

The Tennessee Williams Annual Review

Tennessee Williams Scholars Conference Panel: Williams and His Contemporaries: Lillian Hellman

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Number 8

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Editor's Note: *The following panel was transcribed directly from tapes made at the 2005 Tennessee Williams Scholars Conference.*

Dr. Will Brantley: I thought I would start by reading a citation that Lillian Hellman was invited to present to Tennessee Williams in 1970. It was the Gold Medal for Drama, awarded by the National Institute of Arts and Letters. She had mentioned Williams a number of times before that, with *The Autumn Garden*, for instance, when some of the critics noted that it seemed to be a more Williams-esque play than what she had produced up to that point, and she even said we're somewhere on top of *The Rose Tattoo* and Tennessee Williams in this play. She admired him a great deal and made a number of public comments to that effect, although in the early sixties she felt that he was not doing his best work and said as much. In the *Paris Review* interview, for instance, in 1964, she said, "I think he is a natural playwright. He writes by sanded fingertips. I don't always like his plays. The last three or four seem to me to have gone off, kind of way out in a conventional way. He is throwing his talent around." She frequently acknowledged, however, that he was one of the great American playwrights, and in 1970, as I mentioned, she was invited to present him with this award, and here's what she said:

The American Theatre is, indeed, a strange and difficult world. It will often reward its practitioners with a generosity that approaches hysteria; it is then that the critical heart is not only a loving heart, but its space in the breast reserved for the rest of us becomes too small and the heart moves upward to find room in the head. But, evidently, the head is not a comfortable place, because in time, the heart shrinks away—and sometimes the head with it—and too much loving turns, as it always must, into a kind of rheumatic irritation. It is then that the playwright is held responsible for the generous gift of the once overloving heart and he is turned on as the rich turn on the undeserving poor who have not fulfilled their moral hopes.

In other words, she's dealing with the fact that in 1970 Williams's reputation was somewhat, at that point, in decline. He was not producing the kind of work that people so loved him for. He wasn't doing *Streetcar* again or *Glass Menagerie*. Hellman continues,

It is no news, except in my racket [she calls playwriting a racket], that good work has always been, must always be, allied with, and dependent upon work less good. If this were not true, then the artist has grown frightened, his powers weakened, his artistic life is over. Criticism of any one or any ten works may be, often is, justified, but such criticism must be based on the body of the work, the total work, and must be spoken of with a respect for the past and hope for the future.

At this point the apology ends, and she goes right to the heart of why Williams was receiving this award at this time:

Tennessee Williams has been a major victim of this game of yesterday's genius. Perhaps that in itself is a kind of tribute to the fact that with *The Glass Menagerie* of 1944 and *A Streetcar Named Desire* of 1947, he brought to the theatre the greatest talent of the post-war generation. There are many good writers who do not influence men who come after them—influence is not the only measure of worth—but I think it is safe to guess that Williams' influence on the theatre will be there a hundred years from now because the mirror he held in his hand announced a new time, almost a new people, and the mirror will remain clear and clean. Since 1944 he has written plays, novels, poems, [and] movies. It is the dedicated career of a serious man to which we pay respect today. I hope that Mr. Williams will feel comforted by this medal given to him by the only body of men and women in this country who are his equals.^[1]

That's quite an acknowledgment of what he had accomplished, and I think that Hellman felt somewhat caught, somewhat trapped. She did her best work at a time when social realism was the dominant mode of the day, but it was giving way to something that Williams accomplished so well. And there was always some rivalry between them, and that's something that I think we will also address. In fact, in 1970 Peter Feibelman says that Hellman came in the room one day after reading a *New York Times* review that mentioned Albee and Williams and Miller as the three great American playwrights, and she went into a tangent, saying, "How dare they! How dare they forget about me! I am still alive!" So she realizes that she was dealing with someone whose work probably in the end would matter more than hers.

^{¶12} **Martinson:** It was Albee that really got her, in that group, though. [*Laughter*] I think I'll start there by acknowledging the assumptions the American audience has today about both Williams and Hellman and what age had done to their reputations so that in 2005 you get a very different response to the two playwrights than you would have in 1940. In some ways the passage of time has tarnished their reputations and in other ways has diminished what they did in writing. What people think about them personally diminishes the worth of their plays, and in Hellman's case, at least, her memoirs. When I was at Columbia University in a summer seminar fellowship and Howard Stein was talking about Williams, he told this *horrible* story about Williams going to Yale that left the seminarians saying, "Oh, Howard!" Williams was just outlandish. He was drunk and he was a druggie, and he demanded to go swimming. His story highlighted Williams's outrageous behavior and implied what kind of horrible human being he had become. And, of course, we were stunned because Howard has absolutely wonderful feelings about Williams's plays. Now, every time I talk to anybody about Hellman, they leap in before I say two words about her plays or her memoirs, "Oh, that vicious harridan! What a horrible woman she was! She was outlandish, and she was nasty, and blah, blah, blah." And yet both Williams and Hellman were at the times of their lives when their reputations were in a state of decline. In some ways, age marked a physical decline also. Certainly, Hellman's last six years of her life were plagued by intermittent senility, which is the worst kind because you can't be depended upon to be senile. So some days she would be quite nice and smart and the next day just really a strange, nasty kind of person. No one quite knew what to do with her. And so what I think is important in observing both Williams and Hellman is to look at their lives before they had such outrageous behavior that they offended their critics, essentially, or even the audiences. And I think one thing that is clear is that Hellman *did know* Williams was a better playwright than she. I mean, she admitted it, she knew it, and she honored him for it. I don't think she would say he was a better writer, and I'll get to that, maybe, when I talk a little bit about *Memoirs*.

Both of them were really excessive human beings. They liked people that were of excess or, in Hellman's case, hated them if they were in excess, but at least they interested her. Anybody that was very bland never had a chance. For example, there's this wonderful Tallulah Bankhead story where Tallulah slapped Hellman in the face when she refused to do a *Little Foxes* presentation in Finland after Russia had attacked Finland in 1939. And then there was another case where, supposedly (and a lot of this is apocryphal and as a biographer, I had to sift through what was real and what wasn't) Hellman hit Tallulah Bankhead in the face with a purse when they had to share a taxi one day, and Tallulah said, "I will never be in another one of your plays," and Hellman took her purse and smacked her and said, "Well, don't worry, you never will." And there was a huge *New York Times* kind of brouhaha among the two of them about their politics. Hellman called Tallulah "boring" in an interview, and then Tallulah wrote back in the letters to the editor and said there was no more boring person in the world than Lillian Hellman. And of course, the truth is that neither one of them was boring in the least. [Laughter] But those kinds of excesses make their dramas excellent. They're very different dramatically, and we can discuss that later.

¶14 At the same time, Williams and Hellman had a lot in common. For example, the New Orleans connection. I mean, people argue about whether Hellman was southern because she was born in New Orleans, lived there for six years, and then left to go to New York for six months of the year until she was sixteen. She was *very* southern in all sorts of ways. All her relatives were southern, but the fact that she was also Jewish led some people to say well, you know, that's not southern. In fact, Dashiell Hammett said that in New Orleans they have trouble distinguishing Jews from Mexicans . . . whatever that meant. So there was always this kind of shift about whether she was southern enough. No one ever asked Tennessee Williams that.

¶15 And there was the issue of sexuality. Williams dealt with his sexual psychology, as well as a sexual body, in a very excessive way that was quite public. Hellman also was excessive sexually, though in her plays she stayed rigidly away from it. Both of them were also romantics. I think Williams and Hellman were *very* romantic in all sorts of interesting ways. Hellman could not write that romanticism or that sexuality into her dramas. As a person, Hellman was very sexually active. The last time I met my agent we sat down to lunch, and he said, "She was really having four lovers going at once?" I said, "Well, yes." And I thought I'd tease him a bit and said, "Everybody would if we could get away with it." And of course, he objected, saying, "I don't think that's true." But Hellman? Very excessive, but not promiscuous. And especially for a woman in the 30s and 40s . . . and then the 50s. It was uncalled for in terms of the social critique, but it was certainly her choice to make.

¶16 Both Williams and Hellman were very much involved in theatre and film, and I thought it was interesting, in looking at Nancy's article ["Sanitizing the Streetcar"] I remembered when Hellman was called to Hollywood to make sure that *A Streetcar Named Desire* could pass Joe Breen in the Hays Office. Of all people! She was personally being censored right and left on two coasts, but she could also censor pretty well for Breen, and did. But while she was in the middle of that project, they yanked her away from it because she had been blacklisted, and so, from that point on, Hollywood would have nothing to do with her because of her politics. They did sneak a Fitzgerald project in, *Tender is the Night*. They wanted her to make sure the dialogue was era-specific, and they wanted Hellman to do it. They couldn't ask her to do it in any real way, but they promised her a whole load of money off the books, and she took it because she needed the money.

17 So the kinds of things that I want to discuss are the assumptions about Hellman, the assumptions about Tennessee Williams, about their lives that did and did not work within their dramas and then later their memoirs, as well as how those assumptions have in some ways diminished and enhanced their reputations. And I suppose it takes scholars to remind us what really matters, which, as Hellman said, is the writing and the art.

18 **Dr. Barton Palmer:** My focus on Hellman is much less interesting than Deborah's. I'm not interested in personality. I'm interested in the comparison and contrast in use of dramatic form in Hellman and Williams. And the reason I'm interested in that is because, as you heard a few minutes ago, I'm well launched in a project with Robert Bray. We're writing a book on the film versions of Tennessee Williams's properties, particularly his plays but, of course, also the novella, *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*. One of the things that Robert and I are working on is to—I hate to use the word “correct,” but I guess that's what I really mean—to correct the misimpression that has been perpetuated in adaptations and studies of Williams for years, and there are a number of misimpressions that are connected with this. One is that the accommodation of Williams to Hollywood had only to do with notions of censorship and material. The process of adaptation was actually much more complicated in the case of Williams because he presented Hollywood with a notion of dramatic form that was quite different from what had been the case in the industry. And so actually, if you look at the adaptation of Williams's plays, there are normally two different layers to what's going on in the process. One is—certainly the one that's most noticed and discussed—the cleaning up of Williams's themes and characters and incidents and so on, which involves a very complicated series of negotiations that have been much delineated in the case of *Streetcar*, but actually in the case of some properties such as *The Rose Tattoo* are relatively undiscovered country. And when Robert and I went out and did research on this, we found that the negotiation process for that film took about five years and was extremely complex and contentious and involved many different varieties of the scripts. The second process of accommodating Williams to the normal Hollywood notion of dramatic form brings me to an interest in Lillian Hellman because it is quite obvious that the film versions of Lillian Hellman's properties were very *easily* adapted to Hollywood dramatic form. It is the case with *The Children's Hour*, which has been adapted twice for the screen; after the first adaptation, which was done in the thirties, it did prove necessary to rewrite the play in order to substitute a heterosexual dynamic for the homosexual one, and Hellman herself participated in that process. She was largely responsible for the resulting script for the film, *These Three*. When the play was adapted the second time—by the same director, by the way, William Wyler—in the early sixties, it could be done more faithfully. In both cases, the notion of dramatic form was relatively the same, and if you look at the film version of *Little Foxes*, for example, you see that the subtleties of dramatic form that Hellman implies, that she employs, are so radically different from anything that we see in Williams that they bear some discussion.

19 Let me say just say a little bit about what I mean. Let me go back to *The Children's Hour*, which is a play that's built on two principles, as I see it: one is the principle of suspense, and the other is the principle of surprise. Both of those are related to the tradition of the well-made play. Working on Hellman's difference from Williams has led me to do a good deal of work on notions of the well-made play, which of course starts out as a mostly nineteenth-century concept, but has had its twentieth-century practitioners. In fact, I would argue that Hellman bears a closer comparison to the British playwright Terence Rattigan than she bears to any of her American

contemporaries in the amount of sophistication and technical expertise that she shows in the use of dramatic structure. Her play, *The Children's Hour*, in my mind, bears close comparison to Rattigan's *The Winslow Boy*, which is likewise built on a series of suspenseful incidents including, as they say, a *scène à faire* that ends the play just before the first curtain, which is quite similar to the corresponding scene in *The Children's Hour*. If you don't remember that play, it's when the two women, Karen and Martha, who are running the school, had been accused by Mary of having a homosexual relationship, and Mary's grandmother has attempted to close down the school, and there's a kind of a mock trial scene in the grandmother's house, which is arranged in archly dramatic fashion that's absolutely reminiscent of the well-made play tradition. It seems as if the two are going to be found guilty, and just as it seems that Mary's scheme is going to be defeated, she calls in her friend Rosalie, whom we have seen previously, had who had been blackmailed by Mary . . . and all of the elements of suspense work together to create a startling effect just before the curtain. When the play picks up after the curtain, you get more the use of surprise, which of course has everything to do with Martha's revelation that she actually is . . . or has had lesbian feelings, and what had been presumptively a false accusation is actually in some sense true. The principle of surprise works there because it's carefully prepared for in the first part of the play where there's real hesitation created about Martha's relationship with Karen, and if you go scene by scene in that play, you see the exquisite sense of dramatic structure leading to the climax that ends right before the curtain, and then of course the surprise, the shocking ending that we have right at the end of the play.

¶10 When it was produced on Broadway, Hellman got high marks from almost everybody, and we've mentioned Brooks Atkinson earlier. It was significant, I think, that he called attention to the fact that she had made a slight error in dramatic construction—now how often does Williams get criticism like that?—by having the grandmother come in after Martha has committed suicide at the end of the play, and that this action is anticlimactic. Interesting that when the second film version was made, Hellman corrected that mistake, and the grandmother's visit to the school comes *before* Martha's suicide, right?

¶11 In *Little Foxes*, you have a similar dramatic structure with a series of struggles—"agons," if you like the traditional dramatic term—with the various members of the Hubbard family over the question of the money and the investment. And you have a very similar scene right before curtain, which of course is the startling revelation that Horace knows what Regina knows, and then as the bonds have been taken—there's a very complicated plot in this play, if you haven't seen it lately—but it's a very dramatic scene of his death and her allowing him to die. And those kinds of elements are really absent from Williams. And one of the things I'm really interested in is to put Hellman within the tradition of late 30s and 40s drama in comparison to Williams and his contemporaries. He was not as interested in notions of dramatic structure, although sometimes he was *more* interested than others. I think that you could say there's a certain building of dramatic tension in a play like *Streetcar* that's more or less absent in other plays, such as *Summer and Smoke*. But what I'd really like to spend some more time talking about with the other panelists is the notion of the comparison between Hellman and Williams as playwrights.

¶12 **Brantley:** I'm curious, Barton, when you say "the well-made play," I think Hellman responded to that almost in a negative way. She said, "The well-made play? Would you want something to be *badly* made?" [Laughter] She knew it was a term that didn't work in her canon . . .

¶13 **Palmer:** She used to call her plays realist melodramas. I think that's a very interesting term because it calls attention to the fact that she wanted to connect herself to the realist tradition, which I think we see in Williams—a poetic form of it, but certainly a realist tradition. At the same time, she's very interested in melodrama with its emphasis on type-dramatic construction and on the cementing of the audience's emotional reaction—bit by bit, dramatic moment by dramatic moment—to the play.

¶14 **Martinson:** I just want to point out that Williams really came to fore right after *The Little Foxes*, so already the well-made play was a passing style. Hellman's later plays weren't quite so "well-made," and some of them didn't do as well. *The Autumn Garden*, for example, is very much *not* the well-made play. And she began to do all sorts of experimental kinds of things, which really work well reading them, but sometimes on stage they didn't do quite as well, and she seemed to realize that and struggle with it. Where I see Hellman and Williams coming together most dramatically—and I mean that in both senses of the term—is in *Toys in the Attic*, which is well-made, but she does employ some of those techniques that Williams does to go deeper into the psyche of the characters and to make things happen that go beyond just the structure of the play. And so I think that Hellman does develop her style over the years, but at the beginning she even said that the seams show too much. You could definitely see the structure of her work. I heard people say, "Oh, they're so outdated!" But in our political climate, they're not all that outdated, and they really can be compelling drama. They are well made. They're not Williams drama, but they're really good Hellman drama.

¶15 **Palmer:** I think that there's no reason to denigrate her success with the well-made play, and certainly there's been a tendency, I think, to put down figures like Hellman and Rattigan simply because they're so good at dramatic construction. It's very interesting reading *Autumn Garden*, coming to that play from *Little Foxes* and from *The Children's Hour* because it's so much more Chekhovian than it is anything else. Obviously, she was much influenced by Chekhov, as was Williams, in part. And at Washington University, Williams was also taught Strindberg. I think you can see Strindberg sometimes, and also Ibsen, in more of an emphasis on tighter dramatic structure in some of the Williams plays.

¶16 **Brantley:** Well, they each shared the need to do something new after what they had previously done and felt a penalty in moving on. Chekhov is very interesting. Hellman edited an edition of his letters in the 1950s—1954, I think it was. And it's interesting to learn that what she finds in Chekhov is not the same thing that Williams sees in Chekhov at all.

Martinson: And yet Williams really, really liked the edition.

¶17 **Brantley:** He liked the edition. In fact, he was reading it, and that picks up on something you said a moment ago, and I found the citation here. He was reading it in 1962. This is in Maria St. Just's *Five O'Clock Angel*, p. 178. He said:

I don't for a moment believe that all is over between Ken and Elaine Tynan. They really love each other very much. They must just learn to live with the primary fact of life, which is not a monogamous thing on the animal level. Well ma'am, stay healthy my sweet, extraordinary actress.

This is a quote from Chekhov to the woman he married, and Williams quotes Chekhov's letters from what he calls "the wonderful translation of them by Lillian Hellman," although she didn't actually translate the letters. She simply edited them and wrote an introduction. Still, Williams links the letters with this notion about defending the fact that we're not monogamous, which is something he clearly shared with Lillian Hellman—an approach to life that infused their drama.

¶18 **Tischler:** You know, Williams said of his plays when asked whether any of them were well constructed, it was always *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* he thought was fine construction. I think it was simply because it had unity of time and place. I think it was the idea of the Greek unities rather than the idea of a well-made play, as the latter didn't really appeal to him.

¶19 **Martinson:** Hellman's plays almost all were motivated by rage, as she was furious at the social system; she was very much a leftist working in a *very* repressive social condition, and she was outraged by much of what was going on socially. And so, even though they aren't political plays in a typical sense, there's a sense of rage that motivates her, and so she's almost cold in the way she makes things so neat and clean. Whereas it seemed to me that, in some ways—and this is so oversimplified, forgive me—but that in Williams, there's an element of fear there that moves his plays along in quite a different way. It's far more, if I dare say it, hot in the way he moves it psychologically, and there's so much more than form. The plays themselves are not so rigidly defined. It's almost as if Hellman created an argument when she wrote her plays in some ways, whereas Williams is not so interested in creating an argument.

¶20 **Palmer:** I think that's absolutely right. I think even the play *Little Foxes*, which seems to me to be a very interesting demonstration of the corrupting power of money and the desire to make money, loses opportunities to make points about some other vision of how to live simply by de-emphasizing the character of Horace, who couldn't figure into the dramatic power structure, so the central mechanism of the play kind of leaves out the character who might add greater depth and poetry to it. And simply running the play like a machine makes her leave aside that particular character, and it's too bad that it happens.

Martinson: Well, she wanted to make sure he got eaten. [*Laughter*]

Palmer: Yes; that's right.

¶21 **Tischler:** You know, I was wondering some, too, as you were speaking of Hellman's courage, about her political stance as opposed to Williams, especially at the time of the Un-American Activities Committee because, when Kazan did testify, Williams barely missed a step. It was very important for him to keep up the relationship with Kazan. His own success, he thought, depended on that, and so he did not pull back from that friendship, while others did. And I wondered if Hellman had any response to that. I know she would have responded very differently.

¶22 **Martinson:** She was furious and never spoke to Kazan again, *ever*. And she was asked on a couple of occasions to introduce him or to give him an award at one point, and she wrote scathing letters. She always admired his talent. And I interviewed Kim Hunter for the biography, and Kim Hunter had a really, *really* hard time with it,

too, because she was gray-listed, which is that insidious thing where you're not *exactly* blacklisted, but you don't get work. And so you don't know if it's because your talent isn't quite what it used to be . . . you're not sure. And with Hellman, she was sure. She was told to get out of Hollywood, and she did. But even Kim Hunter had a really tough time with Kazan's testimony. Hellman never, ever forgave Kazan. Even Dalton Trumbo—who was also furious because he was jailed as one of the Hollywood Ten—even Trumbo said to Hellman, "You know, God forgives . . . I mean, you've got to forgive." She said, "I'm not God, and I will *never* forgive." [Laughter] And she never did. She never, ever would work with Kazan. I mean it was awful. And of course, he called her a "coiled snake." Hellman was first, last, and always political, and when I wrote the biography, I thought, naively, "Oh, I'll stay away from politics because I really am a literary person, and I'll stick with the films and the plays." But the politics is my largest section because it began to override everything in her life, and it all worked together in some real way.

¶23 **Palmer:** It's certainly the case, and even in a failed play like *Days to Come* that really doesn't work—I guess it closed after about three performances or so . . .

Martinson: Two.

Palmer: Was it two? Ok. But it has an Odets-like fervor of support for the left, and it's rather amateurishly put together. But her script for the film *North Star*, I think, is very interesting. It's a very effective propaganda piece.

Brantley: She bought the rights back for an enormous sum, just to make it her own work again.

¶24 **Martinson:** She was very much pro-Russia in 1943, I think, when the film came out. And she was keen to do it earlier. Goldwyn wanted this Russian picture, and so she and Wyler were going to do it. Wyler brought in all these singers and dancers, and there's Russian dancing on the commune. Walter Brennan is one of the major characters, and she absolutely went nuts over that.

Brantley: It's something to see. I mean, it really is. [Laughter]

Martinson: I know. And she said that she just could not bear it. And there's this wonderful anecdote when she first sees it, she began to cry and was screaming and swearing because Goldwyn and Hellman were another really interesting duo. Neither one of them, when they got outraged, had any sense whatsoever. And she did buy back the rights and always disowned it but never took her name off it because it made her too much money. And so . . .

Palmer: Well, she changed the title, and it was re-released under the title, *Armored Attack*.

Martinson: She insisted the title be changed because *Armored Attack* is anti-Russian.

Palmer: Right.

Martinson: And it came out in the Cold War, completely switched who the enemy was. So when you see it on TV it's hilarious because it's the opposite of what the intent was to begin with. I mean, it's crazy.

¶25 **Tischler:** Well, sometimes the desire for success—and you’ve all mentioned both of these people are incredibly concerned with success—contradicts their willingness to be forthright, in Williams’s case probably more so. And you might want to comment on this. I was thinking about the relationship to Arthur Miller because one of the most interesting letters to me was the one that Williams enclosed with a letter to Audrey Wood in which he protested Arthur Miller’s being denied a passport, and it was to be sent to the State Department, but with the caveat: “Audrey, if you think this would get me in trouble, and I would be denied a passport, let’s not do it.” And so he apparently never sent it, you know. So, the brave letter, and then, “On the other hand, I like to travel.” [Laughter] And so it’s a kind of secondary reaction. But he also didn’t want to come out for anything bravely political that would hurt his career.

¶26 **Brantley:** I think that’s fair. With Hellman, by the time she wrote *Scoundrel Time*—which is the work that I’ve written the most about that she produced—that set off a reaction unlike any other memoir in the twentieth century because the key question is: how do you define yourself as an intellectual in the twentieth century? How do you find yourself in connection with the Communist vision of society? And Hellman at that point was willing to name some names on her own, people that she felt had acted dishonorably during the McCarthy period.

Martinson: Of course, it was twenty-six years later.

Brantley: But those battles still were lingering then. I mean, it was from a safer distance, but the reaction to that book and then the vilification that occurred afterwards, even if she brought some of that on herself, was surprising. Most of you probably know she was involved in a very costly litigation with Mary McCarthy at the time of her death. Mary McCarthy went on the Dick Cavett Show and said that every word that Lillian Hellman says is a lie, including the “a” and the “the,” and Hellman brought a suit against her. And just copious pages of people denouncing what she had written as lies, which perhaps you could speak to more . . .

Martinson: Oh, I could speak to that . . .

Brantley: I don’t know if this is crucial here. That’s certainly not the reaction Tennessee Williams solicited in any way, and he did not go into those muddy political wars in the same way. I think it’s all there, encoded in his work, clearly; but he didn’t venture out as explicitly as Hellman.

¶27 **Martinson:** It’s interesting to me that Hellman disrespected those that would not make political stances, but she never disrespected Williams.

Brantley: That’s true. That is interesting.

Martinson: So whatever he was doing, she found important enough to override his political distance. And she was a black-and-white person. She did not have a lot of gray areas, at least in whom she liked and whom she didn’t like, whom she respected and whom she didn’t. And you can speak to this, probably, because the talent that Williams had allowed her to override the fact that he was essentially apolitical. But he wasn’t an enemy. I mean, he wasn’t apolitical in the neutral sense of, “Oh, let’s just have everything.” He was careful.

Palmer: She just doesn't have the poetic sensibility of Williams . . .

Brantley: No, that's exactly right.

Martinson: That's right.

Palmer: That's another thing that comes across so strongly in reading her in comparison to Williams—she always lacks that poetic sensibility and language. There are just no passages that compare to almost every page of a Williams drama. She couldn't do that. I don't think she tried to do it, either.

Brantley: No.

¶129 **Martinson:** But I think in the memoirs, she does, and I would argue that her memoirs are her greatest works. There's a lot of critique about them, but they're poetic. They're not lies. They're not fact. They're literature. And so, she's really moved a lot . . . and her form is far more sophisticated. And she wrote them when she was over sixty, so it wasn't in her youth. But that's where she was the poetic Hellman, not in her plays, where she was so overdone by political passion, I think, and by the need to argue, as you pointed out, in the structure of the dramas.

Brantley: I agree with that. I think her contribution will be something that she brought to the memoir, and it's a way of writing about herself through portraits of others. It was quite a sophisticated thing to do, and Williams didn't attempt that when he produced his memoirs. He produced something much more, I guess, brutally honest, almost a confessional kind of writing there. Hellman felt that she had brought what she could bring to drama and wanted to move on. She still had the need to write, and I think that's why she said she was maybe a lesser playwright, but not a lesser writer than Williams.

Martinson: Right. I think that's true.

¶130 **Palmer:** One of the things she shares with Williams—you touched on this a little bit earlier—is the fact that she had this precipitous fall in reputation.

Brantley: Right. Exactly.

Palmer: In the early 70s after the publication of *Pentimento*, she'd been given honorary doctorates by just about every university in the country. When I received my Ph.D. from Yale, she was on the stage.

Martinson: Was she smoking? [*Laughter*]

Palmer: No . . . not at the moment. But that was about the fourth one she got that year, and then suddenly she had a fall from grace that was almost amazing.

¶131 **Brantley:** I think that when she was presenting Williams with the Gold Medal, it was self-reflective. She was writing as much about herself and the politics of canon formation and literary decline . . .

Martinson: I think also it was *Scoundrel* time. She waited twenty-six years to write about her performance before HUAC, thinking that was a safe distance from the time itself, that she couldn't be accused of being self-heroic or all those things because she had waited so long. There's letter after letter after letter saying, "Please, Lillian, write about HUAC." But she wouldn't do it. She tried, but couldn't do it. Finally, in 1976 when she was seventy-one years old, she decided, "Okay. I'm going write about it." And then, everybody erupted because she did. She blamed the left, she blamed the right, she blamed anybody in the center. They say she falsified history, though she makes it real clear, "This is what I remember. This isn't necessarily a historical document." She says it seventy-five times in the book itself, so it wasn't a hidden subtext. But I think that's really when she fell, because then everybody just was on her for everything. And I'm sad about that only because it came when she could least defend herself. That was when she had her first strokes; that's when she really went into the decline of old age and started suing everybody in sight. I mean, she just really lost herself after the publication of that and was not able to accept those attacks, and in some ways I see that with Williams, too. The attack on his plays came at exactly the time when he wasn't in a position to defend himself in a way that could reclaim his reputation. And now after their deaths there is this attempt to say these two people were really important in the twentieth century in drama and in other kinds of ways, and now we can look at them. But the public still doesn't, necessarily. When I said I was coming to a Williams conference to talk about Hellman, more than one person rolled their eyes and said, "Boy, *that* ought to be great." And yet none of them had seen the films. None of them had seen the plays. It's all this sort of cultural assumption.

¶32 **Brantley:** Someone called Williams's *Memoirs* the memoirs of self-indictment. I think it would be interesting for a moment, since I don't know if everyone knows exactly what Hellman proposed to do with *Streetcar*, to talk about that. She was called in to make it acceptable to Breen (The Production Code Administration), to simply write different variations of how the rape might be suggested or handled. She said she never understood why people liked Birdie so much in *The Little Foxes*. She had no patience with Birdie. [*Laughing.*] Birdie is something of a Blanche character, and so what she proposes to do with Blanche is to make her seem even more unstable and to suggest that the rape is all in her head—Nancy Tischler brings this out—and she proposed several scenarios to do that. In a sense, I think, we can be grateful that, at that point, she was pulled off the project, or actually the rights were sold to Warner Brothers instead of her completing the project.

¶33 **Martinson:** Of course, last night, there was a one-act play that prefigured *Streetcar*, called *Interior: Panic*. Blanche was imagining the rape, and so I thought that was *really* fascinating because at least early on that was what Williams had done with that character. And Birdie and Blanche are very much alike to a certain extent. Birdie, Hellman's mother Julia, was beautiful and little and effete and a Southern belle . . . she was the Old South in a greedy kind of way because this Banana Republic family of Hellman's had come in and sort of bought up New Orleans and were *pretending* to be Old South, but Julia was the real thing. Hellman had a hard time with that perception of being the kind of woman that could only sort of flutter around and make trouble for everybody else in her ineffectual ways. And she wouldn't be really good with Blanche. I think she would make Blanche too weak.

¶34 **Palmer:** Well, I was just going to speak about Geoffrey Shurlock's role, the man who worked with Breen in the Production Code Administration. When they first negotiated the property, it was one of their suggestions. And

of course Kazan wound up finessing everybody by just sort of saying, you know, “Either you do it the way that we want to do it, or forget it.” And that was never really resolved. There was never a letter from Breen saying that he accepts the rape. It’s just when the picture came out, there it was . . . sort of.

Tischler: Yeah, sort of. With the fire hose. [*Laughter*]

¶135 **Martinson:** I think this also brings out an important point about film. At least in the 1947 hearings in Washington, D.C. (and Hellman’s own hearing wasn’t until 1952), with the “Hollywood Ten,” the idea was that these screenwriters had pushed a communist influence all the way through the film. And yet, you go into the Margaret Herrick library at the motion picture archives, and what you see is that those producers and that Hays Office had a real grip on every single word in every single script. You had to negotiate everything from the trash on the stage to *any* kind of sexual thing. In one scene in, I think, *Dead End*, Hellman had two characters in front of a hotel, and the idea was they may have been there the night before, and so they couldn’t even stand in front of the hotel because that might be sort of a terrible thing for the audience. And they had to keep cleaning up the stage because New York slums weren’t supposed to look very dirty, nor were they supposed to look like somehow they were unkempt, that the government had somehow abandoned these children, so even Goldwyn would go around with brooms, tidying things up because it was too socially outrageous. So it would have been very, very difficult for those screenwriters to get much in of any kind of sensibility, and yet that was the whole premise . . .

Palmer: Yes. The only time they get it in is when Russia’s our friend.

Martinson: That’s right, and they had to get it in fast.

¶136 **Palmer:** In a war. And then Hollywood is asked to make pro-Russia movies. That’s why *North Star* gets made the way it was—celebrates all the joys of Communism and collective farms under Uncle Joe. It’s really just sort of funny . . .

Martinson: And *Mission to Moscow*, and then everybody that wrote those films was called before HUAC, even though they had done so at the behest of the government. So if you ever want to feel paranoid, you’ve got to get into those letters because that’s where you’ll find the paranoia.

¶137 **Tischler:** You know, I think we should invite everybody to join in this, so let’s have your questions.

From Audience: When did Lillian Hellman die?

Martinson: 1984 . . . but she had had her first stroke in 1976, and from that point on she was in and out of public life.

¶138 **Virginia Spencer Carr [from audience]:** I once interviewed Mary McCarthy. . . and Lillian Hellman wrote me and asked if I would please review my materials and see if I had any evidence of Mary McCarthy lying . . . [*Laughter*] She wanted me to provide the materials. I said if I had any evidence of her lying to me directly, of course I would, but you know, there was no evidence . . .

Martinson: That's really very funny. I would love to have known that for my Hellman biography. I have this one paragraph in the biography, which shows her at her worst. There are fifteen lawsuits going on, from the \$1.14 that the telephone company on Martha's Vineyard had cheated her out of, to the trash, repair guy . . . I mean it was just awful. But she was desperate to find some evidence of McCarthy also lying. She did say something funny, though. You brought it up in that interview in 1964—somebody criticized Tennessee Williams . . . Mary McCarthy says, "I have a hunch that no matter what happens, Tennessee will wind up famous and rich." And Lillian Hellman's response was, "I have the same hunch about Mary McCarthy." [*Laughter*] So, I mean, even then in 1964 there was some tension between the two. I interviewed Carol Gelderman, the great biographer of Mary McCarthy, and she said, "Well, you can't believe anything Lillian Hellman ever said. She's a liar." And I said, "How can you buy in to your subject matter's point of view without evidence?" So we had kind of an argument going, and that was very early on in the biography.

¶39 **Tischler:** Yes, Brian.

Brian Parker [from audience]: I just recently re-read *Autumn Garden*, and it didn't seem to me very like Williams or very like Chekhov. I know Gassner said the difference between Hellman and Chekhov is that Chekhov loved his characters and Hellman didn't. I'm interested here in the Hammet connection. Was Hammet around when she wrote that play?

Brantley: Well, he thought that was their best play, so to speak . . . [*Laughing*] *their* best play.

Martinson: Hammett wrote the character Grigg's last speech in *Autumn Garden*—the one that brings the theme together. Hellman wrote the speech twice, and Hammet rejected it both times, and so she said, "Well, you do it." And he did it, and she gave him fifteen percent of the royalties for the rest of his life. At that time it was important because he had been blacklisted, and every cent he got went to the IRS for the rest of his life. So he got fifteen percent of the royalties under the table for the rest of his life so he could have some cash. Don't you think Crossman was patterned on Hammett in some sad and horrible way? In any event, she dedicated the play to Hammett.

Brantley: The business about "frittering away your life."

¶40 **Parker [from audience]:** I was thinking about Barton's comment on the structure of the earlier plays, how they reveal the influence of Hammet rather than the well-made play. I'd say, actually, the detective genre seems to be in play here.

Palmer: Oh yes, right. I mean, it's very similar to Hammet's fiction. There is, of course, similarity. I hadn't thought about that, but that's really absolutely true.

Martinson: Hammett helped her plot, for sure, and he was a terrific editor. In the archives we find out that he wasn't an editor who would change things himself, but he would send it back, saying: "You've *got* to make this dialogue sharper. You've *got* to cut out this." Or he'd draw a diagram, which he did for *Autumn Garden*, suggesting that the action had to have a central pivotal kind of point. And it was Hammet that drew the diagram, and then of course, Hellman had to carry it out. . . .

Brantley: Some of the reviewers would point to the Williams-esque flourishes, of the set in a boarding house, for instance . . . but Hellman grew up in a boarding house in New Orleans, so some of those charges don't bear up.

¶41 **Tischler:** It's funny to hear you all talking about plot structure and so forth. That was so hard for Williams. [Laughter] I mean, there was no clear place to begin, no clear place to end, and the middle, you know, just kind of took care of itself. Because once he put the characters on stage, he thought that they would work out their drama. Although Audrey Wood gave a lot of advice, she never said, "Try to get your plot under control."

Brantley: In a conversation with Dodson Rader in '81, Williams said—this was with the revival of *The Little Foxes*—that "Lillian Hellman is a funny woman and a skillful playwright. Several of her plays are enormously skillful." That's perhaps the highest compliment he paid to her in his career, and I think he's speaking to that skill, that tightness of construction that he struggled with much more.

Tischler: Oh yes, he would put a narrator at each end and, you know, turn it into a book or something . . . [Laughter] . . . so that he could get some kind of form to it.

¶42 **Martinson:** But I have to say, Hellman was enormously skeptical about other playwrights and what they were doing, but never about Williams. Some of the later plays she didn't like, but she always knew that the man with the "sanded fingertips" knew drama when he saw it, and he could put it on stage in a way that she knew she couldn't. And she was enormously admiring of that. Hammett taught her structure. He was a perfectionist in building a plot, when he got off the bottle long enough. But the *Maltese Falcon*, when they made that into a film, is almost exactly taken from Hammett's novel. It was so well constructed that it was just on the page as a screenplay almost immediately.

Palmer: Yes, you can see that novel is very well put together. In the other versions that precede the '41 Huston version, with John Huston doing the screenwriting, he's following Hammett very closely, but the other versions don't, and they're really pretty terrible.

Martinson: Is that right?

Palmer: Right, *Satan Met a Lady* is the worst of the other two, and it's very badly put together.

¶43 **Martinson:** And I suppose I should say that some critics say that Hammett wrote Hellman's plays, and he didn't . . . though Hammett's grand daughter told me, and I agree with her, that with the first play, which is *The Children's Hour*, Hammett *really* had a hand in that. He went over it line by line with Hellman. She was twenty-eight years old and getting on his nerves, and he thought that if he put her to work he could be free to go about his business. And he worked line by line. Somebody even said that he typed her drafts. In any case, Hammett was certainly no saint, and it takes a saint to type somebody else's drafts. But he really worked with her on that one, and then he sort of said, "Okay, you're on your own." And that's when she did that terrible play . . .

Palmer: *Days to Come*. It was so awful.

Martinson: What she did was think, “Okay, here’s the basic plot; I’ll just go with it,” almost like a Williams conception. . . . “I want some love stories going on. I want some sexual intrigue. I want some cheating to go on here.” And she packed it with about twenty subplots that never converge. Her idea was to show the complexity of all of life. But that demonstrates how young and naïve at that point she was, whereas Williams could show that complexity without seeming to. Hellman could not. She had to stick to her theme and let it move in that direction.

¶44 **Palmer:** I think Williams’s sense of character is just so much more profound, and that’s what Nancy was saying that really makes it work better. You can see that scene in a play like *The Searching Wind*, which we haven’t mentioned . . .

Martinson: Oh, I love that play.

Palmer: . . . which is interesting in its dramatic construction because it takes three different moments in time, but it still doesn’t have characters who are particularly deep.

Martinson: Maybe Cassie . . . I know, you’re right. Not deep.

Brantley: One of Hellman’s previous biographers—I think it was Carl Rollyson—said that her plays are wonderful when you’re watching them; they just don’t stay with you. They don’t resonate with you the same way Williams’s do. The characters don’t live, breathe, act . . . and I think that’s a really fair assessment because she’s quite a watchable playwright . . . even bad Hellman is quite watchable.

¶45 **Martinson:** One of the things that Hellman was always disappointed in was her audience’s response. She meant for them to recognize themselves in her characters. And they seldom did. They’d say, “Oh, that Regina. What a bitch!” Those in the audience didn’t realize that they, too, could be greedy and rapacious and shrewd. Hellman was always upset about that. And I think that in some ways people say the same of Williams—that we are not his characters, that we cannot feel the enormous poetics and dramas of the characters in his plays. But I think that one of the things Williams did accomplish is that in our heart of hearts, we walk out of the theatre knowing that we’ve just seen the worst part of ourselves sort of paraded on stage. We can walk out of a Hellman drama thinking that she’s writing about someone else that’s not us. I think that may be one of the dramatic distances.

Tischler: Would you agree with the idea that Hellman’s characters are much more judgmental than Williams’s in the sense that they’re always clearly good or bad, whereas with Williams, it’s never quite clear? I know my husband came out of *A Streetcar Named Desire* saying, “You know, there’s a lot to be said for the Kowalskis’ point of view.” [*Laughter*] Because he knew my mother. [*More laughter*] And, you know, it’s hard to hate him.

Palmer: There are a couple of exceptions. I would say Zan, in *Little Foxes*, whom Hellman wanted the audience to think of as sort of a silly idiot, winds up being sort of the heroine at the end of the play. I think there’s a duality to her because she leaves Mother behind, and what Hellman wanted was the audience to think that, “Well, what a petty form of rebellion. I mean, how long are you going to be away? About an hour? And then come back?” But there’s more to Zan, I think, than that. But I think that’s more or less an exception to the general rule.

Martinson: I don't know. Regina I really relate to.

Brantley: I like Regina.

Martinson: And I think that one of Hellman's disappointments is that not enough people saw that Regina had a point, you know. Yes, she's vicious and yes, she's cunning and cold, but she is also very funny. And her brothers were appalling, and she called them on it. And so, I'm always sort of there saying to myself, "Well, go Regina!" And I think that a lot of people, at the time that it was written, didn't want to go there and so didn't.

Brantley: Although Hellman did something remarkable in that play, it's really what Alfred Hitchcock does in some of his films. It's awful that Regina is letting Horace die, but you can't stand it if he doesn't die. [Laughing.]

¶46 **[From audience]:** I'm wondering about what you've been saying about the contrast between Williams and Hellman as playwrights, Hellman being more, perhaps, plot-driven—and Williams more character-driven, having more problems with plot. It seems to me that an analogy could be drawn between what we usually think of as the mainstream films formula—taught by those people who teach screenplay writing and say you must do this in it and you must build so much of that in it—and what we think of as the art-house films or independent films.

Palmer: I think that's absolutely right. I mean, in Hollywood screenwriting manuals, what drives the film is supposed to be narrative, and the characters are functions of the narrative, and so there's no excess in terms of developing character. Character is developed insofar as it drives the narrative. And what we normally think of as art cinema does just the opposite; it tends to diffuse what David Borbo calls non-goal-oriented plots where there's sort of a plot, but it's not oriented toward some goal, and there's much more interest in character. I think that's absolutely right. I think there are real connections between Williams and the art film in the 50s.

Martinson: I would say that that is right, but that in Hellman's memoirs, it's the characters that move it, not the plot, and that's what killed the critics because they wanted to see every aspect of Hellman's life drawn out. I mean, she's criticized for being "the queen of omission." [Laughter] And yet, try to write your life without omitting some things. Of course one of the criticisms comes from Gore Vidal, who said, "Has anyone ever seen them [Hellman and Hammet] together?" [Laughter] You know, implying that he was a construct of Hellman's imagination. But I think as a woman, all the men in my life are constructs of my imagination in some way, and especially when you think of someone that has died, or when you've become widowed, or whatever, that person lives in a different realm of the mind than someone living with you day to day. Not that I think that "she became Williams in some way," but she got that poetic sense of psychology in her memoirs that she did not have in her plays. Would you agree with that?

Brantley: I agree.

Palmer: Oh yes. I think her memoirs are absolutely fascinating.

Brantley: You can see her moving in that direction with *My Mother, My Father and Me*.

¶147 **Palmer:** . . . and so politically oriented as to draw these vitriolic attacks from the right-wing historians like Paul Johnson. I think that the chapter in his book on this is just unbelievable.

Brantley: . . . *Intellectuals*. “Lies, Damned Lies and Lillian Hellman” is the title of it. [*Laughter*]

Martinson: The worst one for me was the article William F. Buckley wrote, after Hellman and Jane Fonda presented the Academy Award to the winner of the Best Documentary of 1977. Hellman also received a special award herself for being Lillian Hellman. And she got up and gave a speech, and of course Hollywood loved it because they hated the blacklist. But Buckley wrote a column entitled, “Who is the Ugliest of Them All?” and called upon her lack of what he considered a good physical presence to damn her, and that was a hard one to take. He would never be able to publish it, now. In 1977 it was different, and we’ve gotten much more subtle with that kind of thing.

¶148 **[From audience]:** How did she work with her stage directors?

Martinson: Herman Shumlin was her first one, and they had an affair . . . I mean, it was one of the ongoing ones . . . [*Laughter*] . . . for years and years and years . . .

Palmer: It was Thursday. [*Laughter*]

Martinson: They were absolutely great together. Both of them had the same political realist philosophy. He was great at what he did. In fact, one of the best things about doing a biography—and I think you’d agree with this—is I fell in love with Herman Shumlin when I was studying him, and I thought, “There is no biography on Shumlin. How could that be?” And I am *not* volunteering to do one, by the way. But he was a great Broadway director, and he directed almost all of Hellman’s plays. They had a falling out, and she never found a director again that she could work with well. She tried it herself, but she was horrible. She just ordered actors about, and then she tried Harold Clurman. Whoever was directing, she took notes and made demands and would roll her eyes when the actors were rehearsing it and all these other things. And of course the actor can’t *do* anything when she’s making all these gestures. She was an absolute nightmare to work with, except for Shumlin . . . the two of them really hit it off.

¶149 **[From audience]:** It seems that’s a difference between the two of them. Williams had a directorial stance embedded in everything. In a sense, she was alienated from that whole aspect.

Martinson: She was. She was alienated from the idea of what an actor or an actress could do. She had her vision of the play, and that’s what should be on stage. And of course, that isn’t what happened on stage. She was really, really tough on directors. On the other hand, in film, she loved William Wyler, and they worked wonderfully together.

Palmer: Yes . . . I was going to point that out that when she made both the versions of *Children’s Hour*, they worked together with great cooperation. And then *Little Foxes*, of course, is another Wyler film. He didn’t do *Watch on the Rhine*. Someone else did that. I’ve forgotten who.

Martinson: Herman Shumlin.

Brantley: She was at ease with taking her work from one medium to the other, with *Little Foxes*, for instance, in creating the love interest for Alexandra . . . for she understood the difference in the mediums and didn't struggle with them in the same way that some adaptors have.

¶150 **Tischler:** You think that's equally true with Williams? I never felt he was as comfortable with film as he was the stage.

Palmer: No. No.

Brantley: Not at all.

Tischler: Because he seemed to *feel* the stage. There was such a visual, tactile sense about what the costuming would be, you know, where the lights were—the tone of voice. I noticed last night in those plays, the music that was weaving in and out and so forth. It was all of this. He wasn't comfortable with just the words, or just the story. He really wanted all of that going on.

Palmer: Right. Well, he was so sensitive to every detail. His plays were fragile structures to him. *Glass Menagerie* is a wonderful example. When the film adaptation was done, there was a decision made, to which Williams agreed, that there should be a happier ending. And then there was a negotiation about how “shadowy” should be the shadowy gentleman caller. Should he be presented in profile? Should he have a name? How many seconds should he be on screen? And all that. And then Williams negotiated all of these details. He didn't win in the end, although he came close to getting what he wanted.

Tischler: But then he wrote that terrible letter . . .

Palmer: Well, he went on, and he publicly denounced the film to Dorothy Kilgallen, which was not a very smart move. . . [Laughter] . . . and then had to make a penitential journey to Hollywood and sit in the hotel in Beverly Hills and write a retraction. It's an interesting text, by the way.

¶151 **Martinson:** I think an interesting thing here is Hellman also did *The Chase* in 1961, and she had a terrible time with it. Terrible because she wasn't in charge, she was supposed to do an adaptation . . . Spiegel . . . is it Spiegel?

Palmer: Yes. Sam Spiegel.

Martinson: Yes. Sam Spiegel was *very* much involved, and she wanted to do one thing; he wanted to do another. Depending on what you read about that film, everybody's pointing a finger at everyone else . . . Marlon Brando was in it . . . also . . .

Palmer: . . . Robert Redford . . .

Martinson: She considered it a wonderful film; critics knew it wasn't. And that was it for her in Hollywood. She said she couldn't any longer collaborate. And I think that's essentially true about Hellman: she was not a collaborator. She wasn't a give-and-taker. She had left Hollywood, and she could no longer work there. When Fred Zimmerman did *Julia* in 1976, she just said, “I can't do it. You do it. Fine!” Well, you know, anybody that

knows Hellman knows “fine” is completely a lie, and so, she again intervened on everything from the hairstyles of the actresses to who was going to be called whom and all this kind of thing. In one epistolary battle, Zimmerman had written Hellman a letter, and then later, on his copy of it, he put, “Madam, you are a pain in the ass.” [Laughter] But he didn’t send it [Laughter], which I think does show that by that time—that was 1977—she was beginning to be really hard to get along with . . . yet she loved her work. She loved it, and she didn’t want anybody else’s fingerprints on it, and that, of course, made it a real problem in both the theatrical and the film world.

¶152 **Tischler:** Well, that is different, in a lot of ways, from Williams because a lot of those letters about *Baby Doll* between him and Kazan are amazing letters because he’s willing to take whole scenes from Kazan and move them (such as the frog-gigging sequence) and to question whether to use it, what would it mean, and on and on. And he liked that sense of collaboration as that was what theatre’s about.

Martinson: Hellman liked collaborating with Shumlin, I think, and with Wyler on the films. Wyler changed a scene in *The Little Foxes*. He inserted a shaving scene with Oscar and his son Leo that was brilliant. And Hellman agreed with critics that Wyler’s movie was better than her play. It was better because Wyler moved things around, changed it for film. When she worked with Wyler she was young and not so set in her ways.

Palmer: He had a great visual sense as a director, I think, that really helped her stage her drama better . . .

Martinson: I agree.

[From audience]: [Indistinct]. . . if she had Kazan to direct it. [Laughter]

Martinson: I think she would have loved it before the political thing, really, I mean, because she had enormous respect for him in the early letters, and then that was that.

¶153 **Brantley:** She made one indirect compliment to Williams that came out in a biography that was done a few years back for PBS, *The Lives of Lillian Hellman*. Kitty Carlisle Hart says that Hellman was in the hospital, and she had a sign placed on the door: “Gentleman Callers Only.” [Laughter]

Martinson: Yeah, that’s true. That’s true. She also had a bar set up at ICU, which I think is *really* an achievement. [Laughter]

¶154 **Tischler:** Any final thoughts from each of you? Anything that’s left unsaid? Any questions left unasked?

Audience: I would like to know what the panel is going to write next. I mean, you have finished your book . . .

Martinson: I turned it in March 1st [ed. note: the biography is now out].

Brantley: I’ve been working on a book on Pauline Kael for a long time. It may some day see the light of day.

Tischler: And you’re working on five books?

Palmer: Well, Robert Bray and I are finishing the films book on Tennessee Williams, but I'm also writing a book on David Cronenberg at the moment, so . . .

Martinson: David or Louis?

Palmer: David. David Cronenberg. Speaking of grotesque.

¶55 **[From audience]:** What about you, Nancy?

Tischler: Oh, I'm leaving the Williams field, so volume three is going to be a one-man operation with Al Devlin, only. And I've gotten too old to follow another person's old age.

Martinson: Oh, that's tough. I agree.

Tischler: So, yes, the time has come. I figured out, I have spent fifty years on Williams. You know, he deserved it, but that's enough.

Martinson: I have a question. Do you dream about him?

Tischler: No. *[Laughter]*

Brantley: It would be impossible to do a panel like this without the kind of work that Nancy has done . . .

Martinson: I agree.

Palmer: Yes.

Brantley: . . . with these letters, which are just beautiful.

Tischler: Thank you. I would like to pay tribute to somebody out there in the hall before we finish up. I don't know whether you know how much hard work Robert Bray puts into all of this, but it is astonishing. And so many people change their minds at the last minute, or come as I did with notes rather than preparation, and he's really wonderful. He does it with such grace and generosity, so I think he deserves . . . *[Applause]* And I would also like to thank the panel who made it unnecessary to have a moderator. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Notes

¹ From *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (4), Margaret A. Van Antwerp and Sally Johns, eds., *Tennessee Williams* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1984) 255.