellman juxtaposes "them" to the individual self which distinguishes itself from the group by its *face* and/or its *voice*. In *Scoundrel Time* the word "face" is used sixteen times, either as in a description of a human face or in a description of a specific position toward others, as in "facing them." Like a child she looks and listens for the comfort of a loving face and voice to emerge from the blur of "them." For instance, her lawyer, Joseph Rauh, has a "nice, unbeautiful, rugged,
crinkly face" which is comforting for Hellman. And comfort also comes in the form of the supportive voice. During her testimony she hears from the press gallery "a clear voice" that says, "Thank God somebody finally had the guts to do it" (675). This "unknown voice," Hellman writes, "made the words that helped to save me." Three weeks after her testimony she narrated the opera, Regina, adapted from The Little Foxes by Marc Blitzstein. She had tried to cancel, nervous about her reception because of her testimony. She writes that Blitzstein told her not to worry that "we'll face it the night it happens." In a journal entry included in Scoundrel Time she writes of the night of the performance: "I am in much worse shape than the day I came before the Committee, maybe because this is my racket and audiences have always frightened me" (694). Audiences are faceless, frightening entities. When she is about to go on stage she hears a friendly voice: "A voice says, 'Need a drink?'" Supported by the drink and the kindness of a stranger, Hellman goes on to narrate the opera. This time the saving voice is that of a stagehand, a large Irishman with red hair. At the end of the performance the audience rises and applauds: "...I face it, unable to move" (695). Concerning the man in the press gallery, Joseph Rauh told William Wright that he did not hear the voice. It is very possible that Hellman heard the voices or the words she needed to hear at the given time, just like when in need she conjured forth a mother in Julia and a complementary alter-ego in Hammett.

Although in Scoundrel Time Hellman returns to familiar refrains—the importance of the distinctive, human face, her bumbling behavior under stress—there are major differences between this work and the first memoirs. And the most important difference is that in Scoundrel Time Hellman attempts for the first time to address an audience, an act which, we have seen, she considers a scary dialectic. Hellman did not envision an audience when writing her first two memoirs, did not think of herself as conversing, coercing or arguing with "others." In fact, a common statement throughout the memoirs
is "I said to myself . . . ." She says in a 1976 interview, "When I did An Unfinished Woman, which was the first time I'd ever fooled around with the memoir form, I had no idea where I was going. I just thought, I'm doing the book for myself" (Bryer, 199). And about Pentimento she says, "In the opening story of Pentimento . . . called Bethe, I don't think I'd thought about Bethe in 25 years. And why I did at that minute--I was lying on a bed half asleep--I have no idea. That certainly is the "X" part of the mind. Then every time I finished one section I'd say, what's next, I don't know what's next" (199). These memoirs were a dialogue with self in which she asks the questions--what's next?--and she also answers them.

In life, as well as in her works, Hellman had a habit, a tendency to talk aloud to herself. Once when Peter Feibleman was Hellman's houseguest he thought that she had late-night company in her room because he heard her talking. What he heard was her quarreling with imaginary companions. "It makes me sound so nutty," Hellman explains in an interview. "All my life I've divided myself into two and sometimes three parts. And they talk" (Bryer, 263). In Pentimento Hellman describes a time when, as a girl, she tried to articulate her strong emotions to her cousin Bethe: "I went into an incoherent out-loud communication with myself, a habit people complain about to this day, trying to tell her what was the truth in what I had just said and what wasn't" (18-19). Bernard Dick writes grumpily that in the memoirs Hellman "does not want to recreate the past with an Aristotelian beginning-middle-end. She wants to recreate it as she remembers it; even more, she wants to comment on the process of remembering and the events she remembers" (141). In Scoundrel Time she actually addresses her newfound literary audience but her tone is angry and opinionated, much like the tone she often used in life when trying to defend an opinon, position or belief.

At this point in her writing--Scoundrel Time being the third in a series--she felt that she could make a statement, take a stand, by working from a foundation of
self-assurance attained during the writing of the first memoirs. As I have emphasized, Hellman had, in the first two memoirs, progressively written herself into a position of a stronger sense of self. A more powerful identity had been literally created over the course of the writing that was then validated by the public's approval of the works; both books had long runs on the bestseller list. Hellman had also written herself toward a tenuous acceptance of the role, function, and importance of others in one's life; and this view was also encouraged and substantiated by the response of "others," by the popular and critical acclaim with which the books were greeted. But dialogue was a difficult concept for Hellman to master, especially when she felt strongly about her opinion. Speaking of her plays, Wright observes that "on the relatively rare occasions when Hellman offers her views, dialogue ceases and the soapbox appears." Unfortunately, her new foundation of self served as a soapbox from which she told her story of the time of scoundrels.

In *Scoundrel Time* Hellman does not allow other voices merit—except the ones kindly disposed to her. In this work, in Wright's words, there was "the absence of political discourse . . ." (357). Faced with the risk of loss of self, Hellman locked herself into her position. Ultimately she became a person who was a prisoner of her own defense—she became locked into an image, into a "nature," almost against her will, or at least, against her conscious will. Wright says that "on one of the few occasions in *Scoundrel Time* when she does explain the thinking behind her position, she stumbles quite badly" (357). To feel the need to explain is an acknowledgement of other opinions, other voices. She stumbles before the idea of this otherness. We have seen that Hellman's physical stumbling and her psychological retreats from discourse stem from the same source, the fear of loss of self, and Wright often chooses to speak of her inability to talk or write conversantly in terms of stumbling (357). He relates an incident that took place during the 1959 production of *Toys in the Attic* which reveals Hellman's
difficulty with addressing others. Hellman, who was not the director but who was concerned with the way the play was going, came before the assembled cast and, in Wright's words "started a discourse" on what she wanted to achieve with the play. He writes: "She got tangled in her thoughts, stumbled and lost volume to the point of inaudibility." The range and tone of her voice, in her writing and in her speaking, depended on many variants and one was how much she identified with the topic. Her tendency toward "fusion" when involved with people also applied to her work as well as to issues, particularly political issues, as seen in Scoundrel Time.

Hellman writes that for five or six years after her appearance before the Committee, she would get up at odd hours of the night to "write versions of the statement I never made." At the time of the crisis she did not say what she really wanted to say, did not speak her true feeling, express her true "self." Writing Scoundrel Time was an attempt to defuse the original pain. Again, like a child comforted by a rhythmic chant, she recalls what went through her head during the hearings: "You are a bunch of headline seekers, using other people's lives for your own benefits. You know damn well that the people you've been calling before you never did much of anything, but you've browbeaten and bullied many of them into telling lies about sins they never committed. So go to hell and do what you want with me" (620). Surrounded, confronted and questioned by the "others," she become childlike, irrational, defensive--regressive. In contrast the letter she wrote to the Committee was mature, rational, strong.

It seems that in solitude Hellman could achieve clarity of thought, whereas in relation she became confused, to the point of losing her "voice," and, as we have seen, often her balance as well. Balance was difficult for Hellman, emotionally and physically. Hellman agreed with Hammett's analysis that for her the best part of the playwrighting experience was when she was in a room by herself putting the plays on paper (Bryer, 232). And it was in some room, isolated from others, that she wrote her
famous letter to the Committee in which she offered to testify about herself but refused to speak of others. Wright tells us that there were five other witnesses before Hellman who had made the same offer. But the difference, he writes, was that "in her letter, if not in her testimony, Hellman had articulated the moral repugnance of forcing denunciations of friends and colleagues with greater eloquence and restrained dignity than had been done by anyone previously, . . . " (254). Diana Trilling attempts to discount the letter on the grounds that the response was not new: "... the sole difference between her response to the HUAC and that of others who took the Fifth was a public relations strategy . . . before appearing before HUAC she wrote her now famous letter about not cutting her conscience to fit this year's fashions in which she offered to answer questions about herself and not about others" (48). But "the sole difference" between Hellman's stand and that of the others is a major difference: she wrote a powerful, dramatic piece, turning much emotion into good literature. She found the words that spoke for others, capturing in metaphor the emotions of many. The letter is often quoted--Dick calls it "one of Bartlett's best" (Hellman in Hollywood, 155). Eric Bentley included it as the finale for his play --Are You Now or Have You Ever Been.--which dealt with the McCarthy period. During the production different famous actresses took turns reading the letter. But Hellman was only eloquent in the missive--when she appeared before the Committee she was so nervous she could hardly talk at all. "Hellman's responses were rather dull," Dick writes. "She became so rattled that she took the Fifth Amendment when she didn't have to . . . " (155). Hellman writes that at the time her right hand began to move as if she had a tic: "... I sat up straight, made my left hand hold my right hand, and hoped it would work. But I felt the sweat on my face and arms and knew something was going to happen to me, something out of control . . ." (674). Again one sees that for Hellman it was the writing, in the form of the letter here, which was the means for her to distinguish and differentiate herself from others.
Scoundrel Time, almost a period piece, gives us a vivid sense of the world in which Hellman functioned and succeeded—and it was a man's world. The theatrical, political and literary circles of the time were dominated by men, and we know that Hellman drank and smoked and wrote along side the best of them—Hammett, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Russian soldiers. And in Scoundrel Time it is especially noticeable that Hellman is a woman among men. There are the lawyers—Stanley Isaacs, Abe Fortas, Joseph Rauh, other playwrights, and movie moguls—Louis Mayer, Samuel Goldwyn, Harry Cohn. There are those whom she calls "the men" of Washington, such as J. Edgar Hoover, whom she sees in a restaurant while having lunch before her testimony. She cannot finish her meal. Then there are the men on the Committee: "Senators McCarthy and McCarran, Representative Nixon, Walter and Wood..." (37). There are Hammett and Marc Blitzstein and Henry Wallace and cabdrivers and stagehands. The women are "a few elderly, small-faced ladies" who look like "permanent residents" of the Committee room, "a severe looking lady" who was the head of the Passport Division of the State Department, Henry Wallace's wife, and Clare Booth Luce, who is the ambassador to Italy when Hellman is there. From within this male context, Hellman maintains and reveals a strong sense of herself as a woman.

It is in the face of this world that Hellman wears a designer dress to testify. This would seem to counter somewhat the unjust criticisms that Hellman tried to make herself over in the image of man. She sees nothing contradictory in her impulse to purchase a new dress to bring her courage at the hearing: "It will make me feel better to wear it," she writes in her journal of the time. But Wright reads much into this stereotypical feminine detail, writing of her "Balmain dress, a hat, and white kid gloves" as "stylish armor in which to stand down the committee." Somehow her feminine dress becomes masculine "armor." With another touch of condescension he writes: "If she was to go
down, she would go down not just as a lady but as a well-dressed lady" (250). In an overview of the reaction to *Scoundrel Time* he writes: "There is something almost comic about the wrinkled, seventy-one year old Hellman, with her passion for fine clothes and Creole cooking, driving the finest intellects in the country to their typewriters and their reference books to write lengthy and scholarly obloquies against her brief remarks in *Scoundrel Time* " (369). For Wright it seems that good cooking and fine dressing are totally at odds with good writing. The contradictions seem to pose a threat to him.

Hellman made critics uncomfortable with her contradictions, her blurring of the feminine and the masculine. Not only was she a genre jumper, mastering the play form then going on to the memoir—but she was tough and sexual as well as very feminine. This combination of traditionally masculine and/or feminine characteristics was apparent in her writing style, as we have seen in *An Unfinished Woman* and *Pentimento*, in which she rambles on in a very feminine way about her very untraditional woman's life in which she made it in a man's world.

But *Scoundrel Time* is unique among her memoirs in that structurally and stylistically it fits the criterion for what "a consensus of critics" call masculine autobiography (Jelinek). Unlike her previous works, it is an orderly and linear narrative with a narrator who does not develop a sense of self but rather remains unchanged, (unrepentent in Hellman's case) from the beginning to the traditional ending. *Scoundrel Time* is not about self-revelation, but about self-justification, therefore coming closer to our sense of the male genre of autobiography. But still the "feminine" emerges from the margins of the text. It appears in the letter to the Committee—letter writing itself having been associated with women over the years—and it appears in the particular line of the letter that reads "I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions . . . " (659). There is also a link (almost umbilically) to Sophronia in the letter in the repetition
of advice Sophronia once gave her. Sophronia had said: "Don't go through life making trouble for people" (25). In the letter Hellman writes: "I am not willing, now or in the future, to bring bad trouble to people who, in my past association with them, were completely innocent . . ." (659). It is in the relationship that develops between her and the cabdriver she uses in Washington. "On the way back to the hotel with my packages I ask the taxi driver if he could pick me up at eight the next morning. He says sure, it would take his mind off things. What things? His wife has cancer of the throat, but they won't do the operation before noon. That's all he said, all I said. Before I left him, I gave him a check for a hundred dollars and asked him to buy his wife a present" (667). After her testimony she goes to Italy for awhile but must go to London to have her passport extended. She is is advised by a lawyer to remain in London for a few days, but she tells him she cannot because her dress is dirty. ". . . he laughed and said women were women" (710).

This is certainly a different picture of Hellman than the one painted by Patricia Meyer Spacks, who faults Hellman for, in the creation of the character of the memoirs, the rejection of "traditional concomitants of femininity" (The Female Imagination 299). Bernard Dick takes a different view when he writes that "the Hellman who emerges from Scoundrel Time is a woman subject to fear and anger as well as a woman in need of reassurance . . ." (154). The Hellman who "emerges" from the male world of the 1950's and from the male text which she chose to write was still frightened of the reactions of others. And most of these "others"--the reviewers, political analysts, writers like Mary McCarthy--pulled out the big guns, mistaking Hellman's tough act for truth; the "truth" is that her strident voice, soapbox stand, and "unadorned prose" were used, like her letter for the Committee, in self-defense, in defense of a self-image that was always precarious.
The attacks that were to follow concerning *Scoundrel Time, Julia*, and the integrity of the entire body of her work made her bitter and irrational; her worst tendencies became exaggerated. Grossman thinks that in light of the controversy Hellman "retreated" in her next book, *Maybe*. Grossman sees the retreat as one into "quasifictional form." But "retreat" is an important choice of a descriptive because it fits into Hellman's repeated psychological pattern of falling down or running away from confrontation, from difference. Grossman attributed the "relative failure" of *Maybe* to the "slightness of story." "Hellman had not," Grossman writes, "come up with a subject which could lay claim to significance . . . ." Hellman had achieved a subject of substance in her previous memoirs, herself, but then in *Scoundrel Time* instead of exploring her nature, like she had done before, she became trapped in it. She writes in *Scoundrel Time* that "I cannot make quick turns, cannot even take a plane in the afternoon if I have counted on flying in the morning, cannot ever adjust fast to a new pattern, have not the mind or the nature to do one thing, maybe wise, when I am prepared for another" (668). In the last lines of *Scoundrel Time* she writes, "As I finish writing about this unpleasant part of my life, I tell myself that was then and then is now and the year between then and now and the then and now are one." Nothing is relative--she holds herself together here in a chant reminiscent of her other child-like, self-consoling chants; in this one there is no "difference." This inflexible stand prevented her from being able to roll with the punches that came her way over the book. When her identity, which was in great part her work, came under attack, she retreated into a work that was without form and/or substance. The "subject" that Grossman sees as missing from *Maybe*, is, maybe, Hellman herself.
Works Cited


Chapter Six

"Rambling On . . . In the Void"*

Hellman's final memoir, *Maybe, A Story*, written in 1980, is a strange crossbreed between fact and fiction, a work in which Hellman makes the unreliability of memory one of the primary focuses of an extremely unfocused book. *Maybe* is about many things, too many things, but on the surface it is about a woman, Sarah Cameron, who Hellman was only acquainted with but whose life touched Hellman's in various ways over a long period of time. "From my point of view," Hellman writes, "she was a kind of interesting drop-in and that never makes for sharp memories or much feeling" (*Maybe*, 15). They first met either at a party or a restaurant, Hellman cannot remember which, and then saw each other again for "the third or the fourth meeting" in a Parisian restaurant a few years later. They encountered each other a few more times, and then Hellman did not see her again until in the 60's in a hotel in Rome at which time Sarah did not acknowledge her; we learn later that Sarah had faked her death for the insurance money and been resurrected as Signora Pinella of Rome. Over several decades Hellman remained tied to Sarah, tenuously but consistently, through the knowledge that they had had the same lover when they were young women (not simultaneously), and by a mutual friendship with a malicious woman named Ferry, who every once in awhile brought Hellman unsolicited news of Sarah, and through a relationship, a love affair without the love, that Hellman had in the 70's with Sarah's former husband, Carter Cameron. Hellman and Sarah passed each other as they traveled and socialized in Europe, New York, and Hollywood, as they went about living their separate lives. It is important

*From: Vivian Gornick, *The Village Voice*. 
that Hellman chose to use this particular relationship as a paradigm for what she believed, finally, to be an inherent truth of all relationship: that connections with others are tenuous, often based on misinterpreted feelings between two people, feelings that are usually unequal, unshared, misunderstood on both sides.

"Like everybody, I guess," Hellman writes, "I have had people wander in and out of my life who think they mean more to me than they do. They believe you have thought about them more than you have" (l4). Elsewhere she says ". . . And anyway how mixed up trivial things get when you come to know how little you cared about the passing people, should have known it, and not seen them again after the drinking years" (l6). In An Unfinished Woman and Pentimento Hellman explored her connections to others, but in the last solo-piece of her writing career she dwells on the disconnections of her life, the careless inattentiveness of people to people. She says of her first sexual relationship: "He had been the first man I had ever slept with and the first time, like most, was painful and unpleasant" (l8). Dorothy Parker once pointed out to Hellman that she had never written a love scene, and Hellman repeats this observation several times in different interviews (Bryer, 229, l16). With Carter Cameron she had what she called "one of the happy arrangements of my life." It was a satisfying arrangement because, she writes, "it had no meaning beyond the experience itself . . . We felt no need for each other . . ." (85). Although Hellman is attracted to Cameron, her real interest in him seems to lie in the fact that he had been loved and left by Sarah. "Why am I writing about Sarah?" Hellman asks in the text. "I really only began to think about her a few years ago, and then not often. Although I always rather liked her, she is of no importance to my life and never was" (50). Yet, in a certain way, Sarah was as important to Hellman as was Julia. In Hellman's last years Sarah came to represent "the other" to her. She was beautiful, decadent, mysterious--Kober said she looked like Garbo; she
had a son--Hellman had abortions; Sarah re-created herself, killed herself off and started over--Hellman tried to re-create herself and got caught and publicly chastised for the attempt. Sarah is terrifying as "other" in that she can just cut herself off from ones who loved her and not look back--a scary fantasy. Contemplating such an elusive and unfeeling person sends Hellman into bouts of confusion. She denies any understanding of her attraction to Sarah and draws no comparison between them, although there are similarities between the two women. In a review for The New Republic Maggie Scarf describes Sarah as "dissolute, impulsive, promiscuous, unfeeling. . . . She is a heavy drinker and drug taker, a tough, hard woman beyond vulnerability" (36). If Julia was who Hellman wanted to be like, then perhaps Sarah is who she fears she was like.

In Maybe Hellman traces the work of malice between people, a theme of her plays that has not appeared in the memoirs before. She pinpoints maliciousness in the form of the interfering, almost sadistic Ferry, the cruel former lover, Alex, and the sociopath son of Sarah's, whom Sarah named Som, for son of many. Characteristically Hellman cannot see the malice in herself, but it is clearly there. Finally, in this book, Hellman writes of the complexity of the dialectic between people that she did not acknowledge before; this resigned recognition is expressed with sadness and surprise but little understanding. "In addition to the ordinary deceptions that you and others make in your life, time itself makes time fuzzy and meshes truth with half truth. But I can't seem to say it right. I am paying the penalty, I think, of a childish belief in absolutes, perhaps an equally childish rejection of them all. I guess I want to say how inattentive I was--most of us, I guess--to the whole damned stew" (51). And "this time out," unlike in Scoundrel Time, her writing fails her as an organizing, self-defining principle: "When I talk to myself I can say it clear to me, about Sarah and other people, and places and dates, but I cannot seem to sort it out here" (51). The center does not hold.
Always before in her writing Hellman could render into hypnotic prose the most dissonant of experiences and emotions; but in *Maybe*, where her writing is not under her control, there is an exposure of vulnerability that was not apparent in the previous works; it especially appears in the curious and startling thematic thread that runs throughout this book in which Hellman reveals her long, agonizing obsession that revolved around her smell, particularly her vaginal odor. Significantly, her fears developed after her first lover, Alex, mentioned to her that she had "an interesting but strange odor." The feminine appears in the text in the term vaginal, but her uneasiness with her femininity is revealed in the odor. This subtext of self-repulsion again shows extreme vulnerability to others, here to the jet-setting world of people that she was a part of but not a part of, connected to but only by social perception or illusion. Her "smell" functions as a metaphor for "difference," a difference she fought for angrily--she was not a woman playwright she said, but a playwright; but this same sense of difference is also what she often backed away from, sometimes tripping over her own feet, undermining her own steps toward autonomy.

But in this last work distinctions became blurred--between people, time, even about what was important and what was not, who had been important to her and who had not. She was almost totally blind by the time she finished *Maybe*, which was written as she lost sight of the world around her as well as the world within her. In a 1980 interview she said that "I finished the new book by postponing an eye operation last September. Whatever was going to happen I was going to finish. It's the first time any work of mine has gone off by itself and I've said 'I can't help you kid!'" (279). Scarf says that "monumental despair is the true subject of *Maybe.*" The "primary tonal quality," she writes, "is one of utter lostness, of panic" (36).
At the heart of this story of her odor, and her compulsive bathing that was the result, is Hellman's repeated, shy attempts to seek help from others about herself and her debilitating neuroses. She wants acknowledgement from others--does she smell or not? Her first husband is perplexed and preoccupied when they discuss the problem for the first time. "I've kept many things from you, but I don't mean to this time," Hellman tells him. "I believe I smell, and I can't stand it. I stop in the street to smell myself. I stand naked and smell myself. Yesterday in Le Printemps I almost asked a strange woman to smell me. I was halfway through the asking when I ran out. Maybe I am going crazy." Kober's reply is not very reassuring, "I don't think you ever will, but I guess that doesn't help you now" (24). The whole issue had just come to her attention in Paris when the hotel manager complained about the amount of water the Kobers were using. Not believing that she actually takes three baths a day as her husband tells her, she writes her mother from Paris to inquire if she had ever noticed her excessive bathing; there is no reply. Hellman then sends a night cable to her father, saying "for literary reasons" she wants to know how long she has been taking three baths a day. Hellman's father jokes in his return note that he had noticed the bath habit, warned Hellman that it was bad for the skin, and wondered "what literary purpose" did she have in mind. He was anxious, Hellman writes, "to read my adventures in hot water" (23).

Hellman broaches the subject again several years later when she asks Hammett, "Don't I ever smell good?" "Always," he said, "and silly, too, and that smell stuff has roots somewhere you ought to find out about or leave alone." The next day Hellman said to him, "My God, you're bright," and he replied: "Don't tell me about it. It'll be something like isn't it wonderful I open my pants to pee when lots of two-year-olds don't" (42). In the Hammett-world emotion should be left alone; his uneasiness with Hellman's need appears in his regression to adolescent crudeness that is much like an
inappropriate laugh. Hammett's response to Hellman, this rare example of dialogue between them that Hellman does not package prosaically, breaks the usual rhythm of Hellman's prose, just as does the subject matter of vaginal odor. Both, Hammett's coldness bordering on cruelty, and Hellman's fears about her body, tear the matrix of her life; these are ruptures that she does not or cannot mend this time in the writing. According to Scarf, what is so unsettling and surprising about *Maybe* is Hellman's concern "with feminine hurts and feminine humiliations. . . ." She says that Hellman opens the door "to a different world--the world of suffering and of acknowledged feeling that was, for the most part, left out of the other three books" (36). In the other memoirs Hellman's style concealed her deepest feelings while at the same time somehow managing to evoke a sense of the repressed. There was style and there was substance, but the substance shone through the veil of repetitive, associative prose. For the first time in her work, we can see the raw material which she usually turned into prose, myth, drama.

The world documented (or created) in *Maybe* is a very different world from Julia's world, which the director of the movie chose to film with a golden, fuzzy glow. In *Maybe* the "characters" are hard-edged and so is Hellman. Scarf writes that "the characters in this book are glittery, sophisticated, scary; they lash out, wound, lie, distort, defend themselves ceaselessly and fail, always, to recognize or meet one another's needs, to touch one another as human beings" (36). We have a book of striking contrasts--there is the vulnerable, neurotic Hellman seeking release from the pain inflicted on her by a lover, and then there is the tough Hellman who reveals an appalling lack of empathy for others. The former "Hellman" is the one Wright exposes in his biography, but who is hidden from view, edited out, repressed in her own history of
herself. In many passages of *Maybe* Hellman seems to see relationship as only a bothersome interruption of her solitary daydreaming.

There are two instances in *Maybe*, one with Ferry and one with Sarah, in which they talk seriously to Hellman, but she cannot recall the details because she was not listening. Hellman explains that once she made a detour on her way to Boston so that she could visit a lake where she had attended summer camp as a girl. After seeing the lake, she goes to an inn she remembers and discovers that Ferry is there. She tries to slip away but Ferry spots her. Hellman writes: "I wasn't in the mood for her or anybody else. I had spent the day thinking what I could bring back to memory's road from summers on the Monterey lake, where I had always felt lost, puzzled by everything I was doing and the kids I was doing them with each year, unprotesting, I allowed my parents to send me back. To what, for what, what could I have been about in those day? Now I wanted to learn something about myself, think about the years I had spent on the lake. I had counted on being alone" (30). This is the same rhetoric she used to conjure up memories of her time with Hammett, the same tone she used to speak of Julia's death, her love for Sophronia. But one must notice that here we are talking about Hellman's unpleasant memories of summer camp: here she is in her 70's and she would prefer to brood over these old times than to be gracious about a chance encounter with a friend. "I was annoyed at the interruption of Ferry and so I had a lot to drink that night . . . .The talk from Ferry was new to me, odd half-finished sentences, a break in the voice, references to things and places I didn't know about, sudden, sad, common reflections on 'life' or 'women and men.'" Hellman's description of Ferry's "talk" could easily apply to much of Hellman's prose, but Hellman presumes she has a corner on the "truth" of the topic, i.e. that there is not "truth" to be had; she is condescending
and ridiculing about Ferry's sentimentality perhaps in a displacement about her own "reflections," particularly in this book.

At another point Hellman recalls a time Sarah, very distraught, came to Hellman's home in Hollywood to talk to her. Sarah tells her a "tale" that "went in and out but I do not think I knew then when what she was describing had happened--a few days ago or a few months before." But, Hellman says, it is not because her memory is poor that she does not recall what was said, rather it was because she was "only half listening." Her excuse for the inattention is "I had wanted to have dinner alone" (56). Again we see Hellman returning to the narcissism expressed in the fig tree in the first of the memoirs. In her weakened, depressed state, she cannot suppress in her writing this flaw in her nature or her cynicism about the possibility of connection with others. She is retreating before our eyes into herself.

Near the end of the work Hellman describes a wedding of a friend's daughter; it is a hippie wedding with guitar playing and singing of Bob Dylan songs along with some originals written for the occasion. "The originals picked up the theme of fucking," Hellman writes, "although they occasionally they got into dreams, the marvelous dreams of 'true' human connection, or dope or God" (90). Hellman's idea of an alternative to naive belief in "true human connection" or a defense against the fear of the impossibility of union, is the informed, jaded response that shows she has the "cojones" to see the world as it really is. (Hemingway once told her she had cojones) (An Unfinished Woman, II3). The periodic tears in the fabric of her own romanticism sound so false they make one cringe. She cockily tells Ferry that she does not care about Alex, that "he was a shit made of Monel Metal" (35). When she happens on Sarah in France and can't make sense of her drunken or doped conversation, she says, "Stop the junk Sarah" (48). She again throws in the word "junk" when speaking long-distance with
Ferry who tells her that she has heard Sarah died--Hellman says she "decided it was junk talk and said good-bye" (75). When Hellman puts the word "junk" in her text it is like a wrench thrown in to the usual graceful, melodic narrative. In this book her eloquence on memory that we have seen before dissolves into the flat, sophomoric statement: "But memory for us all is so nuts" (63). In Maybe she gives us her recipe for a cure for a hangover, tells of a time when she needed and imbibed the wretched brew, tells of her friendship with a notorious gangster, Frank Costello, and recounts a time her husband gives her a hundred dollars to go to a resort for a rest where she meets an English couple and sleeps with the husband: "I don't know why I slept with him because I didn't much like him" (25). These seem to be transparent posturings to defend against her admission of vulnerability, her announcement that she has a vagina, but that it smells. Vulnerability stinks.

When she loses her sense of or regard for the other, losing even the ability that she had before to write herself into a relation to others, even if it was only in a text, she experiences a frightening loss of self, "...so much of what you had counted on as a solid wall of convictions now seems on bad night, or in sickness, or just weakness, no longer made of much that can be leaned against. It is then that one can barely place oneself in time. ..." Near the end of the book Hellman describes a night-swim that begins as a return to the womb but turns into a terrifying struggle for survival: "I decided to go for a swim. It had been at least a year since I had gone swimming alone, and I guess the wine made me feel capable, a long lost and long regretted feeling" (99). She writes that "the water was the right temperature, everything was good, everything was better; there was even the possibility that there could be some answer to the future and that it wouldn't be as bad as I had thought." She feels a sense of security in the embryonic water--always she has felt "at home" in the water. But she becomes
confused, swims toward what she thought was the shore, only to discover she has
misjudged. "The word frightened is not the word. I am not frightened in water.
Something else was happening to me: I was collapsing in a way that had never
happened before" (100). What began as an experience of rebirth becomes the
opposite—an experience of depersonalization, dissolution of self.

Maybe was written as an attempt to stave off blindness and death, but when she
cannot "see" clearly, she cannot write clearly. Hellman no longer had the strength to
write her self into balance, into coherence, into a more emboldened sense of self. After
her near drowning, she stumbled to shore: "I went off the path and fell into the bush. A
rosa rugosa bush is not a good place to fall, the thorns are very bad, and I had fallen
because I had forgotten to turn on the flashlight. She then bumps into the screen door,
burns herself in the bath and lays down to sleep. She writes that ". . . when I woke up
the world seemed gone" (101). Over her lifetime Hellman had created a self and a world,
first in her dramas, where the world was stylized, self-contained, full of family and
acrimonious conversation; of her dramatic productions she wrote: "The production is
of great importance, has given the play the only life it will know, but it is gone, in the
end, and the pages are the only wall against which to throw the future or measure the
past" (Three, 454). In her memoirs, she was gutsy and tough in the safe circumscribed
text of friends. But it was always the manuscript, the object itself, which was of utmost
importance to Hellman: "The manuscript, the words on the page, was what you started
with and what you have left" (Three, 453). On the afternoon of Hellman's death Peter
Feibleman called her to say he would be delayed bringing the galley-proofs of their
collaborative cookbook. Hellman said to him, "You don't understand. I want to work, I
want to work, I want to work." She referred to her illness as "...the worst case of
writer's block I ever had in my life. The worst case" (Eating Together, 181-2).
Paradoxically, Hellman used the writing of *Maybe* to continue and maintain her connection to life and to others, although the book itself was about the absolute futility of trusting the reality of human connection. This was the fear Hellman always fought, often successfully, sometimes not; unfortunately in her last work, her fear had the last word.
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