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ICarbs, Volume 3, Issue 1

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ICarbs

VOL. III, NO. 1

SUMMER-FALL, 1976

Ralph E. McCoy / *Sidney E. Matthews*

John Howard Lawson / *John Howard Lawson*

Lee E. Lowenfish

Gary Carr

Henry Miller / *Elmer Gertz*

Richard Aldington / *Norman T. Gates*

Eliot & Graves / *Richard F. Peterson*

Cairo, Illinois / *Johnetta Jones*



ICarbS*

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*ICarbS is the National Union Catalog symbol for Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

The editors of *ICarbS* are particularly grateful to John Howard Lawson himself not only for contributing to this issue a portion of his otherwise unpublished memoirs, but also for his permission to other writers to examine his papers and to quote from their contents.

Thanks are due, too, to Mordecai Gorelik for his permission to reproduce two of his original set designs for John Howard Lawson's *Processional!* now in Morris Library's Special Collections. (The design on the cover is for Act I; the one on page 38 is for Act IV.)

Also, the editors thank Elmer Gertz for sharing his Henry Miller correspondence. An annotated edition of the Henry Miller-Elmer Gertz correspondence will be published by the Southern Illinois University Press in 1977.

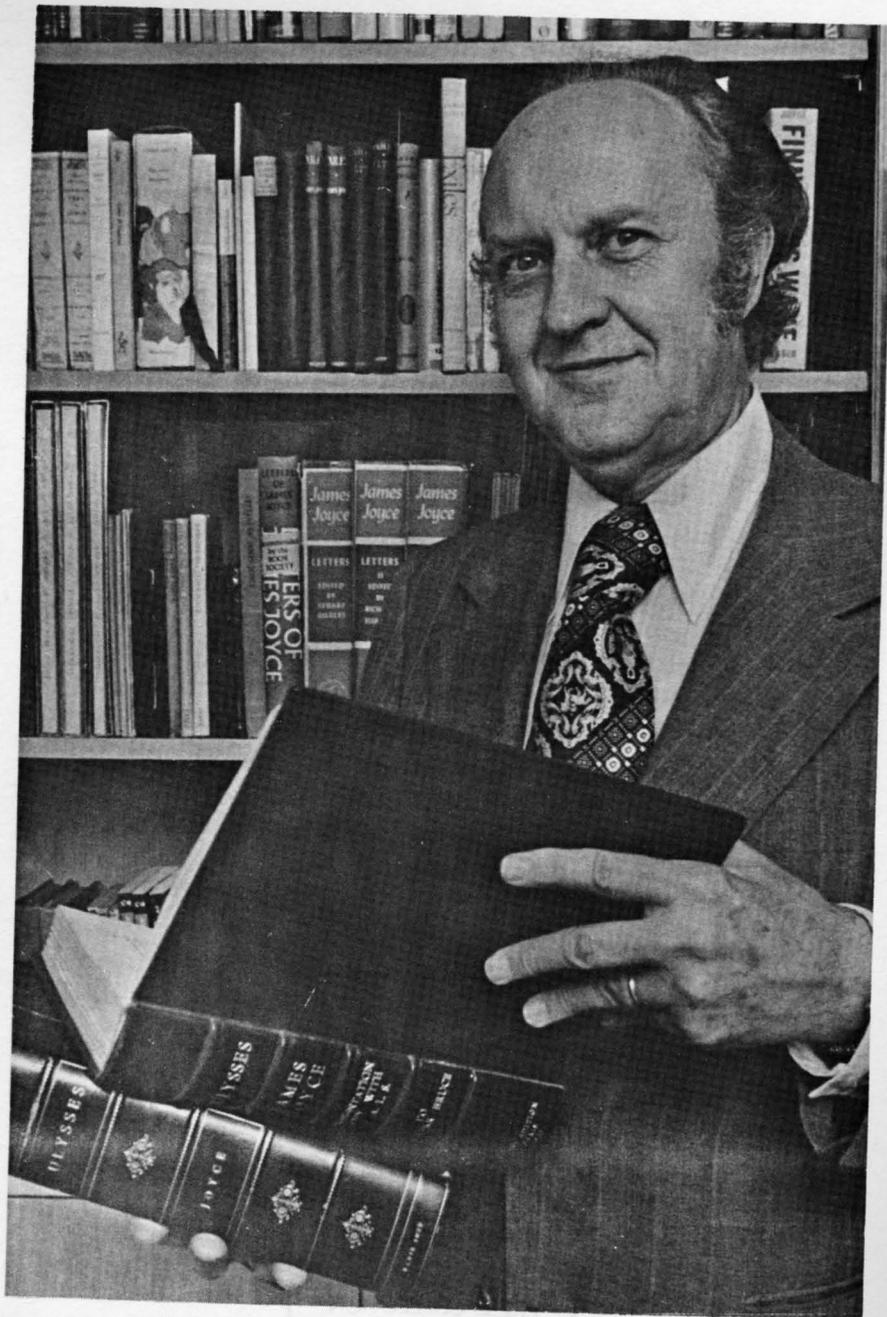
The Friends of Morris Library welcome Kenneth G. Peterson as new Dean of Library Affairs.

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Editors: David V. Koch, Alan M. Cohn, Kenneth W. Duckett.
Editorial Assistant: Dorothy Garsky. Circulation: Glennie King.

This issue of *ICarbS* is dedicated to Ralph E. McCoy, who retired the first of March after serving as head (under various titles) of libraries and related operations at Southern Illinois University for nearly twenty-one years. On the next pages, Sidney Matthews reviews Dean McCoy's career in detail. Appropriately, the main theme of most of the other articles this time is intellectual freedom, for this is one of Dean McCoy's major professional interests.





*Ralph E. McCoy with Croessmann Joyce collection.
(Courtesy Southern Illinoisan)*

The Not-So-Retiring Ralph E. McCoy

Sidney E. Matthews

When Ralph Edward McCoy left the University of Illinois Library in 1955, he headed south to the “other Illinois” popularly called “Egypt” and to “Delyte’s new suitcase college.” Southern Illinois University, led by President Delyte W. Morris, was growing faster than any other major university and was outgrowing its faculty, its buildings, its campus, and the town of Carbondale. A new library building was under construction to replace the old Wheeler Hall, a building dating back to the turn of the century.

President Morris wanted a librarian to build a great research collection, and Ralph McCoy had prepared carefully for this opportunity. Academically, he had an A.B. from Illinois Wesleyan University, B.S.L.S. and M.S. from the University of Illinois, and a doctorate to be conferred the following year (1956) by the University of Illinois. But the new librarian brought more than “book learning” with him. His background included public school teaching, university library experience, and World War II service. After graduating from Illinois Wesleyan University with a degree in history, he was teacher/librarian at Marissa, Illinois, for two years; then he enrolled in Graduate Library School, University of Illinois, for his first library degree. While earning this degree, he was also Assistant Librarian in the College of Agriculture library.

Ralph McCoy’s first experience at collecting a million books was during 1942-43 as director of the Victory Book Drive for Illinois. This activity took him over the entire state, introduced him to many people, and perhaps kindled the spark to collect another million volumes.

In 1943, he was drafted into the famed 42nd Rainbow Infantry Division as a rifleman and trained in Oklahoma. After basic training, Private McCoy was selected for Officers Candidate School at Camp

Lee, Virginia (now Fort Lee). After receiving his commission as 2nd Lieutenant, he was stationed at Camp Lee as a writer and assisted with writing many Army manuals. He was promoted to Captain and received an honorable discharge in May 1946. His Commanding Officer requested him to stay on as a civilian to organize and run the Quartermaster Corps' library. This he did until 1948.

Returning to his native Illinois and the university at Urbana, he devoted the period 1948-55 to librarianship and study. He was librarian and Assistant Professor at the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, earned a Master of Science degree, and completed work on a doctorate. His dissertation was *Banned in Boston: Development of Literary Censorship in Massachusetts*. Censorship had become an area of personal interest when he was a senior student editor of the school paper at Illinois Wesleyan—and had an entire issue of the paper burned by an irate University President—and later developed into his specialized forte. Now, he is one of the country's foremost authorities on freedom of the press and owns one of the finest personal libraries in the English language on freedom of the press.

In 1955, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale had about 4,000 students, no graduate programs or professional schools. Now, it has over 21,000 students, twenty doctoral programs, scores of master's programs, and two professional schools—law and medicine. Keeping pace with the University's growth, the library now has more than 1.8 million volumes and soon will exceed 2 million. An astounding increase! Other library figures are just as staggering. The total library budget in 1955 was \$252,148; today, \$2,256,309 or an increase of 895%.

One of Dr. McCoy's first priorities was not only to fill the new library building, but also to fill it well with scholarly research material. Rare books and manuscripts, the heart of research in some fields, would also attract scholars. Purchases, gifts, and donations from estates and the New York Mercantile Library tripled the library's book volume between 1957 and 1962.

To help meet his first priority Dr. McCoy knew he would need "friends"; so, following a plan used successfully at other major universities, a "friends" group was proposed for the university libraries. On 17 October 1960 eighty-five interested area residents, bibliophiles, faculty members, and alumni met to organize The

Friends of the Southern Illinois University Library. Their cooperation and active participation has aided the university's libraries in the acquisition of not only rare books and manuscripts, but also specialized research aids. Since that humble beginning, The Friends have organized an active group on the Edwardsville as well as the Carbondale campus, with Morris Library's Friends today numbering over four hundred.

While the library was still under construction, Charles E. Feinberg, a Detroit oil executive and philanthropist, visited the campus. A collector of Walt Whitman material, he came to SIU-C to visit Dr. Robert D. Faner who had just written the book *Walt Whitman and Opera*. While Feinberg was on campus, Dr. McCoy gave him a tour of the new library. One of Feinberg's first questions was, "Where is the rare book room?"

"No one had thought of rare books and manuscripts," McCoy recalled. He told Feinberg the library had no such room.

"Every library must have one," Feinberg answered. "If you set aside a room, I'll help you fill it."

Overnight a staff conference room was converted to a rare book room.

Feinberg was as good as his word. He did help fill the room by giving items from his personal collection and by donating funds to buy other items.

One of the library's most famous collections came from a shy, retiring, Southern Illinois optometrist, Dr. Harley K. Croessmann of DuQuoin. His James Joyce collection is one of the most comprehensive gatherings of printed Joyce material and, as well, contains correspondence by the Irish author and papers of such Joyce scholars and biographers as Stuart Gilbert, Herbert Gorman, Georg Goyert, and Frank Budgen. Dr. Croessmann, who called himself a "poor man in a millionaire's hobby," was a life-long resident of DuQuoin and never owned a car or television set. But, from his home, over more than three decades, he built up his outstanding collection. He once outbid Feinberg—whom he later met at SIU-C—for some valuable Joyce papers.

Another of the library's early manuscript collections tracked down by Dr. McCoy was the papers of Lennox Robinson, long-time director of Ireland's Abbey Theatre. This collection includes lengthy correspondence with William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory. Other

outstanding manuscript areas are modern American, British, and Irish literature and theater, and modern philosophy.

At the same time, Dr. McCoy saw to it that Morris Library was responsive to a more local—though appropriate—interest in the history of printing and publication within Illinois. It now is accumulating early Illinois imprints, particularly those dealing with “Egypt” and the Mississippi Valley region. In conjunction with the growth of Illinois imprint material, the University Archives is engaged in an extensive program of collecting historical manuscripts of both local and national importance.

In the late fifties and early sixties there was no talk of a law school, but Dr. McCoy urged that law material be acquired for course work in education, history, political science, government, and economics. Through careful planning for these programs and *en bloc* purchases of two law libraries, a law library was established. So, when the School of Law was authorized in the early 1970s, the law collection was on hand and was a significant factor in the school’s establishment and rapid accreditation.

Dr. McCoy was special assistant to the Vice-President for Planning for one year (1963-64) and over the years he has served on fourteen committees and/or councils. He taught in the Instructional Materials Department and annually since 1965 has offered a course in “Freedom of the Press” for the School of Journalism. In addition, he served on many doctoral and master’s committees.

As the university moved on so did Morris Library in a uniquely modern way. At the circulation desk, on the first floor, a computer base circulation system—a pioneering venture in automation in libraries—was installed in 1965. This modern bit of technology attracted visitors from all over the world. The system was, and is still, highly successful with thirty-two libraries copying the concept in part or *in toto*. Morris Library also was an early participant in the Ohio College Library Center (OCLC), in Columbus, Ohio, an extensive, on-line cataloguing system with, now, over 400 participating libraries.

One basic idea at SIU-C which was identical to Dr. McCoy’s philosophy was service to the area, to the state, and to the nation. Dr. McCoy served as president of the Illinois Library Association, 1956; and president of the Association of College and Research Libraries, 1966. His activities in the Illinois Library Association,

American Library Association (A.L.A.), Association of Research Libraries, and Center for Research Libraries are too numerous to mention. He also found time to belong to the Caxton Club, Chicago; the A.A.U.P.; the boards of the Carbondale Public Library and the Shawnee Library System, Carterville; the Illinois State Archives Advisory Council; the Illinois State Board of Higher Education’s Audio-Visual Committee and Committee on Libraries, and other professional and educational organizations.

Throughout his academic and professional career, Dr. McCoy has been a prolific writer. In high school, he was editor of the yearbook; in college, editor of the college newspaper; as a librarian, editor of *Illinois Libraries* (1939-43) and *Illinois Library Record* (1948-50), and author of four books and over twenty articles in educational and professional journals.

Dean McCoy’s contribution to librarianship and scholarship has been recognized over the years. In 1961, the Illinois Library Association presented him with its “Outstanding Contribution to Library Profession” award. His major work, *Freedom of the Press: An Annotated Bibliography* (1969) is, as stated in the A.L.A.-Scarecrow Press award it received, “a notable and indispensable reference book, which is and will continue to be a landmark in library literature.” In addition, it received the American Association of Law Libraries’ Joseph L. Andrew Bibliographic Award, and the Illinois Library Association’s Intellectual Freedom Award. A supplementary second volume will be published later this year. His description of the Theodore Schroeder collection at SIU-C (no. 8 in the libraries’ Bibliographic Contributions series) is a monument to another, earlier champion of the principles of intellectual freedom.

In May 1975, the U.S. Government Printing Office recognized Dr. McCoy with a plaque and citation letter for his “Valuable Contribution” to the Depository Library Council to the Public Printer. Membership in Beta Phi Mu, national scholastic library science fraternity, and Phi Kappa Phi, also a national honor society, along with his other accomplishments are outlined with biographical sketches in *Who’s Who in America* and the *Directory of American Scholars*.

Dr. McCoy’s priorities were completed within twenty years under nine different administrators. He built a research library in a shorter time than any other librarian in the country, acquired several

internationally renowned manuscript collections, and established Morris Library as one of the top research libraries in the nation.

He has fulfilled the prophecy of Dr. Leslie W. Dunlap, Dean of Library Administration, University of Iowa, who wrote in *College and Research Libraries*, January 1955, on the occasion of McCoy's appointment at SIU-C: ". . . the staff of the library of Southern Illinois University can look forward to many rich and rewarding achievements in the years directly ahead."

And in the process he made many friends who wish him continued good health and good books.

The One Hundred Days

John Howard Lawson

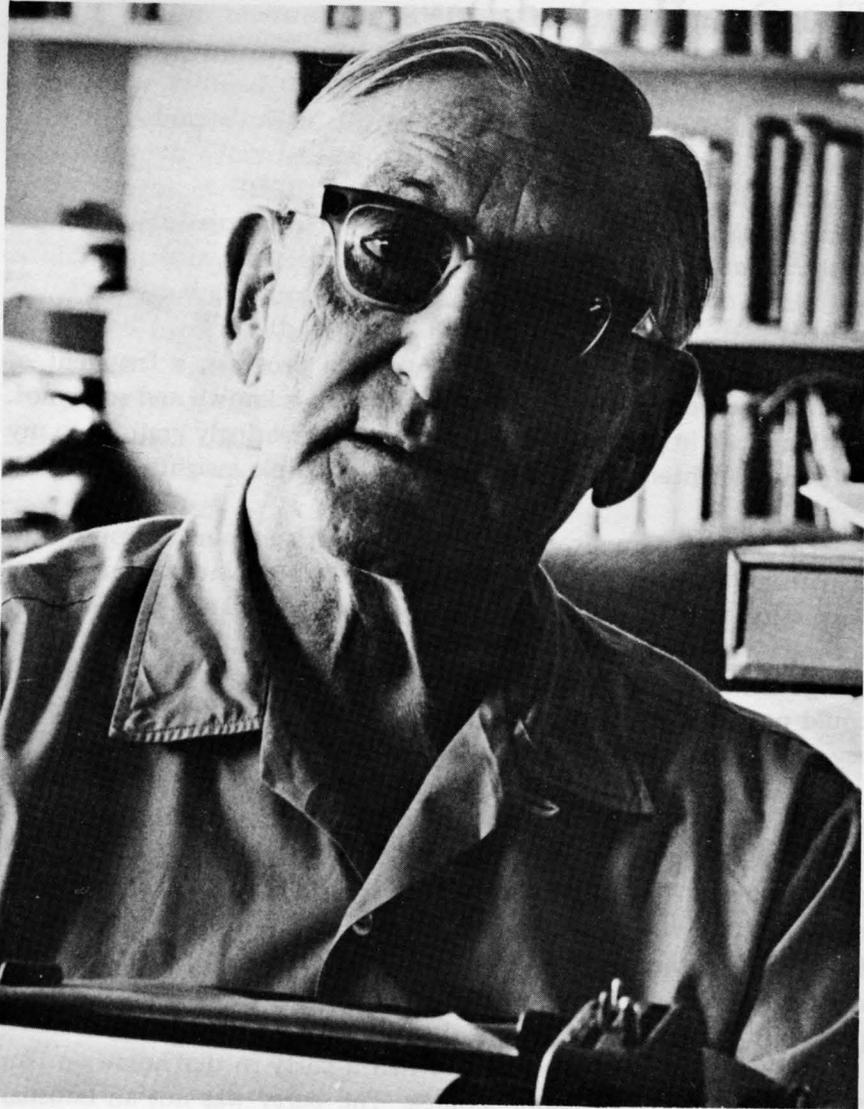
Author's Note: This is part of a work in progress, a fragment of cultural and personal history—some of which is known and some not. As this work in progress takes form, I am increasingly grateful to my wife and daughter, for their patience and multiple insights.

The first one hundred days of Roosevelt's administration was to transform my life. My own situation in this ominous year of the depression was far from desperate. I was employed at MGM, and my contract would continue for a number of months. The most striking thing about my one hundred days was to be their unexpectedness. I could not foresee the crowd of events that would so rapidly change my social awareness and my identity as a writer.

On Saturday, March 4, 1933, Roosevelt delivered his inaugural address launching the one hundred days of Congressional reform. There was a great crowd gathered in front of the Capitol, and millions listened on the radio to the voice that spoke of hope: "We have nothing to fear but fear itself. . ." I took a dim view of Roosevelt's promises. I knew that his words stirred millennial expectations born of the suffering of many people, but I saw no probability that the new president could relieve the suffering.

On that Saturday evening, we had a party in our home on San Vicente Boulevard in Santa Monica. The party was not an unusual occurrence, nor was it related to the inauguration, but there was a tension, a vibration, a rumor of things impending and unknown that made the party different from other Saturday nights.

Carlo Tresca and his wife, Margaret de Silver, were our house guests. Margaret had been one of our dearest friends ever since the early twenties, and her marriage to Tresca made him like a member of the family. He was well known as an Anarchist leader who had



John Howard Lawson.

fled from Italy in the first decade of the twentieth century and was involved in the Lawrence strike in 1912 and the Paterson strike in 1913. His first meeting with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was on May Day, 1912, on the streets of Lawrence; their marriage lasted until 1925.

Carlo and I differed in our estimate of Roosevelt. Carlo was devoted to Fiorello La Guardia, who had assisted him when he was sent to prison in 1923, and he shared La Guardia's admiration for the president. The party on the night of the inauguration was divided into two groups—Carlo led the group which held that Roosevelt would bring a revolutionary change, while I held that only the groundswell of popular protest could persuade the nation's rulers to grant serious concessions. We had discussed our differences casually, but on this night of the inauguration the estimate of Roosevelt's future course became a matter of passionate partisanship. The guests gathered around us, attracted by the unexpected intensity of the discussion.

Jim Tully took an instant dislike to Carlo. Jim was the only professional writer I had ever known who looked like a "proletarian." With his compact, muscular body, his close-cropped, bright red hair, and his face of a fighter trying against odds to last another round, he seemed like a true son of the working class. He was vague about politics; Wobblies, Anarchists, Anarcho-Syndicalists, Socialists, Communists, all of them were too highbrow and too intellectual. Now he jumped into the fray, called Carlo a charlatan, and asked me why I paid any attention to his "phoney talk." A fist fight was avoided, largely due to Carlo's restraint. But the party had turned rancid and the guests departed.

Sunday was a day of reconciliation and hangovers. For Roosevelt, it must have been a momentous day: at one o'clock on Monday morning he issued an order closing all the nation's banks and prohibiting all dealings in gold. It was evidence of the gravity of the crisis. But for us, it represented a minor inconvenience; it was impossible to cash checks.

We drove to Agua Caliente, a plush gambling resort just across the Mexican border near Tijuana. We left Carlo in San Diego: he was not an American citizen, and, although he was legally in the United States, he feared that the immigration authorities might raise objections if he left and attempted to re-enter. I was acquainted with

the management at Agua Caliente. We obtained substantial sums and gambled for a few hours. The resort was crowded with Americans whose febrile gaiety contrasted with the somber uncertainty in the United States.

When I returned to Hollywood the following week, Louis B. Mayer had called a meeting of all actors, directors, writers, and producers. He told us that American business was in danger of total breakdown. To protect our jobs and to keep the studios functioning, we were all required to take a fifty-percent cut in our salaries, regardless of contract provisions. Mayer told us that similar meetings were being held at all studios.

I was close to Mayer, and I watched his face. Tears trickled down his cheeks as he told us that his own pay would be cut in half. Mayer's tears moved me—but not to sympathy. My first thoughts were of the studio workers who belonged to unions. I was sure they had not been asked to take a cut because they would refuse, their unions would protect them, and their jobs were not in danger. And I thought back to the small, secret meetings of writers at which we had discussed the possibility of forming a guild. We had been uncertain, fearing reprisals by the producers and doubting whether the majority of writers would risk joining an organization. As Mayer talked and wept, I looked at the faces of other writers. I knew the time for a guild had come.

A small group of screen writers had already been holding meetings to discuss the possibilities of an organization to defend the economic interests of authors in the film industry. There had been differences of opinion about the practicability of organization: some felt that Roosevelt's coming to the White House would change the temper of the country and establish rights of labor which would force the motion picture companies to deal with us. I questioned this optimism, but I was less cautious than some in urging that we could, and must, form an association.

Mayer's tears now gave me a new insight into the system of power. I knew almost all the men and women in that room; Mayer was taking blatant advantage of them, just as he had misused whatever creative power they possessed. He and men like him were deliberately using the crisis for their own advantage. But they had also clarified the writers' helpless position. Up to this time, there had been a good deal of resistance to organization on the part of the

writers. Now we could move from secrecy to an open declaration. I felt a surge of affection and kinship toward all the writers who were present. We were thinking the same thoughts.

The following weekend, I met with the writers who had been most active in planning an organization, among whom were Dudley Nichols, Oliver H. P. Garrett, Ralph Bloch, and Lester Cole. These men were the initiators of the first organization of professional workers in the country's largest mass entertainment industry. I don't know why these beginnings of a new social order in Hollywood have aroused so little interest since, but I assume it is because our culture promotes an endless mystique of sex and frivolity in which film-making is a matter of "fun and games," while the history of Hollywood as a commercial and cultural monopoly is ignored.

The decision was made to call a public meeting of writers on April 6th to establish a Screen Writers' Guild (now known as the Writers Guild of America, West, Inc.). It was a decision bold enough to cause trepidation. We had descended from our ivory towers to a battleground which was unfamiliar and mined with booby traps. The notion that Hollywood authors would form and maintain a union was derided by most observers, including many of the writers themselves. I was collaborating at MGM with Larry Stallings, a mercurial, warmhearted man who wore a mask of aggressive skepticism. He was willing to support a guild, but he assured me it would be shattered in the first skirmish with the producers.

There was no doubt on anyone's part that a strike, or at least the effective threat of a strike, would be required to win recognition from the film corporations, but there were differences of opinion as to whether the national government would adopt legislation strengthening the right of workers to bargain collectively. There had never been any organization of the highly paid professionals in the industry. Actors' Equity, which had won its position in the theater through a hard strike, had attempted to organize screen actors and suffered defeat.

I had never before placed any great confidence in other writers, except for those who were my friends. I had not been interested enough to attend a meeting of the Dramatists' Guild in New York. Now I found myself arguing with passion for faith in my fellow writers. I had not realized how much the idea of the Guild meant to me until I began to speak of the indignities we experienced, the lack

of respect for our talent, the obstructions placed in the way of honest work. Our function as serious craftsmen was as important to me as our compensation, and the two aspects were bound together: economic insecurity was due in large part to the industry's failure to appreciate our contribution.

In order to bind our members together to meet the circumstances of union organization in a field where there was no trade union consciousness, we adopted an intricate "contract" to present on April 6th, devised by Lawrence W. Bielenson, who was Oliver Garrett's personal attorney, and who became the Guild's lawyer. The contract was a pledge binding each member to abide by any rules which would later be established by a vote of three-quarters of the membership. The code of rules would govern "uniform working conditions." To emphasize the prospect of a strike, everyone who signed the preliminary contract was required to pay \$100 for a strike fund. Anyone who violated a decision of three-fourths of the Guild would be subject to severe penalties, expulsion from the Guild, a fine of \$10,000, and "any other remedy given by law or equity."

When the committee asked me to be the only candidate for president, I realized that my decision would have far-reaching consequences. It would certainly mean a break with MGM, where my contract had a few more months to run. I assumed at the time that it would end my career in Hollywood. I was mistaken in this, but I sensed personal results which might affect the rest of my life. I was about to embark on an adventure in fellowship, a commitment of a kind I had never undertaken and which could never be betrayed.

Two hundred writers gathered at the Hollywood Knickerbocker Hotel. I was deeply moved as I read the preamble to the pledge with the phrase, "Writers are the creators of motion pictures." No words like this had been spoken in Hollywood. Yet by the end of the year this thought would be echoed by FDR himself and resound throughout the industry.

I realized that the men and women at this meeting were people with varying talents. They were not heroes, nor the sole "creators of motion pictures." But they had suffered the indignities of studio employment and knew the gravity of our task. As screen writers, we were faced not only with arbitrary pay cuts ordered by omnipotent producers, but with the equally arbitrary abuse of creative

work—assignments and credits given and withheld at random, work on scripts done without the knowledge of the writer—conditions affecting the most highly paid as well as the less fortunate. As I watched the audience, I realized that I had underrated my fellow writers, and so underrated myself. It was not folly to talk of our creative role. There was a spark in every one of us, and it could become a flame.

About 100 people, approximately half of those present, signed the pledge and paid the \$100 fee. I was unanimously elected to the presidency. I am the only Guild president who was so chosen. Even at that first meeting, there was a left wing and a right wing, but both sides gave me their confidence. Frances Marion was elected vice-president. She was one of the most distinguished authors of the silent period who had maintained and increased her reputation in the era of sound. Joseph I. Mankiewicz became secretary, and Ralph Bloch, treasurer.

It was an impressive group, but when the officers met after the meeting, we knew that our cause was seriously weakened without the adherence of a number of important people who had refused or escaped. We made a list of the more influential people who had avoided membership. Three members of the board joined me, and we spent a mad night, driving from house to house. In most cases we succeeded, sometimes after vehement argument, in getting the writer's reluctant signature on the pledge. One of them appeared at his front door in pajamas. It was three in the morning, and he was sleepy-eyed. He knew why we had come, and he simply asked, "Must I sign?" We nodded, and he signed.

The most convincing effect of the Guild's founding was the end of the fifty-percent cut. It could not be proved that the action of the motion picture companies was due to the Guild's presence, but almost all writers, and a great many actors and directors, felt the connection was obvious, and it brought a rapid increase in our membership.

We were engaged in a dozen delicate enterprises, requiring endless meetings of boards, committees, and the whole membership. There were continued negotiations with the Authors' League of America; we had been accepted as one of the guilds of the League, but we wanted to convince dramatists and writers of books to adopt our pledge and join us in case of a strike.

When my six months at MGM ended in May, I had no expectation of another job, and I was too engrossed in the affairs of the Guild to worry about employment. I had saved enough to carry me through the year, and the future was more weighted with suspense than it had ever been in the past. We were part of a drama which affected many lives or, more accurately, we were a subplot of a national drama, and it became clear that the next act would take place in Washington.

Roosevelt's Hundred Days saw the passage of fifteen major laws. The last of these, enacted on June 16th, was the National Industrial Recovery Act. It provided several millions for public works and was designed largely to help business by setting up "Codes of Fair Competition" which would permit industrial planning, even if it violated certain provisions of the anti-trust laws. Our attention was focused on the famous Section 7A, which guaranteed the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively. The language seemed beautifully clear, and its application to the Writers' Guild was almost as authoritative as the Ten Commandments.

There was a rush of people to join the Guild. Section 7A led the actors to follow our example. I met with a committee of actors and gave them the benefit of our brief and startling experience. They decided to adopt the same legal procedure, with a preliminary contract promising adherence to a "Code of Working Rules." (It was a time of codes and rules and potent phrases about fairness and justice.) The Screen Actors' Guild held its first membership meeting on July 8th.

A few days later, I wrote to Edward Childs Carpenter, president of the Dramatists' Guild, that "our accomplishments to date have been extraordinary." There was no doubt of that. In five months, the desperate tension of the first meeting had become electric enthusiasm. In July, there were 380 members of the Guild. In August, when a mass meeting was held to celebrate my departure for New York and Washington to secure our rights under the proposed industry code, our number had grown to 464.

On August 17th, the *Guild Bulletin* had a banner headline: LAWSON TO NEW YORK FOR NIRA CONFERENCES. In New York, I received advice and whole-hearted support from Marc Connelly, president of the Authors' League, Elmer Davis, its vice-president, Carpenter, head of the Dramatists' Guild, and William

Hamilton Osborne, general counsel of the League. They warned me of the pitfalls I would encounter in Washington. Then I left for the capital, accompanied by Luise Sillcox.

Luise, the general secretary of the League and its guilds, was my companion and guide in the maze of intrigue and frustration around the NIRA. It was a strange partnership between Luise and me, and it established a friendship which lasted, even after I was assailed by the Un-American Activities Committee in 1947. Luise was conservative, Republican, and fanatically devoted to the League and its guilds. She was practical about the New Deal, because she had no illusions about it.

Luise was invaluable to me in Washington. She helped me to work practically in an atmosphere of such magnificent duplicity that I could not have believed it without the aid of an interpreter. She gave me a guided tour of the inner life of Washington. It was obvious from the first moment (it had been obvious to Luise before we arrived) that the Code was being written by the motion picture corporations, and that there was not the slightest chance of our having a direct effect on it.

The task, as Luise explained, was to follow a circuitous route and salvage some prestige for writers from the political confusion in Washington. The great drama I had expected turned into a farce, in which I could not even obtain a speaking part. As I began to see the way the Motion Picture Code would evolve, I felt I must warn the members in Hollywood. I sent a harsh message, printed in the *Screen Writers' News* of August 28th, pointing out that the proposed Code was "designed to destroy competition and to perpetuate the producers' arbitrary and undemocratic control over the creative workers in the Motion Picture Industry."

This information was accurate and well-known in Washington. It shocked the Guild board so much that they telephoned me to return to Hollywood for consultation. I counseled that we wait until after the Code hearings and then work closely with the Authors' League to secure some modification of its most objectionable features. Our attorney agreed that our best course was to lay the basis for a long legal struggle to secure recognition.

At the formal hearings in Washington early in September, Luise and I sat in the last row of a crowded visitors' gallery. Luise had failed to get me the privilege of a few moments' testimony. William

Green spoke for American labor, but it was evident that he carried very little weight. He could not get a single labor representative on the so-called "Code Authority," which would prepare the Motion Picture Code and administer it, and which consisted entirely of producers, distributors, and exhibitors.

Late in September, I was astonished to receive word that RKO was buying *Success Story* and wanted me to come to the coast immediately to do the script. RKO had been considering the play for some time, but it seemed to me that their decision was timed to coincide with the end of the hearings in Washington. The producers, aware of the failure of our campaign in Washington, were no longer threatened by the Guild. I felt, on the other hand, that my return to the ranks of employed writers, just at this discouraging juncture, would reassure our members. It was desirable for me to be in Hollywood, to explain the Code, and to prepare writers for the troubles that lay ahead. My acceptance of RKO's offer was, of course, also influenced by my personal finances, which would have made it foolish to refuse.

I was totally unprepared, however, for what seemed to me the final testament to the film writers' helplessness, following the travesty of the hearings in Washington. When I arrived at RKO, I was informed that the studio would insist on only one slight change in my play: the leading characters must not be Jews. I had always known that the play would be cheapened in the film version, but the Jewish theme was clearly the heart of the play, the source of its passion and life. By this time my personal plans and my Guild activities were already under way. If I walked out, I faced the probability of a complete separation from the industry. I felt I had no choice but to accept the conditions imposed and to salvage what I could from the original work.

While I labored at this thankless task, the Writers' Guild leaders tried to shape a policy out of a dispiriting situation. The motion picture companies insisted that writers and other creative personnel were not "workers" and were therefore not affected in any way by the guarantees of Section 7A. Further, the producers argued, these people with unique talents were over-paid, and they intended to use the Code to reduce the bargaining power of individual actors, directors, and writers. Toward this end, the Code enabled the film corporations to combine in ways which had previously been illegal in

order to control salaries. They were to give each other notice of any offer to another company's employees, and only in the last thirty days of a contract period; they would forbid any employer to "alienate from his employment" an employee of another company.

We did not as yet know the extent of these clauses, but their general effect was a foregone conclusion. They would injure performers and directors more than writers (because performers and directors had more prestige and were more highly paid), but writers (especially those who were famous and in demand) would suffer proportionately.

The screen writers and the Authors' League were in disagreement as to the best means of meeting this danger. The writers wanted to join with the screen actors in fighting for recognition as salaried employees. The dramatists and other authors in the League were not employees and wanted to strengthen their position as independent contractors. They were intent on getting special recognition in the Code as creators whose services were so special that they should be exempt from rules which limited the bargaining power of actors and directors and executives.

I tended to agree with the Authors' League largely because of my experience as a dramatist, my intense feeling about the creative function of the writer, and my conviction that the screen writers' best and only hope lay in national unity of all authors. But most of my colleagues in Hollywood were sure their future depended on cooperation with the actors. The conflict with the League seemed to be moving toward an open split. Telegrams and letters became more irritated. I received confidential notes from Luise who informed me that prominent writers who were in touch with President Roosevelt were trying to persuade him to exempt us from the Code.

The controversy became more and more embittered. A confidential memo from a Guild representative in the east told us that Roosevelt was not sympathetic to actors, that he was upset about Mae West's published statement that she would ask \$280,000 for her next picture. In the same memo we learned that League leaders resented our plans for joint strike action with actors. To them it would mean, for example, that Eugene O'Neill would be asked to withhold sale of his plays for the sake of Clark Gable.

When I talked with Luise, and with Marc Connelly, Sidney Howard, Elmer Davis, and other League leaders, I found them as

worried as I was by the danger of a split between the League and the screen writers. I was in an untenable position because I had to represent the viewpoint of the Guild, and I was personally opposed to it. Yet I was surprised to learn that the officers of the League were confident that they would get the exemption they wanted.

I could not believe it, but it happened. The Motion Picture Industry Code, signed by Roosevelt on November 27th, made no mention of special treatment for writers, but it was accompanied, paradoxically, by an Executive Order from the president, including this paragraph:

Because the President believes that writers, authors and dramatists are engaged in purely creative work, the provisions of Article V, division B, part 5, section 1 (c), 2, 3, 4, and 6 of this code shall not become effective with respect to such employees

Typical of Roosevelt, the order was an intricate compromise: to conciliate opposing interests, he seemed to give contradictory concessions, each cancelling the other. In addition to this startling concession to writers, the same provisions of the Code would be suspended affecting actors and directors "pending further investigation." All in all, it was an astounding performance. Roosevelt had let the motion picture companies write their own code, and then, by a stroke of the pen, cancelled their plan to use it as a weapon against those people whose reputations or talents made them uniquely valuable. The practical value of the Executive Order accrued only to a small number of prominent authors, but the prestige that it gave us, and possibilities that lay in the legal recognition of our creative role, were an inestimable boon to the screen writers.

The president's move set off chain reactions in New York, Washington, and Hollywood. While I was congratulating the Authors' League officers on what seemed to all of us a dazzling victory, we received word from Hollywood that the Screen Writers' board had sent a rude telegram to the White House denouncing the Code for its failure to give us bargaining rights. The leaders of the Authors' League were disposed to break off all connection with the screen writers. The telegram had ignored the weeks of delicate negotiation and pressure which had led Roosevelt to place writers in a superior category.

I pleaded with the League to take no hasty action. I wrote a long

letter to my board, explaining that their message to Roosevelt was a blunder, that the President's designation of writers as creators was not an empty gesture, that it gave us valuable prestige and might have a practical effect on our position in Hollywood. The board held an all-night meeting and reversed itself, agreeing with me and apologizing to the League.

One of the reasons for the screen writers' quick change was their observation of the effect of Roosevelt's order on the film industry. The heads of the companies were so angry that they spoke out against the Screen Writers' Guild. It was the first time they had ever deigned to recognize that such an organization existed. There was turmoil in Hollywood; Guild members were threatened; representatives of management stated openly that they would get the president's order revoked.

The frantic moves and counter-moves that followed convinced everyone that the presidential tribute to writers was a matter of significance. Within a few days, General Hugh S. Johnson, head of NIRA, issued an "interpretation" which contradicted what the president had said. A hysterical telegram to me from the board in Hollywood showed how completely they had adopted the viewpoint of the League:

Johnson's "clarification" ruins all we had accomplished under the Code . . . We are facing tremendous pressure from producers . . . Fact that producers made such an issue of writer exemption shows importance of work done by League.

The board asked me to cooperate with the League to get the Executive Order reaffirmed. This was exactly what we did. Johnson wrote another letter, calculatedly vague and yet denying that he had ever intended to contradict the president. I wrote the board that the net effect of this was "to make General Johnson look extremely foolish." But we could publicize his rather cryptic admission that writers were creators and were permanently excluded from provisions of the Code on this account. The Guild had proved that it was a force to be reckoned with. Although there was no hope of immediate collective bargaining, there was a collective spirit and an aroused membership.

The year of my presidency with the Guild healed my divided

conscience and left me with an urgent need for expression. I would decline to continue in the presidency. I wanted to return to the theater where I was convinced that I could creatively use my new awareness of the social drama I had witnessed so closely. In my active participation with the Guild, I had found another dimension of myself, but this unexpected clue to my identity would not give me solace unless I could translate it into creative work.

I had always been conscious of my class status, but I had seen it as a bondage without hope. I had been unduly skeptical about Roosevelt's One Hundred Days, unaware of the ferment that would follow. Now I had learned a respect for middle class writers, like myself. With all their faults and hesitations, these people could organize and change, and in so doing could transform their surroundings.

The battle for Guild recognition would finally be won. The industry would fail in 1934 to establish the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences as a company union, although another decade of conflict would precede recognition. But the ownership and control of films was destined to become ever more tightly exercised by large corporations, and the Motion Picture Academy would continue, to the present day, as the symbol of this commercial domination. The promise of a significant voice in the creation of films, so bravely forecast in 1933 with the words, "writers are the creators of motion pictures," is even more remote today. But these were words that would, nevertheless, shape my career and haunt me through a term in jail and the long night of the blacklist.

John Howard Lawson's "A Calendar of Commitment"

Lee Elihu Lowenfish

The John Howard Lawson collection at Southern Illinois University's Morris Library is an important addition to the archives of recent American cultural and radical history. A massive compendium of over one hundred boxes, the Lawson papers contribute much to an understanding of radicalism between the world wars, in particular the commitment to communism.

It is a commentary on how much the Cold War has frozen the knowledge of American history that Lawson today is probably remembered, if at all, as one of the "Hollywood Ten." In 1947 the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began to investigate alleged Communist subversion in the motion picture industry. Eight Hollywood writers and two directors refused to answer the committee's questions and were cited for contempt of Congress. At first, most of the movie community stood behind the ten. But as the Cold War heated up and loyalty to country seemed to demand the purgation of domestic communism, the ten lost both peer support and their case in court. After appeals failed, they went to prison in 1950.

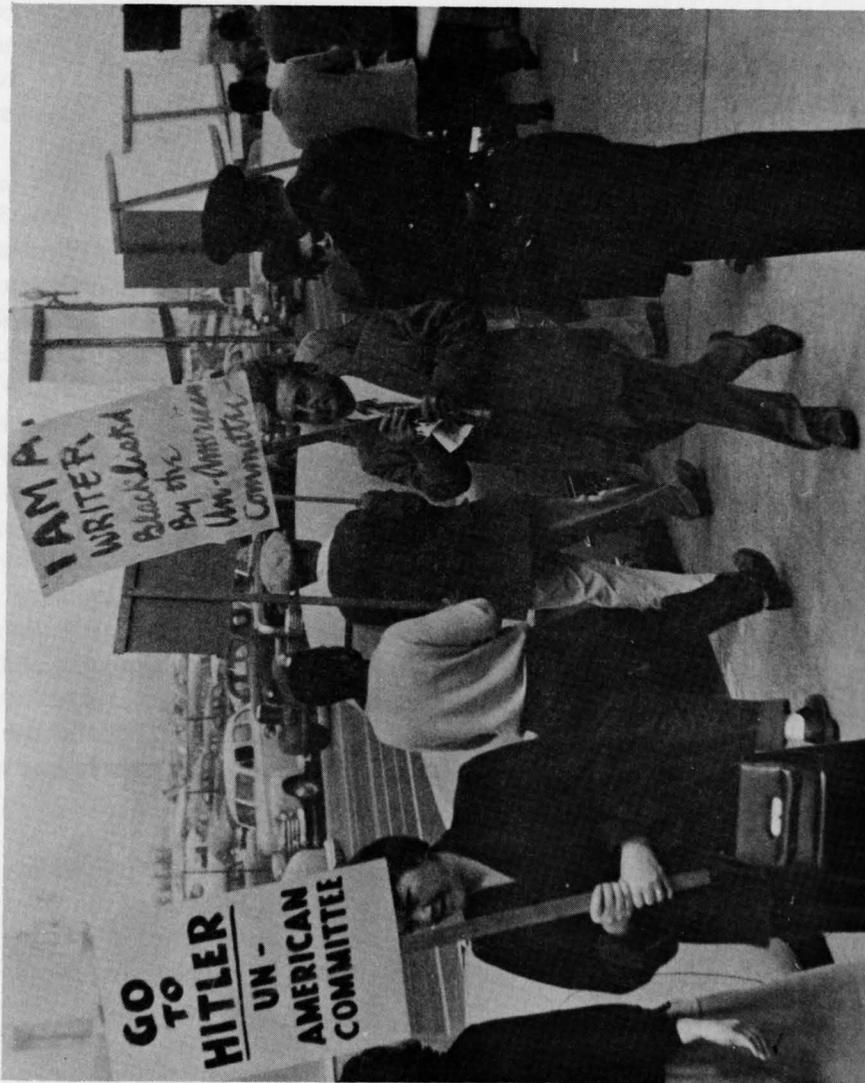
In today's climate, where détente with the Soviet Union is widely discussed as an alternative to Cold War, the full history of the years before 1945 should be told. Alistair Cooke has aptly noted that the anti-Communist crusade of the late 1940s was in effect trying people then for what they allegedly had done a decade earlier.¹ The motivation behind John Howard Lawson's autobiography is mainly an effort to clarify the political situation of the twenties and thirties. His career needs to be reexamined because he was a prominent figure in American culture: he wrote several plays produced in New York during the 1920s; he co-founded the New Playwrights Theater in Greenwich Village in 1925; he was author of numerous screenplays

(many of them outstanding commercial successes) from 1928 until his indictment and imprisonment; and in 1933 he was unanimously elected the first president of the Screen Writers' Guild.

In 1934 John Howard Lawson publicly identified with the Communist party of the United States. How and why Lawson made that decision is the subject of this essay, based on a reading of his unpublished autobiography, "A Calendar of Commitment: Another View of the 1920s and 1930s" (housed in Morris Library). The testimony of this autobiography is a welcome aid to the study of these decades. Most historians and literary critics have allowed the anti-Communist biases of the Cold War to distort the picture of pre-World War II history, while the real dreams, hopes, and fears of the participants have been neglected. In a standard history of the American Communist party written in the middle 1950s, Irving Howe and Lewis Coser accused communism of being not just a "failure" but a "falsehood," which "betrayed" the hopes and talents of many well-meaning but "duped" individuals.² In a recent history of the American theater during the Great Depression, Malcolm Goldstein has similarly condemned communism. Goldstein claims because John Howard Lawson defended the Communist party viewpoint after 1934, he is therefore guilty of an "act of self-humiliation."³

Lawson began his autobiography in the 1960s to counter the distortions of the anti-Communist position. "The 'God that Failed' theory equates Communism with a sort of millennial fever," he writes, "and thus cuts it off from normal experience."⁴ Lawson did not finish the memoirs, although at eighty-two and in fragile health, he still is trying to complete his interpretation of the 1920s.⁵ For Lawson, the problem of recreating his then-emerging attitudes toward communism—undistorted by later history—is enormous. But he feels it is a necessary task if historians are ever to understand the factors which radicalized people in the 1920s.

John Howard Lawson was born in New York City in 1894, the second son of Simeon Levy Lawson, American manager of the Reuters news agency. John Lawson's creativity flourished at an early age. He wrote plays in his progressive grade school and while a teenager decided to become a playwright. He attended Williams College and wrote plays and stories for the campus literary magazine.



Lawson picketing.

He occasionally went to Socialist meetings on campus, but he found them dull—less stimulating than his friends or his own writing. World War I erupted soon after his graduation, and in July 1917 Lawson went to Europe to serve as an ambulance driver on the front lines.

Other writers of Lawson's generation shared strikingly similar experiences. Walter Lippmann and Floyd Dell, equally precocious youths, both had grown bored with the pre-World War I Socialist party. Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, John Dos Passos, and Ernest Hemingway, to name only a few, all rode the ambulances during the war. Like them, Lawson dates his first severe sense of alienation from established society with his experiences in a Europe at war.⁶

His memoirs attempt to count off the central events on his calendar of commitment. He returned from the war a rebel against authority, but by no means politically engaged. His main goal in life was to become a recognized playwright. "I wanted success so badly that I raged at everything in my way," Lawson writes. "Yet I thought of myself as a lonely rebel, and rejected everything that might alleviate my loneliness."⁷

Success came swiftly. In 1923 *Roger Bloomer* opened on Broadway, performed by the new Equity Players. A story about a callow dreamer from Iowa who comes to New York in the vain hope of finding a more meaningful life, *Roger Bloomer* is imaginatively conceived and was inventively staged. All the themes which would be found in Lawson's later work appear in this early play: the sterility of business, the restless searching of youth, the exciting but false glamour of the city. *Roger Bloomer* created a furor and lasted on Broadway for only a few nights. But with the consent of the Equity Players, Lawson soon reopened it himself off-Broadway.

In 1925 Lawson's stature increased when the prestigious Theatre Guild performed his play *Processional! A Jazz Symphony of American Life*. In a passionate introduction to the printed version Lawson announces war on the concept of "art as an escape from life." He expresses confidence that the modern playwright can find the unique rhythm and substance of American life. He argues, as he will for the next ten years, that even "middle-class commuters" have hidden stories which the radical artist can transform into worthy material. He concludes by hoping his new play will help "to lay the foundations of some sort of native technique, to reflect to some

extent the color and movement of the American processional as it streams about us."⁸

The political content of *Processional!* is remarkable, considering that it is a 1925 work. The play takes place in a West Virginia coal mine town during a strike. The mine owner is a caricature, Man In Silk Hat, who spouts phrases like, "Law and Order, that's my slogan." The Klu Klux Klan, then at its strongest, appears in the last act. A newspaper reporter covering the strike is well aware that the press does not report the strikers' side. In a remark characteristic of bourgeois Lawson characters, the reporter muses, "Being a good middle-class man I'm sorry for everybody, but I never know what to do about it."⁹

Fully five years before the controversy over proletarian literature was to erupt among American writers, Lawson had written a play about a strike severely critical of capitalism. Yet the workers in *Processional!* are not heroic figures. They too are caricatures, drinking, whoring, whining. At the end of the play, the Communist agitator Psinski turns to drink despite the success of the strike and the victory in court of an accused miner. "Comrades . . . we ben fightin' like in a fog . . . in ten years, in fifty years, mebbe it will be clear," Psinski declares. "We got ideals, them guys in sheets got ideals, I am drunk with ideals . . . here's a girl gotta baby will be a workman in twenty years. Ask her what it means . . . I am tired."¹⁰

Militant leftists often chided Lawson for his failure to create positive models in his working-class characters. Michael Gold, the radical writer who became a leading Communist literary spokesman in the 1920s, insisted that the major standard of "proletarian art" should be the proclamation of "solidarity with the eternal, yea-saying masses."¹¹ Gold's impatience during the 1930s with Lawson's failure to espouse the proletarian cause was to play a great role in Lawson's ultimate commitment to communism. But in the more tolerant climate of the mid-twenties, Lawson was accepted simply as a promising writer experimenting with new techniques. His political commitment was nearing, but the atmosphere did not dictate precipitous action.

In 1926 Gold, Dos Passos, and Lawson joined forces to establish the New Playwrights Theater in Greenwich Village. The group hoped to present plays for people too poor to afford the Broadway stage. It produced three of Lawson's plays between 1926 and 1928: *Nirvana*,

Loud Speaker, and *The International*. But Lawson remembers a major drawback in the New Playwrights' experiment:

We intended to reach a new audience, but we did not know where it was—workers, masses, the people—where were the flesh-and-blood embodiments of these phrases, and how could they be persuaded to attend a theater, even if the admission were zero?¹²

The New Playwrights, it seems, engaged in “too much flaunting of revolutionary bravado for the uptown crowd.”¹³ By 1928 Gold had left for more vagabondage, Dos Passos for Europe, and Lawson for California. The New Playwrights dissolved in 1929.

The years of the late 1920s are crucial in understanding how commitments and attitudes common in the thirties were formed. Murray Kempton in his uneven but often brilliant study of the 1930s, *Part of Our Time*, has rightly observed that the social passions of the thirties really had their genesis in 1927 with the outrage over the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti.¹⁴ Dos Passos, a crusader in the cause of the immigrant Anarchists, urged Lawson to join the final demonstration in Boston. Lawson picketed, got clubbed, and joined many intellectuals in outrage at the authorities. The Red flag flew over the New Playwrights' Cherry Lane theater on their return to New York. Dos Passos wrote, “All right, we are two nations,” and the leading liberal Robert Morss Lovett warned that “Class war in America” could no longer be denied.¹⁵

Yet the years of the late twenties also marked the growth of Hollywood and the consequent temptation to many eastern writers. Lawson made his first journey west in 1928. He needed the money. On his father's recommendation, Lawson had speculated on Greenwich Village property, but the depression hit real estate earlier than other investments, and Lawson headed to Hollywood to recoup his losses. His first job was at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), where he astounded himself in 1930 by writing a successful screenplay for Cecil B. DeMille's first talking picture, *Dynamite*. DeMille was so pleased that he invited Lawson to the film's premiere, a rare honor then for a mere writer. Three more hits followed for Lawson in the next year and a half, and he estimates that he earned a total of \$63,000 during the depression years of 1930 and 1931.¹⁶

But his heart was still in the theater. In May 1930 Harold Clurman, a director of the newly-formed Group Theater in New

York, wrote Lawson that his troupe would like to perform his new play, *Death in an Office*. An elated Lawson packed his bags and rushed back east. “I hoped and believed I would never return to Hollywood.”¹⁷ But his wishful prophecy proved false. The Group Theater did not have the backing to produce the play immediately. It took two years before *Death in an Office* finally opened under the title *Success Story*. Once it did open, however, *Success Story* enjoyed a prosperous run and was even serialized in the *New York Daily Mirror*.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Lawson followed a pattern increasingly common to writers in the 1930s: transcontinental commuting between the prestige of the Broadway theater and the cash of the Hollywood screen.

Lawson describes in vivid detail his life in the early thirties. He hoped to use the Hollywood money to buy a house in Westchester County. (He observes that intellectuals, just like other Americans, were even then embarked on the flight from the city.) He also used these funds to help support his father, who had been wiped out by the depression. He recalls walking with his dad in March 1930, listening as Simeon Lawson bitterly denounced capitalism and proclaimed Lenin as the greatest man of the twentieth century; John Lawson did not agree with his father at this time. He felt vaguely hostile towards the Soviet Union, Lawson recalls, because a foreign utopia seemed irrelevant to the domestic conditions in America.¹⁹

In the many drafts of the autobiography, Lawson constantly returns to his theory of the progressive stages of commitment. He posits a four-part sequence beginning with rebellion from established society. This occurred for him during World War I. Alienation followed, which in Lawson's case continued into the late 1920s. Beginning in 1928, he underwent a deep search for his identity—stage three. Lawson's search was not resolved during the early thirties, but as social conditions at home worsened, he moved closer to the final stage of complete commitment. He notes that 1930 was the year a million and a quarter people marched against unemployment and hunger and for jobs. He recalls, too, his skepticism when Roosevelt pledged a new deal and inveighed against fear itself. To Lawson, organized greed, not fear, seemed the enemy.²⁰

Without doubt the major factor in Lawson's espousal of communism in 1934 was the condition of the writer in Hollywood. While personally successful as a scenarist, Lawson was uneasy with

the fantasy world portrayed in the movies. At MGM only aristocrats and poor people appeared in scripts, while stories of middle-class people and the complexities of the social structure were ignored. Furthermore, the producers treated the writers patronizingly. Although Irving Thalberg, "boy wonder" of MGM, and Lawson shared a mutual respect, Thalberg never let Lawson forget that his plays had made no money on Broadway. To Columbia boss Harry Cohn, a writer was a good technician, Lawson remembers, but otherwise as unimportant as an extra. Thus when the screenwriters organized a guild in early 1933, and Lawson was the unanimous choice to be their president, he gladly accepted.²¹

The Guild was formed as a response to the producers' attempt to cut all wages and salaries fifty percent to meet the economic squeeze. Writers, actors, and even directors organized unions to protest this edict. Lawson recalls the first meeting of the Guild and the "psychic exhilaration when I spoke to the 200 writers assembled at the Knickerbocker Hotel in Hollywood." The preamble to the Guild constitution declared, "Writers are the creators of motion pictures." While Lawson concedes the remark was exaggerated, he writes, "I felt pride in them and a dark hope."²²

Lawson flung himself into the arduous, technical Guild work. He went to Washington later in 1933 to help administer codes for Hollywood work under the National Industrial Recovery Act. He successfully lobbied for separate codes for actors and writers. Despite some industrial union sympathy among movie workers, Lawson believed writers and actors' working conditions were too different to be effectively regulated under the same code.²³

Lawson meanwhile suffered more hardship on Broadway. In the winter of 1933-34, two of his plays opened and closed within ten days. *The Pure in Heart* was a revision of Lawson's play with the familiar theme of a provincial who comes to the big city and finds corruption. His new play, *Gentlewoman*, dealt more directly with the social crisis. It featured a Park Avenue socialite, widowed by her husband's suicide, and her transitory love affair with a bohemian poet. At the play's end, the poet chooses to leave her and to organize farmers in the Midwest. He declares, obviously reflecting the author's state of mind, "I don't want to sail over the battle on a pink cloud, pounding a typewriter."²⁴ Lawson responded to his plays' commercial failures by publishing them in 1934 under the title *With a*

Reckless Preface. In his preface, Lawson lambasted the newspaper critics who destroyed plays without understanding them. Harold Clurman added the comment that Lawson now believed that "romantic love, introspection, isolated thought cannot cope with the chaos of our time."²⁵

It is revealing that Lawson considers an exchange with Michael Gold in April 1934 as instrumental in his decision to join the party.²⁶ In the April 10 *New Masses*, a news weekly close to the Communist party, Gold branded Lawson "a bourgeois Hamlet for our time." He declared that Lawson's plays lacked any great unifying social idea and did not create sympathetic proletarian models. Reviving the critique of Lawson in the twenties in the more savage tones of the thirties, Gold ridiculed Lawson's characters for "spouting the sort of minor poetry popular among the disinherited sons of the bourgeoisie living in post-war Greenwich Village." The war against bohemianism was deadly serious business in the Communist party of the early thirties, even though, ironically, Gold was very much a vagabond himself. "Like many other fellow travelers," Gold railed against Lawson, "he is hiding from his own fervid desire for bourgeois success, and the difficulty, often, of reconciling this dross with the revolutionary consciousness."²⁷

Lawson replied in the April 17 *New Masses* in an article, "Inner Conflict & Proletarian Art." In an admission rare for the world of radical self-righteousness, Lawson accepted much of Gold's critique of his work. He insisted only that the major question facing the middle-class intellectual—"Where do I belong in the warring world of the classes?"—must be faced in all its complexity. For ten years, he said, his plays touched on this question. To answer it glibly, he declared, would be worse than not to resolve it at all.²⁸

Gold remained critical in his rebuttal. He reiterated his charge that Lawson never had created a working-class character worth emulating. "I have always been puzzled," Gold concluded, "by anyone who could sit on a fence as long as he has."²⁹ Shortly, however, Lawson could no longer be tabbed a temporizer.

By the middle of 1934, John Lawson was actively supporting the American Communist party. He went to Alabama and was arrested in Birmingham while working for the Scottsboro defense committee in support of the nine young blacks who had been arrested in 1931 outside of Scottsboro, Alabama, and falsely accused of raping two

white girls in a freight car. The Scottsboro Case became a cause célèbre of the 1930s. Shortly afterwards on the Fourth of July 1934, Lawson journeyed to Scottsboro to spend the day with the families of the nine victims. "I heard gentle voices telling of homes burned and friends murdered," Lawson writes. "I knew I had only two choices, to be with them or against them."³⁰

After 1934 John Howard Lawson never wavered in his commitment to communism. He spoke out for Party causes frequently. He worked for the defense of political prisoners and for greater aid to the unemployed. He became active in Marxist study groups among Hollywood writers. But except for *Marching Song* in 1937, he wrote no new plays for Broadway. In 1937 *Processional!* was revived by the Federal Theater with Lawson as consultant. It enjoyed a good run. However, that a 1925 play could be considered by some critics the best play of 1937 reflected the lack of new creativity in the radical cultural movement. Even the *Daily Worker* ruefully admitted this point.³¹

As the thirties drew to a close, the fervent hopes of the earlier part of the decade were rapidly vanishing. Intellectuals found themselves polarized in irreconcilable camps, either Stalinists or Trotskyites, interventionists or isolationists, anti-Fascists or anti-Communists. By the end of the thirties, many friendships had been ruptured. Lawson writes movingly of his old friend, John Dos Passos, who once believed in "the great achievement of Communist solidarity"³² but grew embittered by the infighting within the anti-Fascist forces during the Spanish Civil War. By 1940 Lawson laments, "Our roads were so far apart that we could not hear each other's voices."³³ The noted critic Edmund Wilson had insisted in 1932 that the capitalist system could not survive the economic crisis, Lawson remembers.³⁴ But within a few years, Wilson wished "the Marxist hurricane" had never blown across America.³⁵

The value of Lawson's autobiography is his willingness to reexamine the past without searching for scapegoats. He refreshingly accepts errors on his part during the thirties. He underestimated the wide appeal of long-time Socialist Upton Sinclair's vigorous if unsuccessful candidacy for California governor in 1934. He regrets his role in dismantling the *New Theatre* magazine in 1937. It had begun as a stimulating journal of grass roots theater in New York but by 1937 had folded because of an unwise decision, which Lawson

implemented at the behest of Communist party cultural officials, to convert it into both a film and stage magazine. He regrets underestimating the work of Bertolt Brecht throughout the entire period.

Thus John Howard Lawson's commitment to communism did not close his mind. The autobiography is the work of an authentic, credible, searching man. Admittedly, it is hard not to wonder about the role of guilt in prodding Lawson's activism after Mike Gold's attack. It is hard not to regret the decline in Lawson's theater work after the middle 1930s. But to Lawson, the times dictated serious choices, and he chose the Communist movement. His work shows indisputably that there was no Communist conspiracy at work, and it stands as an important corrective to the many distorted writings about the thirties. In carefully describing the culture of the crucial years leading up to the thirties, Lawson has also provided a valuable service. He has made an excellent case for domestic concerns as a cause of radicalism instead of Russian rapture. One hopes he can finish that work in book form, for even if he does not resolve the tensions between intellectual life and social responsibility successfully, the questions he raises are pertinent and pressing.

NOTES

1. Alistair Cooke, *A Generation on Trial* (New York: Knopf, 1950), p. 3.
2. Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), pp. 318, 306, *et passim*.
3. Malcolm Goldstein, *The Political Stage: American Drama and Theater during the Great Depression* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 90.
4. John Howard Lawson, draft for "A Calendar of Commitment: Another View of the 1920s and 1930s," Box 100, p. 11., Lawson Papers, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Unless otherwise indicated all references to this work come from the Box 100 draft.
5. Letter from Lawson to author, 8 October 1974.
6. Lawson, "A Calendar of Commitment," p. v.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
8. John Howard Lawson, *Processional! A Jazz Symphony of American Life* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1925), pp. v and ix.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 162.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
11. Walter Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954: Some Interrelations of Literature and Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1956), p. 124.
12. Lawson, "A Calendar of Commitment," p. 139.

13. Michael Brewster Folsom, "The Education of Michael Gold," in *Proletarian Writers of the Nineteen Thirties*, ed. David Madden (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1968), p. 234.

14. Murray Kempton, *Part of Our Time: Some Ruins and Monuments of the Nineteen Thirties* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), p. 37. Kempton's work was one of the first after World War II to treat the 1930s without the Cold War paranoia. His treatment of Lawson in Hollywood, however, is very condescending and caustic. See Chapter 6, "The Day of the Locust," pp. 181-210.

15. Rideout, pp. 133-34.

16. Lawson, "A Calendar of Commitment," pp. 203, 224.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

18. Letter from Lawson to author, 17 June 1975. Lawson notes that he admired the talent of the Group Theater but felt a generation gap existed. They cared not about alienation, but seemed looking for certitude. If Marxism gave them confidence, Lawson remembers, then they were for it. These comments help to explain why Group Theater members Clifford Odets and Elia Kazan later rejected communism. See "A Calendar of Commitment," p. 243.

19. Lawson, "A Calendar of Commitment," pp. 215, 79, 212.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 194, 198. Also John Howard Lawson, draft for "A Calendar of Commitment: Another View of the 1920s and 1930s" Box 98, Folder 10 Part V, p. 340A.

22. Lawson, "A Calendar of Commitment," pp. 262, 266.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

24. John Howard Lawson, *With a Reckless Preface: Two Plays* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1934), p. 217.

25. "A Preface to John Howard Lawson," in *With a Reckless Preface*, p. xxiv.

26. John Howard Lawson, "Way of Life: Chronicle of an Unfinished Journey," Box 91, Folder 3, p. 4, Lawson Papers, Morris Library.

27. Michael Gold, "A 'Bourgeois Hamlet' for Our Times," *New Masses*, 10 April 1934, pp. 28-29. Albert Halper's 1930s novel *Union Square* suggests that the Communist party warred so brutally against bohemian tendencies in the early thirties because the bourgeoisie had adopted the bohemian life-style without its political content. Cited by Marcus Klein, "The Roots of Radicals: Experience in the 1930s," in Madden, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

28. John Howard Lawson, "Inner Conflict and Proletarian Art, A Reply to Michael Gold," *New Masses*, 17 April 1934, pp. 29-30.

29. Michael Gold, "A Reply to Lawson," *New Masses*, 24 April 1934, pp. 28-9.

30. Lawson, "A Calendar of Commitment," p. I.

31. Judith Reed, "Lawson's Play Belongs in the Past," *Daily Worker*, 20 October 1937, p. 7.

32. Kempton, p. 117.

33. Lawson, "A Calendar of Commitment," Box 98, Part IV, p. 295.

34. *Ibid.*, Box 100, p. 225.

35. John Muste, *Say That We Saw Spain Die* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1966), p. 191.

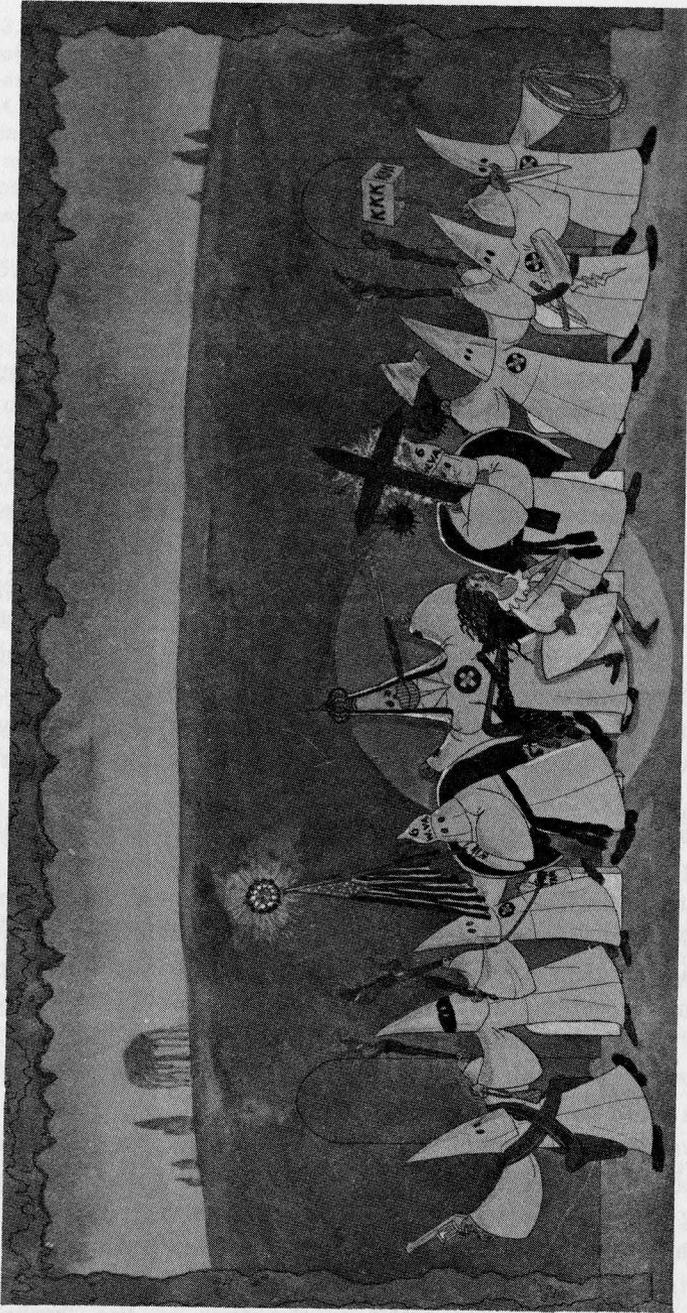
John Howard Lawson Hollywood Craftsmanship and Censorship in the 1930s

Gary Carr

Today, John Howard Lawson is probably best remembered as one of the "Hollywood Ten" who clashed with the House Un-American Activities Committee in the late forties. Lawson's defiance of the committee was inevitable for a writer whose art, over the years, grew increasingly involved with political struggle. As a playwright, Lawson deserves to be remembered as the author of the first native American expressionist play. His *Roger Bloomer* appeared two weeks before Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* in 1923. He was a major force in the avant-garde theater of the twenties. As a member of the New Playwrights Theater, he experimented with vaudeville, burlesque, pageant, and constructivist forms. His *Marching Song* (1937) is the best example of Socialist realism in the American theater.

As a screenwriter, he is perhaps less well known outside the industry. He was one of the many New York theater people imported by Hollywood in the early days of sound. Beginning with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) in 1928, he subsequently worked for RKO, Columbia, Twentieth Century-Fox, Warner Brothers, and Universal, as well as for United Artists producers Walter Wanger and Samuel Goldwyn. With Dudley Nichols, Frances Marion, Joseph Mankiewicz, and Ralph Block, Lawson founded the Screen Writers Guild in 1933 and served as its first president.

Lawson's commitment to Marxism intensified over the years, and he joined the Communist party in 1934. Yet, he was able to continue working side-by-side with the most reactionary elements in Hollywood all through the thirties and forties, until his eventual blacklisting after he appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947 as the first of the "unfriendly" witnesses.



Gorelik set design for *Processional!*, Act IV.

Like virtually every other blacklisted screenwriter, Lawson continued to turn out scripts under assumed names. Among those for which he could not be given screen credit at the time was that for *Cry, the Beloved Country*, which he adapted from Alan Paton's novel in 1950 while serving his term for contempt of Congress in the Ashland Federal Reformatory.

All during the post-World War II hysteria, show business people were prime targets of McCarthyesque witch-hunting.¹ Hollywood writers who had once held Communist party cards were automatically assumed to have been pumping the movies full of Communist propaganda for years. The absurdity of such opinions could have been easily proved had anyone looked back at the screenwriters' work over those years. But when researchers like Dorothy B. Jones did look at all the past films of the "Hollywood Ten" and found no evidence of such propaganda,² the researchers themselves came under attack. In a country spellbound by the trials of Alger Hiss and the Rosenbergs, discoveries of conspiracy—not proofs of innocence—were the orders of the day.

John Howard Lawson lived with studio censorship throughout his Hollywood career. His work was carefully controlled by the industry which employed him, though not because of any political beliefs he might have held. Not unlike a lathe operator in a factory, the studio scriptwriter was a craftsman who turned out a product to fit within certain tolerances, and two years at MGM taught Lawson the nature of those tolerances. Since he learned his craft by scripting projects that others had initiated, he could retain a degree of distance and dignity. But in 1933 he was confronted with what would be his most frustrating task as a screenwriter: adapting his own stage play to the screen. The process by which *Success Story*, his most personal work, became a formula picture called *Success at Any Price* should serve as a key to understanding the comparative freedom of the New York theater in contrast to the rigidity of Hollywood in the 1930s.

Lawson went to Hollywood in 1928 to work for MGM. The following year Cecil B. DeMille, who had seen *Processional!*, Lawson's 1925 play about striking coal miners, called upon Lawson to write another coal miner script for his next film, *Dynamite*. DeMille was ecstatic about the resultant script, although Lawson himself was dissatisfied with it: "I had not written with any

conviction, but I had done a craftsman's job, and it seemed to assure my position in Hollywood."³

But when Lawson saw the *Dynamite* credits, he was outraged. Though he maintained he had done seven-eighths of the work, he received no credit for the scenario, someone else was credited with the original story, and he had to share dialogue credit with two other writers. He protested to DeMille, but to no avail.

This was the first of a long series of disappointments which tormented Lawson and would eventually motivate him to participate in the organization of the Screen Writers Guild. In reading folder after folder of notes and drafts for his autobiography, one discovers in Lawson a complex and often tormented personality. Writing seems to have been the one way in which he could establish an identity, a crucial problem for a man whose father had sought to assure his children's success in the American mainstream by removing every trace of their Jewish heritage.

Simeon Levy had been an enormously successful self-made man, whose plans for getting on in the Eastern Establishment included changing the family name to Lawson. From age thirteen, when John Howard decided to become a playwright (at twenty he had a play produced by George M. Cohan), the theater was his chosen medium for making a name for himself. His attitude toward his screen writing is, therefore, enlightening. Throughout his career, Lawson felt guilty for not devoting himself totally to the theater, his first love. His distress over the *Dynamite* credits reveals his ambivalent attitude toward his screen work. On the one hand, he chastises himself for "writing without conviction," yet he is driven to demand full credit for everything he does write.

After *Dynamite*, Lawson co-scripted three other major films, including a vehicle for a prime MGM property, Joan Crawford. During this time, Lawson came to know and respect production chief Irving Thalberg, whom he would consider ever afterwards as the epitome of administrative ability. His first MGM stint ended in the spring of 1930, when he returned to New York. He was so encouraged by the enthusiastic response to early drafts of *Death in an Office*, the play he considered his *magnum opus*, that he felt total success in the theater was within his grasp—that he would never again have to work in Hollywood, the place he then considered to be "Kafka's Amerika, as mad as that."⁴ Unfortunately, however,

enthusiasm alone does not get plays produced, and *Death in an Office*—retitled *Success Story*—did not reach the stage until 1932.

The two years after leaving MGM were difficult ones for Lawson, both ideologically and financially. He moved ever closer to his eventual formal commitment to Marxism, while at the same time finding it necessary to rely on an income from Hollywood. In 1930 and 1931 he was under contract to RKO, during which time he wrote five screenplays while trying to find the time to rework *Success Story*. The burden of finances and the inner struggles over politics, while he tried simultaneously to serve two masters with his writing, taxed him utterly.

Success Story opened at last as a production of the newly-formed Group Theater. The reviews were moderately good—John Mason Brown and Brooks Atkinson were respectful of what Lawson was attempting in the play upon which he had been working for more than five years, and into which he had tried to cram thirty-eight years' worth of intensely personal concerns. *Success Story* ran for 121 performances and was instrumental in establishing the Group as a major force in American theater.

In this complex play, Lawson blends four distinct metaphorical patterns to create Sol Ginsberg, who is at once apostate Jew, turncoat Marxist, classic Faust, and modern gangster. *Success Story* chronicles Sol's rise from clerk in the Raymond Merritt Advertising Agency to director of the entire operation, then traces his swift and fatal fall. The first act is set in 1928, when the brash Sol begins working at the agency. He has recently broken all ties with a group of radical revolutionaries—a transparent reference to the Communist party—and has determined to succeed within the establishment, which the Merritt Agency represents.

Sol's old girlfriend, Sarah Glassman, is employed as Merritt's private secretary. She is part of Sol's radical past and patiently awaits his return to his former idealism, which has been the quality she most cherished in him. Herself a blind idealist, Sarah remains true to the old Sol, even as he manipulates her to further his own ambitions. Through Sarah, Sol wins a prime assignment, writing copy for the "Glamour Cream" account.

As he works over the copy one night, Sol is confronted by Merritt's mistress, Agnes, who represents for Lawson the nemesis of the writer's idealism. He finds her irresistible and boasts that he will

“own” her some day. She taunts him, promising to influence Merritt in his behalf, while welcoming a relationship in which she can “crack the whip” over him.

The second act takes up in 1930. Sol is on his way. With money, his self-proclaimed measure, he can do no wrong. He has invested shrewdly in the market, and his stock rises while Merritt's plunges. Sol knows that Merritt has been embezzling company funds, but bides his time until he can crush Merritt and usurp his power. Sol has an ally of sorts in Rufus Sonnenberg, the grand old financial wizard of Wall Street, who is a silent partner in the firm. Hovering over the play like a Homeric deity, Sonnenberg watches in silent approval as Sol manipulates Merritt out of his own company and takes over. Sol's triumph is crowned by Agnes' immediate switch of allegiances and her promise to marry him. Sarah, though she is distraught, determines to remain with the firm.

Act three is set in 1932. In business, Sol has been fantastically successful. But Agnes has proved to be more than he had bargained for, leading him to dissolve “this four-way relationship” with Agnes, Merritt, and Sarah. After telling Merritt to consider himself bought out and Agnes to go ahead with the divorce, he storms out. When he returns, he finds only the faithful Sarah, to whom he addresses a long confessional. He says he knows he has been “possessed.” He admits his betrayal of both his Jewish heritage and the revolutionary ideals of his youth. Sol speaks of the latter in an inverted parable of Christ and the Tempter:

This fellow Christ took me up to a high mountain and showed me the earth. . . and he said, “Do you want the earth, Solomon Ginsberg, or do you want to join me in a cellar, sweating and plotting with a few close friends?” Well, I made my choice and somewhere Christ is in a cellar laughing at me right now—don't I know it?⁵

Sol finally confesses his love for Sarah, but it is too late. Declaring that she “won't be mixed up in [his] black magic,” she becomes hysterical. Crying out her love for Sol, but her hatred of what he has become, she picks up the revolver he had been toying with as he considered suicide, and she shoots him. Sol's last act is to ask Sarah to put the gun in his hand to “make it look right.” After Agnes and Merritt burst in, it is only Agnes who can act. She commands Merritt to call the police and dictates the “suicide” alibi as the curtain falls.

The key to the very complicated character of Sol Ginsberg is found in Agnes, who serves as his true antagonist. As Mephistopheles to Sol's Faustus, she first “appears” to Sol as he is beginning to write the “Glamour Cream” copy, and she inspires in him the knack for words, which assures his success. Sol suddenly realizes his power: as he says, “Any words will do.” Agnes promises to use her influence with Merritt: “It doesn't matter whether it's good or bad, I'll make him push you along.”

Lawson's point seems to be that success for a writer on Madison Avenue and, by logical extension, Hollywood depends not on quality, but on willingness to serve. After all, what were the scripts he wrote for Garbo and Crawford but “Glamour Cream” copy? The fascination of the abomination one detects in Lawson's attitude toward the studios appears in Sol's feelings toward Agnes. Like Faustus, moreover, Sol is aware of the company he is about to keep: he calls Agnes a “blood sister to the street walker.”

In the process of selling himself to achieve success, Sol abandons his Jewish as well as his revolutionary heritage, a concern which seems to have supplied Lawson with the original impetus for the play. He writes of being influenced by Em Jo Basshe's *The Centuries*, which appeared in 1927 as the second offering of the New Playwrights: “It stirred my soul to a more intense and painful consciousness of my Jewish background, my half-lost and yet inescapable Jewish identity.”⁶

A fourth facet of Sol's character is his gangster aspect. His brother was “One-Eyed Izzy” who “got his” on the Lower East Side and was buried “in a solid silver coffin with gold cupids.” At one point, Sol tells Sarah, “This is a gangster's world, and I'm out to beat it. . . . I swore at the funeral to get what Izzy got and get it respectable.” At the end, Sol's last words to Sarah recall this aspect of his background: “Put me in a silver coffin with gold cupids—don't matter what it costs.” He starts to laugh, then dies in Sarah's arms.

In his autobiography, Lawson asserts that he did not intend Sol to be viewed solely as a gangster: “He died laughing blindly at the forces that destroyed him, groping for the love that was denied him.”⁷ Given the choice by “this fellow Christ,” Sol chose the earth and lost his soul. Moreover, once he forsook the cellar, the place for “sweating and plotting with a few friends”—one of whom had been Sarah—the atrophy of his capacity to love was assured. Lawson

writes that "the Jewish identity which Sol has lost, which he tries to recapture through Sarah, is crucial to the play."⁸ In all his earlier plays, enclosed spaces like cellars served his protagonists as places for self-discovery. In the light of Lawson's overall metaphorical system, Sol's choice against the cellar is critical: in so choosing he loses himself, both as Jew and as revolutionary.

Ironically, *Success Story's* success in New York brought Lawson's name back before the MGM brass, and by mid-1932 he found himself under contract there once more. But financial conditions that year prompted MGM boss Louis B. Mayer to cut all non-union salaries at the studio by fifty percent. Almost overnight, Lawson and other writers began unionizing, setting up the Writers Guild. Lawson became its first president, and spent the next year shuttling between New York and Washington on behalf of the Guild, meanwhile wondering if he would ever work in Hollywood again. He was amazed, therefore, when he received word in the summer of 1933 that RKO wished to purchase *Success Story* and wanted him to leave immediately for the west coast to work on the screenplay.

Central to the play was the relationship of Sol's demise to his earlier rejection of his Jewish heritage and his radical past. Although well aware that these themes would be ravaged if the play were ever transferred to the screen, Lawson was unprepared for the harshness of RKO's terms: every trace of the Jewish theme—not to mention the radical politics—would have to be deleted. Though *Success Story* was his most intensely personal statement, Lawson nevertheless acquiesced to the demands of the studio through a process of reasoning that seems as complex as Sol Ginsberg's psychological make-up. First, Lawson was in need of work, and \$10,000 would have tempted almost any writer in that third year of the Depression. More important—to his conscience, certainly—was his idea that, in actuality, he would be sacrificing his artistic dignity for a higher good. His acceptance would be "beneficial to the Guild" by making it possible to return to Hollywood "to mobilize the board and the membership."⁹

Lawson had originally hoped that Paul Muni would be signed for the role of Sol. But since Sol had been watered down to "Joe Martin," a character of limited depth and no ethnic identity, the role could be done by a far more lightweight actor, and Douglas

Fairbanks, Jr. was selected. Signed to play Sarah Griswold was Colleen Moore who had played ingenue parts in twenties flapper pictures. Lawson's opinion, in 1973, was that "casting Fairbanks, Jr. (not to mention Colleen Moore) was crazy."¹⁰ Yet, for \$10,000 and the greater glory of the Guild, Lawson and collaborator Howard J. Green proceeded to take the property, now hyped to *Success at Any Price*, and "tailor its lyric tensions to the acting style of Fairbanks and Moore."¹¹

In moving to the screen, *Success Story* underwent both structural and thematic changes. The former were to be expected as natural adjustments to the new medium; in the film, for example, one sees rather than hears about the Lower East Side that spawned Joe. The more significant changes are, of course, thematic. The film version abandons the rich metaphorical texture of the play in favor of simplicity. Gone are the themes of Marxism, demonic possession, and the Jewish identity crisis, and with them the complex motivations for Sol's (now Joe's) drive to success. In a revealing burst of naïveté, the *Times* reviewer notes that, in the film, "Mr. Lawson is telling the story of an East Side youth who obscurely feels the need to topple his bosses back into the dust."¹²

In order to give some reasons for Joe's actions, Lawson and Green carry over and expand the gangster theme which in the play had been merely incidental. In the film, this motif is moved to the foreground and used to initiate the story. The script calls for a fade-in on a newspaper headline: "ELABORATE FUNERAL FOR SLAIN GANGSTER,"¹³ then dissolves to the funeral where Joe is first seen as a tough-talking "child of the Bowery," already a movie stereotype by 1933.

Soon afterwards, Joe reflects on Izzy's (now Mike's) demise. He tells Sarah, "It makes you see what kind of world this is," but neither Marxist ideology nor Jewish *Weltschmerz* spring out to identify the "kind of world." The problem is left in terms of general Depression era malaise.

Likewise, all the characters are simplified. Though Joe's ambitions at the Merritt Agency make him ruthless, there is none of the demon that was so much a part of Sol. In the play, Agnes was both tart and Mephistophelian temptress; in the film she is merely a gold-digger. Similarly, Sonnenberg is divested of his mythic dimension. He becomes Rufus Hadfield, no longer either aloof or

Jewish, but engaged in as much dirty work as is Joe. Hadfield is a stereotype also well-known to Depression movie audiences, one which Andrew Bergman terms the "shyster," the central figure in all those films "most immediately concerned with corruption in all its dimensions."¹⁴ In the filmscript it is Hadfield rather than Merritt who is responsible for the most crooked dealings. Through this shyster banker, Joe buys up Merritt's bank loans until he is in a position to force his former boss out. Shortly afterwards, when Joe discovers that it is Hadfield with whom Agnes is having an affair, he confronts them both and makes good two earlier threats—to divorce her and to go to the D.A. about the crooked stock deals in which he had been involved with Hadfield.

In an echo of Sol's ultimatum to Agnes, Merritt, and Sarah, Joe's "we three" speech becomes one of those confessional outbursts common to thirties films of social consciousness:

You and me are a couple of gangsters—we been cleaning up on Wall Street by tricks that would make a gunman blush . . . you got my wife and you can have her. . . you're both going to be splattered all over the papers—you and your bank and your money! You'll lose 'em all, and you'll get my wife in exchange!

This speech is crucial to the filmscript, for it prepares the way for the atonement of Joe Martin and thereby totally changes the dramatic thrust of the original play. Where Sol forsook his past and suffered total alienation, the worst thing that Joe does is to forget Sarah and fall in with some bad characters—Hadfield, the shyster banker, and Agnes, the faithless gold-digger, both types calculated to elicit a predictable response from the average moviegoer.

After casting out Hadfield and Agnes, all that remains for Joe's regeneration is for him to clear himself with Sarah. For the final scene, Lawson reaches back ten years to his expressionist play *Roger Bloomer* for a device to place in the service of Hollywood melodrama. In the filmscript, it is Joe who shoots himself. Immediately there is a dissolve to what seems a replay of the prison scene from *Roger Bloomer*: "The scene becomes gray, an effect of limitless space, of fog, of empty depth, of vibrating nothingness." Clutching his wounded side, Joe gropes through the fog and meets Merritt, Hadfield, and Agnes. Each refuses to help him. He sinks to the ground, but finds Sarah kneeling next to him. He cries out that

he wants to live. The "nothingness" dissolves to a close-up of Joe lying on the couch in his office. Sarah is mopping his brow, while a doctor works over him. The dream has become a reality—Sarah now promises she'll never leave him.

Besides undergoing a de-Marxification and an overall goying-up, the filmscript replaces the tragedy of Sol Ginsberg with the melodrama of Joe Martin and Sarah Griswold. The new plot adheres to a standard melodramatic formula, with Joe being saved by the love of a good woman, after having undergone the requisite suffering for his wrong-doing. Such an ending had been foreordained in the opening Lower East Side sequence, when Joe took Sarah in his arms and promised "some day" all would work out.

Though too often muddled, *Success Story* is a play to be admired for the richness of its metaphor. It deserved to be turned into something more than such a bland formula picture. That *Success at Any Price* comes full circle to Joe and Sarah's final embrace is the mark of Lawson's craftsmanship, not his artistry. He had indeed "tailored" his play's "lyric tensions" to the acting style of the film's stars and to the ideology of its studio. All through his autobiography it is clear that Lawson never really forgives himself for learning his Hollywood lessons so well.

NOTES

1. See John Cogley ed., *Report on Blacklisting*, 2 vols. (New York: Fund for the Republic, 1956); Robert Vaughn, *Only Victims* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972).
2. Dorothy B. Jones, "Communism in the Movies," in *Report on Blacklisting*, I, 196-233.
3. John Howard Lawson, draft for "A Calendar of Commitment: Another View of the 1920s and 1930s," Box 100, folder 2, p. 434. The author wishes to thank John Howard Lawson for permission to quote from the extensive collection in Morris Library.
4. Lawson, "A Calendar of Commitment," Box 93, folder 3, unnumbered page dated 19 January 1965.
5. John Howard Lawson, *Success Story, a Play* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, [c1932]), p. 230.
6. Lawson, "A Calendar of Commitment," Box 100, folder 4, p. 167.
7. *Ibid.*, folder 3, p. 545.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 521.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 587.
10. Lawson, letter to the author, 6 February 1973.

11. Lawson, "A Calendar of Commitment," Box 100, folder 5, pp. 274-5.
12. A[ndrew] D. S[ennwald], *New York Times*, 4 May 1934, p. 24, rpt. in *New York Times Film Reviews* (New York: New York Times & Arno Press, 1970), II, 1056-57.
13. "Success at Any Price," RKO printed script, 1933. In Lawson papers, Box 74, folder 6. All subsequent references to the screenplay refer to this script.
14. Andrew Bergman, *We're in the Money* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1971), p. 18.

Censorship in Chicago *Tropic of Cancer*

Elmer Gertz

My friendship with Henry Miller and the correspondence which reflected it grew out of the *Tropic of Cancer* litigation in which I represented him and his publisher, Grove Press. I have told the story of the litigation, in all of its tangled details, in my book, *A Handful of Clients*, published in 1965. There, too, I tell of my first meeting with Miller and my tentative impressions of his warm and varied personality. Later meetings and further impressions are told in my memoirs, *To Life*, published in 1974. I have given a summary view of Henry Miller and the law in an essay in the book *Henry Miller and the Critics*, published by the Southern Illinois University Press in 1963. And I have written of Miller in articles and reviews published here and abroad. But nothing better gives the full flavor of the man and of the matters in which we have been involved together than our correspondence. What I now write is only a segment of that exchange.

As I said when I first told the story, the summer of 1961 was ending in a haze of lovely memories. My wife, Mamie, and I had just returned from a trip to Europe and the Middle East when I received a long distance call from my friend Shad Polier, with whom I had long been associated in civil rights matters and in the American Jewish Congress.

"Cy Rembar is in my office," Shad said. "I have recommended you to be his associate in a censorship battle in Chicago."

Charles Rembar, whose voice had a clear and pleasant ring, told me that he was the general counsel as well as the president of Grove Press, the publisher of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, and that Grove was beginning to be involved in censorship litigation on the book in every part of the country. Trouble was expected almost at once in Chicago. Would I care to represent the publisher there? I had

not read *Tropic of Cancer*, and Henry Miller was then little more than a name to me. But I was strongly opposed to book-banning, regardless of the author or the work. I fervently believe in the freedom of the press.

Until then I had hardly been aware of what was going on with Miller's book in the Chicago territory. Now, I read newspaper articles about the activities of certain suburban and Chicago police officers who were confiscating copies of *Tropic of Cancer* and threatening booksellers on the assumption that the book is obscene. No search or arrest warrants had been issued by any court. There was just arbitrary police action in violation of the Constitution.

Then I read that under the auspices of the Illinois division of the American Civil Liberties Union a suit had been filed in the Superior Court of Cook County to restrain the suburban police chiefs from such unlawful conduct. The suit did not seek a legal declaration that *Tropic of Cancer* is not obscene. The ACLU held that the plaintiffs, as prospective readers, had standing in court to protect their freedom to read the book, regardless of its nature, and that the police misconduct had interfered with this freedom. The suit was sound, but I thought it would be better if the publisher and the author intervened in the proceeding and sought not only to restrain the police but also a finding that the book is not obscene.

We would also file a suit in the United States District Court in Chicago, predicated on the theory that we were being deprived of our civil rights by reason of the police misconduct. I liked the idea of moving affirmatively instead of sitting back supinely and simply defending criminal actions brought against booksellers. The police had to be taught that it is dangerous to act as censors in a free society.

I had been told that Miller disliked legal involvements and lawyers and that I was not to trouble him about the various pending suits. But we began to write to each other. Edward P. Schwartz (founder of the Henry Miller Literary Society, who combined fun with seriousness of intent) is really the father of this exchange between us. I had asked Eddie about a minor point in Miller's work. He in turn had asked Miller for the answer. And Miller had written to me. Our correspondence continued, with growing intensity and scope.

What I have said thus far is only the scaffolding, as it were, of the famous case in which I was involved almost to the exclusion of all else for a period that stretched into weeks, then months, and ultimately years. Circumstances made my *Tropic of Cancer* case the most important of the many that were going on throughout the country. After favorable rulings by the United States Post Office, the Bureau of Customs, the Department of Justice, and Federal Judge Thomas F. Murphy (who had been the prosecutor of Alger Hiss) in New York, the publisher had a right to assume that there would be no further trouble. In earlier obscenity cases, a single favorable decision in court or administratively had brought a halt to all actions against the book. Not so now. This was prosecution with a vengeance, and on all fronts.

When the trial began in Judge Samuel B. Epstein's courtroom, there was a varied group of attorneys representing the original plaintiffs (several prospective readers of the book from the north Chicago suburban area), the so-called "intervenor plaintiffs" (Grove Press and Henry Miller), and the defendants (the police chiefs of Chicago and of the various suburbs). By general consent, I was to present the case for the proponents of the book. Judge Epstein found, preliminarily, that the plaintiffs as prospective readers had "standing to sue" and that freedom to read was the necessary corollary of the constitutional guarantees set forth in the First Amendment. The ACLU, as I have said, was concerned with this one basic issue and the matter of "prior restraint" by the police, and not with the question of obscenity which concerned us most. The judge indicated early in the trial that police interference with the book was almost self-evident, and, since few of the defendants tried to contradict this, it was clear that the prime issue before the court was whether or not *Tropic of Cancer* is obscene or constitutionally protected.

Judge Epstein, for whom Henry Miller expressed much empathy, is temperamentally a conservative and restrained man. He does not smoke or drink and is circumspect in all of his habits and tastes. His first reaction to *Tropic of Cancer* was of intense distaste. At the same time, he had a strong fear of any infringement upon the freedom of the press. Thus, he kept a careful balance throughout the trial. He read and reread the book several times—every word of it and not isolated passages. He listened to all of the evidence. He read the reviews and

critiques that were offered in evidence. Starting with relatively little knowledge in the field of obscenity, he familiarized himself with the authorities and grasped their essential meaning. In the end, he wrote an opinion that may achieve status as a classic. Its conclusion is part of my faith as a lawyer and civilized man:

Censorship is a very dangerous instrumentality, even in the hands of a court. Recent history has proven the evil of an attempt at controlling the utterances and thoughts of our population. Censorship has no fixed boundaries. It may become an oppressive weapon in a free society.

Taste in literature is a matter of education. Those who object to the book are free to condemn and even to urge others to reject it. Organizations, such as church societies, and other sincere groups are free to condemn any book they deem objectionable. Such efforts would help to educate the literary tastes of the reading public. Reviews and comments in the press are calculated to such purpose. Such voluntary efforts are praise-worthy and consonant with democratic principles.

Let the parents control the reading matter of their children; let the tastes of the readers determine what they may or may not read; let not the government or the courts dictate the reading matter of a free people.

The constitutional right to freedom of speech and press should be jealously guarded by the courts. As a corollary to the freedom of speech and press, there is also the freedom to read. The right to free utterances becomes a useless privilege when the freedom to read is restricted or denied.

This Court finds, based upon the evidence before it and the decisions of the United States Supreme Court and the Supreme Court of the State of Illinois, and by virtue of the Court's conviction of the inherent constitutional rights and privileges of the reading public in our community, that *Tropic of Cancer* is not obscene as defined by the law, and that interference by the police in its free distribution and sale should be enjoined.

Shortly after filing the complaint against the police chiefs, I had sought to secure a temporary restraining order to prohibit interference with the sale of the book while the case was in progress. At that point, several of the police chiefs in the towns and villages adjoining Chicago had declared that they would not interfere in any way with the book and would agree in advance to be bound by any decision that the court might ultimately reach. When Judge Epstein declared the book to be constitutionally protected because not obscene—and thereby restrained all police action against it—I suggested to the various defendants that they would be well advised to waive appeal and to agree to be bound at once by the judge's decree, and that in return I would dismiss them as defendants in the

March 16th 1962

Dear Elmer Gertz

Again a batch of exciting mail from you — particularly as regards the raid on the actors. (They look so serious, those readers!) At this rate the book will soon be on the best seller list again. Dick Ellmann, professor, also sounds too serious. So many of the professor stripe, can't believe it's autobiography. Even that man from Harvard (new Republic) they've never had it served as biography of the whole being, including the interstitial glands, cells and glow-worms, that's the trouble. Even the exaggerated episodes are closer to truth than to fiction.

When you take a vacation cut your bridges behind you — never leave addresses and phone numbers. Die to the world — utterly — even if only for 36 hours, otherwise, the "world" will kill you. I haven't a single Jewish friend (always a professional, of course) who knows how to take a real vacation. I think sometimes the Jews are farther from the Orient than any Westerner. The Orient for us (I include myself, notice) is what sleep is to the body cells. To forget, to just not give a damn, to laze away the days — what a gift!

Take it still easier, please.
Henry Miller

P.S. one suggestion — my friend and her friend, Reginald Schatz — but then he was "raced" different — in his father's wonderful school in Pennsylvania, where creative activity, music and play were the paramount things. Man, he sure can relax!

federal civil rights case and free them from the fears of damages being assessed against them. All of them, except the superintendent of the Chicago police and two others, readily agreed. Then I began to read disquieting reports in the press that certain clerics were urging an appeal from Judge Epstein's decision and that Mayor Daley and his Corporation Counsel, John C. Melaniphy, would yield to this clamor; indeed, it was stated categorically that the mayor, not the police superintendent, had ordered an appeal.

Within days, an appeal was, indeed, taken to the Appellate Court, rather than to the Supreme Court of the state. We felt that this was simply a device for delay; because of the constitutional issue of freedom of the press, the case belonged in the highest court of the state and not in an intermediate court. We thought that this was a cynical attempt to frustrate us—the sale of the book could be held up during the appeal. Moreover, a federal court would be unlikely to act while a state court decision was being appealed. What good would our victory do us if we could not enjoy the fruits of it until many months, if not years, later?

The Appellate Court granted our motion to transfer the case to the Supreme Court, and the matter was briefed for that court's consideration. A bit later the Supreme Court suddenly issued a short and disheartening opinion in our case: it found that there were no fairly debatable constitutional issues, only the factual issues of whether or not the book is obscene and whether or not the right legal tests of obscenity had been applied by Judge Epstein. Accordingly, the court entered an order transferring the case again to the Appellate Court for decision.

Everything appeared to be going down the drain. Barney Rosset, the chairman of the Board and leading light of Grove Press, once again wanted to know what a victory meant if the book could not be sold. Could not something be done about the matter? We had the right to ask for a rehearing. Rehearings were almost never granted by the Illinois Supreme Court, but we had to chance it. If a rehearing were granted, the Supreme Court might modify its opinion and at the very least not transfer the case to the Appellate Court. We declared that the task of exploring particular obscenity standards was an evolving problem, which only the Illinois Supreme Court must ultimately resolve, and that this duty of reviewing the trial court ruling by Judge Epstein should not be thrust upon an intermediate

court of the state but should be carried out by the highest court.

When the rehearing in our case was granted by the Illinois Supreme Court on 27 March 1963, the general expectation had been that the court would retain jurisdiction over the case and within a short period of time affirm Judge Epstein's decree, if not because *Tropic of Cancer* is constitutionally protected, then because of the grossly illegal actions, the "prior restraint," on the part of the police. Few informed persons, including those in the Corporation Counsel's office, expected a complete reversal of Judge Epstein's decree.

The months raced away without any decision from the Illinois Supreme Court. This in itself was extraordinary. The Court generally acted more expeditiously. The courts in other parts of the country began to hand down their rulings on the book. Most of these rulings were in our favor. With each new development, either we or the Corporation Counsel of Chicago called the new authorities to the attention of our Supreme Court.

The courts ground on in their contradictory way. That reasonable men, trained in the law, could differ on the book seemed to me further proof that the issue ought to have been resolved everywhere in favor of freedom.

The United States Supreme Court was scheduled to hand down its last decisions of the term on 22 June 1964. We therefore assumed that the Illinois Supreme Court, having delayed its ruling in our case so long, would hesitate a bit longer, so that it might have the benefit of whatever the highest court of the land said on the subject of obscenity. But with a suddenness that made us almost speechless, the Illinois court, on 18 June 1964, in a unanimous opinion, reversed Judge Epstein and found *Tropic of Cancer* to be obscene.

We were stunned, but recovered quickly with the realization that this decision was a perfect one for an appeal to the United States Supreme Court. Strange to say, I rejoiced. Now, at last, we could get a high court opinion on a book of literary value. The Illinois opinion contained much language which we believed to be contrary to what the United States Supreme Court would hold. Our Illinois court balanced the literary and social importance of the book against its appeal to prurient interest and concluded that such obscenity outweighed the literary excellence (which it thus acknowledged). The opinion was a document for the Philistines rather than for the literati, as Justice William O. Douglas would say.

Henry Miller 444 Ocean Drive -- Pacific Palisades California 90272

June 28th, 1964

Dear Elmer,

At last I sit down to say a few words about the exciting decision of the U.S. Supreme Court and to thank you for keeping me so well posted with telegrams, clippings, and letters. I have been going like a top here for days--Tony just off to Europe with his mother, my elder daughter leaving for Africa, unexpected visits, household work (despite secretary-cook), and so on. Just incredible. Once again I have cleared the decks, to get down to finishing the play.

But about the decision....I still don't quite see how one now gets the U.S. S. C. to make a decision on the Illinois and New York State judgments. But I assume you and Rembar have worked out a plan. It will be wonderful if you get the green signal for the whole U.S.

Looking at a television news broadcast the other day, where a stiff-necked Southerner was being interviewed about Jacksonville, Mississippi and other civil rights matters, I heard him say contemptuously--"it's one thing to pass a bill, it's another to enforce it." He left it very clear that "they" would fight any bill or law tooth and nail--to hold "the niggers" down or in their place. He never once said Negro. It was disgraceful, but I hope the whole country listened in, just to see what mentalities these ignorant white bastards have.

In New York I don't anticipate much trouble, somehow, but Illinois is a horse of another color, eh? One wonders what "their" next move will be.

News Week editor here called me up and asked for a few words on the decision, which I willingly gave this time, mentioning Rosset and yourself--praise for the valiant fight you put up. I hope they don't leave that out.

I also told him the book (*Cancer*) is now printed in twelve languages, and distributed without trouble even in such Catholic strongholds as Argentina and Brazil. The only country at present where the book was suppressed immediately on appearing is Finland. Poland and Yugoslavia are now about to publish some of my books, not the *Tropics* yet, of course. In Germany the sale of the public (unexpurgated) edition of *Cancer* has reached the 100,000 mark--very big for Germany, where books are expensive. Capricorn has an advance sale there of over 20,000 already. England gives no trouble on either book--and of course *Cancer* there has sold well over 100,000 and next year, I believe, goes into a paperback edition.

So, as always, America ends up last. If the U.S. S. C. had not given its OK it would indeed have been disgraceful. I wouldn't be surprised if soon the enemies of progress in this country make an attempt to impeach the members of the Supreme Court--or isn't that possible under our Constitution?

Anyway, congratulations, warmest thanks, and good luck to the end. Curious, eh, that my astrologer was so firmly right? By the way, have you had a chance yet to peek into "Eros Denied"? You'll find wonderful ammunition there, I think. All the best to Mamie and all the family. I await further news.

Henry
"The time of the hyena is upon us"

This unexpected result naturally created a stir. It was splashed over the front pages of the Chicago newspapers and was the subject of much radio and television comment. Some persons lectured us on our ignorance of the law. At this time the booksellers in Chicago had become greatly alarmed over an increase in police pressure against them. They were afraid to handle any controversial book and were in the process of forming an association in self-protection. I had been asked to confer with them. They, rather than we, were disheartened by the unexpected Illinois Supreme Court ruling in our case.

After talking by telephone to Barney Rosset and Charles Rembar, I departed for a conference in New York, arriving there the very day the United States Supreme Court was expected to pass on the various obscenity matters before it. As I stepped into Rembar's office, I was handed a letter from Henry Miller. Miller wrote in the 20 June 1964 letter that he did not feel discouraged or depressed by the news from Illinois. He said, "It's in the stars that *Cancer* won't fail--I told Barney that when he published it. Maybe it's good that we have some fireworks occasionally . . . I feel I have begun a good, new cycle. By October it will be definitely so." Serenely, he continued to paint water colors, like an artist possessed.

Rembar and I discussed the strategy in connection with taking the Illinois case to the United States Supreme Court. He had vast experience in the field of literary freedom. As the attorney in litigations over *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Fanny Hill*, *Evergreen Review*, and *Tropic of Cancer* he had been remarkably successful, although now and then suffering reverses, as we all do. While in his office, I read the transcript of the oral arguments in the obscenity cases pending before the United States Supreme Court. The exchanges between William M. Ferguson, the Attorney General of Kansas, and various justices of the Court, particularly Justice William J. Brennan, were of the greatest interest to me. At one point, Justice Brennan pressed Mr. Ferguson about a "hypothetical" Florida case involving *Tropic of Cancer*. (Of course, at that time a case involving the book actually was on appeal from the Florida courts.) Mr. Ferguson opined that neither *Tropic of Cancer* nor *Tropic of Capricorn* is obscene.

"What do you think the chances are of the Court's taking the Florida case?" I asked Rembar.

"About a hundred to one against us," he replied.

Miller letter, 28 June 1964.

At this moment, we heard that the Supreme Court had reversed the conviction in *The Lovers* case from Ohio and had knocked out the Kansas procedure with respect to the wholesale condemnation of allegedly obscene books. (That the United States Supreme Court interpreted its orders in the California *Tropic* cases, as I had believed it would, became evident from its opinion in *The Lovers* case, where it cited the California Supreme Court decision four or five times.) We learned that the Court had agreed to review the matter of movie censorship, despite its earlier adverse ruling. Not having heard anything with respect to the Florida case, we assumed that it either had been refused or was going over to the fall. No sooner had we made these speculations than Milton Perlman, one of the officials of Grove Press, called us. He had received a rather garbled report late in the day that the United States Supreme Court had taken the Florida case and had summarily reversed it, thus holding *Tropic of Cancer* to be constitutionally protected. This seemed too good to be true. Later, we received confirmation from Edward deGrazia of Washington, the attorney who had handled the case. Despite the Florida ruling, which was too concise if not abrupt, we still felt we had to take the Illinois case to the United States Supreme Court.

I returned to Chicago and immediately made an unsuccessful effort to persuade judges of the Municipal Court to dismiss several pending quasi-criminal cases against defendants who had sold *Tropic of Cancer* and others who had given a public reading of portions of it. I reminded the judges that Illinois was not Mississippi, that we believed in following the rulings of the United States Supreme Court. I could state categorically that it was necessary for a writ to be granted because the Illinois courts persisted in holding vendors and readers of the book.

Since the Illinois Supreme Court was then in summer recess, I appeared before Justice Walter V. Schaefer to ask him to enter an order staying the mandate of the court on the ruling against us until I could appeal to the United States Supreme Court. Justice Schaefer was quite distressed. He wanted to know if I really regarded my procedure as the proper one. Why could I not petition the Illinois Supreme Court for another rehearing? After all, they had once granted a rehearing. They might do it again. I told him that a petition for another rehearing would not be passed upon until the following

October and that by that time I might get into the United States Supreme Court. He shook his head sadly, and I left his chambers with an attorney who expressed the opinion that I had erred in my adamant attitude. I might rue it.

There followed some days of assiduous efforts to prepare our petition for the United States Supreme Court. Sidney Karasik, a bright appellate lawyer who had worked with me on the case, Charles Rembar, and I exchanged views constantly, in person, by letter, and by telephone. Finally, our petition was in reasonably good shape. The Illinois Supreme Court chose this moment, while it was in summer recess, to reverse itself in an unprecedented manner. On its own motion, acting as it said under the controlling authority of the decision of the United States Supreme Court in the Florida case, it ordered its earlier opinion to be withdrawn, and it affirmed the decree of Judge Epstein in full. This was recognized as a fantastic result and hailed by some persons as a landmark, perhaps the most important triumph for freedom of expression since the *Ulysses* decision of more than thirty years ago. Judge Epstein's decision had been the first significant court ruling in favor of *Tropic of Cancer*. It had inspired the later decisions by the Massachusetts high court and others. Now it was probably the last resounding word on the subject, a source of encouragement to authors, publishers, and booksellers everywhere. They hailed Judge Epstein's ruling in a memorable manifesto.

This summary of the famous litigation has a sense of order and of assurance, and even of inevitability. But as the days became weeks and the weeks enlarged to months and then years, none of us could be sure at any time as to where we were going, how it would come out, what we would do next. The correspondence between Miller and myself reflected the haze, frustration, and anger over the delays, ignorance, bigotry. It has a very special value because of these circumstances. At the same time, the vicissitudes of the legal warfare strengthened the friendship between us. Very soon it became clear that we had a special relationship, and not simply one of lawyer and client. We could confide in each other on every sort of personal and social problem. We became sounding boards. We tested ourselves and the world.



Richard Aldington.

The Richard Aldington Collection At Morris Library

Norman T. Gates

In August 1958, Professor Harry T. Moore of Southern Illinois University, while in Europe on a Guggenheim Fellowship, met Richard Aldington for the first time. Moore was then editing D. H. Lawrence's *Collected Letters*, and he sought out Aldington as one of Lawrence's early friends, and one who had championed his work both before and after Lawrence's death. Moore's visit to Aldington at Maison Sallé (near Sury-en-Vaux and Cosne-sur-Loire, about two hours south of Paris by train) was the first of several and began an exchange of letters that lasted until Aldington's death four years later.¹

After Aldington's death, Professor Moore's continued interest moved him to suggest to the Dean of Library Affairs, Ralph E. McCoy, that SIU-C acquire Aldington's papers. Certainly this interest also prompted the American edition of *Introduction to Mistral* in 1960 by Southern Illinois University Press and the memorial volume, *Richard Aldington: An Intimate Portrait*, in 1965. In addition, the SIU Press re-issued a collection of Aldington's short stories, *Soft Answers*, in 1967, and of his critical essays in 1970.

In his last years, one of the things that most worried Aldington was the fact that he had nothing but his copyrights and papers to leave his beloved daughter, Catherine. He arranged a trust to hold the copyright to *Lawrence of Arabia*. Then, the acquisition by Morris Library of his personal papers not only did a great service to scholars interested in Aldington and his era, but also helped to provide some of the security for Aldington's daughter. Of course, McCoy and the library did not stop with this initial purchase, but added letters and manuscript material acquired from other members of Aldington's family, from friends, and from his literary executor. Finally, Morris Library also brought together the most complete collection of

Aldington's books available anywhere in the world; it includes the only copy I know of the exceedingly rare *Movietones: Invented and Set Down by Richard Aldington*.²

The value of this magnificent collection of books and manuscripts to scholars, researchers, and students lies in the importance of Richard Aldington (1892-1962) as a literary figure. As a poet he was at the center of the Imagist movement; in fact, Ezra Pound nominated Aldington, H.D. (who was Aldington's first wife), and himself the original Imagists. His poetry also made up a large part of the first Imagist anthology, *Des Imagistes*. His first novel, *Death of a Hero*, is considered one of the great works of fiction to come out of World War I.³ His *Viking Book of Poetry of the English-Speaking World* is one of the two or three best anthologies of its kind in print. Aldington's biography of T. E. Lawrence, *Lawrence of Arabia*, shook the foundations of a British myth and has been the center of a literary furor which is still not silenced. *Wellington* won the James Tait Black award for biography. His translations of *Candide* and *The Decameron* are still in print. Over two hundred entries (including many introductions to the works of D. H. Lawrence) are shown in Professor Paul Schlueter's "Check List" in *An Intimate Portrait*.⁴

But the Morris Library Aldington collection is not of interest to Aldington scholars only. Aldington's early friends and literary associates included those figures who now are considered the most important of the period—Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Eliot, Lawrence, Huxley, Virginia Woolf, Durrell and many more. Aldington was an excellent letter writer, and few if any of his letters fail to mention and comment on his literary friends, associates, and enemies. The fact that Aldington was an expatriate for most of his life also meant that he was much more likely to record and comment on the current literary scene to far away friends—and that he would write a great number of letters. He earned his living for over half a century, excepting a few years in the army during World War I, exclusively as a writer, and his letters constitute a literary history of his times.

If the Morris Library collection contained only these letters, it still would be of inestimable value to researchers interested not only in Aldington but also in the Modern period. Besides letters, however, the library owns typescripts of several screen plays (Aldington worked in Hollywood from 1942 to 1946) and over thirty poetry manuscripts—many unpublished in the poet's lifetime. Typescripts of

a number of published and unpublished short stories and sketches and of various translations are also included. Among the manuscripts of longer works are those for the unpublished world poetry anthology originally commissioned by *The Encyclopedia Britannica* and his *Walter Pater*. The miscellaneous materials include much to interest a researcher working on the T. E. Lawrence affair. Finally, there are a number of very important notebooks dating mostly from Aldington's early days as a poet and containing, in his hand, early versions of many of his published poems as well as considerable unpublished material. But to most researchers, the manuscripts of greatest interest are the letters, of which there are some two thousand to over fifty recipients—at present the largest single Aldington letter collection. Considering that Aldington usually wrote letters more than one page in length which, if typed, were single spaced, or, if hand written, were in a very minute hand, this represents a substantial volume of material. Indeed, during the latter part of his life, Aldington's letters constituted the bulk of his writing, and, since he mentions to his daughter the possibility of income from an edition of his letters after his death, he may have written many of them carefully with this in mind.

The largest single block of letters, some 1,200, is to his sometime secretary and now literary executor, Alister Kershaw. As one would suspect, these are of extreme value since they are concerned with Aldington's literary career from 1947 until his death. The letters to the author's brother and attorney, P.A.G. Aldington, of which there are 275 written at about the same period as the Kershaw letters, are important for their insight into the writer's legal and personal problems. Some 190 letters are to Aldington's literary agent, Ralph J. Pinker, and 195 to Lawrence Durrell.⁵

Of the longer runs of letters one of the most interesting is to Eric Warman.⁶ The correspondence with Warman begins in 1932 when the younger man evidently wrote the successful author of *Death of a Hero* and *The Colonel's Daughter* to compliment him on his work. Warman also appears to have done an article on Aldington's 1932 collection of short stories, *Soft Answers*. From what he writes, Aldington is at the time working on the novel which will be *All Men Are Enemies*. A great many of the early letters contain literary advice from the older, successful author to the younger man trying to pursue a literary career; at one point Aldington suggests a book of

literary criticism with himself at its center.

Early in 1934 Aldington sends Warman a check for £10 which Warman notes at the bottom of the letter was "wholly unsolicited." Later that year Aldington writes from Austria of his uneasy feeling about the European political situation; most of the letters of that year comment on world politics. The 1937 letters tell of Aldington's legal difficulties concerning the divorce of his wife-to-be, and ask Warman's help in several literary matters.

Aldington's 1938 letters are more frequent and longer. After spending spring in southern France and Switzerland, the Aldington's return to England for the summer. Aldington writes about the sales and reviews of his new novel, *Seven Against Reeves*, guesses incorrectly that a big war is no closer than it was three years ago, and gives a description of Heinemann's planned Uniform Edition of his works (which was never completed due to the war). By 1939 Aldington is writing from America, where he spent the war years variously in New York, Connecticut, Washington, D.C., Florida, and Hollywood. He offers to take Warman's daughter for the duration of the war, writes of his reactions to life in the United States, discusses his work on the Viking poetry anthology, describes his Gulf-coast Florida home with an artist's eye, and writes of his visit to the D. H. Lawrence ranch in New Mexico. By the end of 1942 Aldington is in Hollywood as a screenwriter; his letters about his experiences there, the people he met, and his gradual disillusionment with trying to keep up his literary work and make money at the same time are not only excellent reading but also a concise history of a professional writer attempting to adapt his skills to a new medium.

Aldington returned to Europe via Jamaica and after less than a year in Paris was back in southern France, at St. Clair, Le Lavandou. He did not like Jamaica and found post-war Paris much changed; good sales of his last novel, *The Romance of Casanova*, are encouraging, but a chance to return to Hollywood for twenty weeks at \$1,000 a week does not materialize. He asks Warman, who is now connected with publishing,⁷ to help him collect royalties on the eastern European translations of his novels. From St. Clair in 1948 Aldington writes of his current publications. He has abandoned novels and is doing mostly biographies following the success of his *Wellington*, which was written while he was in Hollywood; his *Complete Poems* are to be published that year. In July 1949 he

writes that he has finished his "Lawrence life," and that all but two of the twenty-four Penguin Lawrence reprints will have introductions by him.

In 1951 Aldington moved to Montpellier, where he stayed until 1957. The letters from this period, some eighty-five in all, cover the time when Aldington was dealing with the problems occasioned by his two controversial biographies, *Pinorman* and *Lawrence of Arabia*; these followed his D. H. Lawrence book which was itself the cause of some sharp criticism. This large group of letters, therefore, gives many additional biographical details about the figures involved and recounts Aldington's problems with the "Lawrence Bureau," as he termed the T. E. Lawrence disciples. These are some of the most interesting letters of this run and are invaluable to anyone investigating this literary storm. A letter in February 1955 explains how Aldington was able to translate Custot's *Sturly* where T. E. Lawrence failed; in the same letter he asks Warman to lend him £200 until his royalties on the Lawrence book are released—his handwritten I.O.U. recalls to the reader's mind the unsolicited £10 sent to his friend many years earlier.

These letters also give Aldington's version of the complicated legal and monetary arrangements made at the time of his second wife's 1938 divorce from Michael Patmore, which caused him considerable financial embarrassment even through *Lawrence of Arabia* was selling very well. Another letter in September 1955 refers to a list of "remaindered" books Warman sent; Aldington comments on many of the individual authors and their works. In a number of letters Aldington shows his humanity by asking Warman to look up and try to help sick or indigent fellow authors. During this period, Warman also attempts to help Aldington with tax matters; curiously, considering his alleged antipathy towards his own country, Aldington always elected to pay his income taxes to England, because he felt it "fairer" even though the French rate was lower. Warman also was able to arrange several writing commissions for which Aldington was most grateful at this difficult time.

In May 1957 Aldington wrote Warman that Alister Kershaw was buying a little cottage about two train-hours south of Paris where the now-aging writer could live rent-free. The remaining letters, written during the last five years of Aldington's life, except for those posted when he was traveling, came from Kershaw's cottage in the tiny

village of Maison Sallé. Generally these late letters are rich in literary detail, and, although Aldington is troubled by the usual health problems of advancing age, are not depressing. He is occasionally lonely and suggests several times that his old friend visit him. For reasons of health he decides to do no more books and returns to an American publisher an advance against a planned biography of Balzac. He will content himself with articles and translations—his last important translation, done with Delano Ames, was the *Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*,⁸ a commission which Warman obtained for him.

As one would expect, these last letters are filled with an old man's reminiscences. In 1958 Aldington writes movingly of his horror on seeing the battlefield of the Somme—forty years earlier. This must have sparked other early memories, because in separate letters he tells of his work as literary editor of *The Egoist* and of the importance of *The English Review* under Ford Maddox Ford (then Hueffer). On the other hand, he remains in touch with contemporary events and comments frequently on the French-Algerian situation.

Although Aldington continued to work up to the time of his death, it is obvious that, even with the free use of Kershaw's house, he was not able to support himself completely and contribute to Catherine's education. He writes in August 1958 that friends have subscribed money to help him and mentions particularly the gift the Duttons⁹ sent from Australia. At the same time he worries about his eccentric friend, Geoffrey de Montalk, and urges Warman to do what he can to help the "King of Poland" acquire a printing press, saying that he, himself, is contributing what he can.

Another thread that runs through these letters is a gradual feeling of vindication in the T. E. Lawrence matter. More and more people come to see the truth of his position and by public statement or in writing support him in his contentions.¹⁰ In a letter dated 19 September 1959 Aldington reports with pride on the success of his works in translation, particularly in eastern Europe and especially in Russia. In fact, as these letters show, in his last years the success of his work in Russia (for example, 225,000 copies of *All Men Are Enemies* printed and sold out in a short time) helped to assuage the hurt he felt because of the comparative neglect of his writing in England.

On 30 May 1962, Aldington wrote Warman of the invitation he

had received and accepted to visit Russia—under the sponsorship of the Writers' Union—to celebrate his 70th birthday. He proudly enclosed a copy of the official letter asking him to come. He later sent Warman a postcard from Moscow and on 17 July, after he returned home, a letter thanking his friend for a birthday telegram received in Moscow. He also describes "the amazingly appreciative reception" and gives details of his visit and the gifts with which he and his daughter Catha were showered. He closes by promising to reminisce further "when we next meet." But this was not to be, because Aldington's next letter, dated 25 July, was to be his last. This final letter was characteristic of him: he asks Warman if he is coming to France and urges him to stop off and see some of the Russian photographs and presents, promising a cup of Russian tea from a tea-glass in a silver holder. Then the old writer talks of his plans for autumn and winter and mentions a script (perhaps a French translation?) for the United States he is halfway through—"it is more advantageous to sell to USA first. . . ." Characteristically, his last paragraph expresses relief that the alarm about the health of Kershaw's son, his godson, proved false. Two days later Richard Aldington died.

NOTES

1. There are fifty-six letters dating from October 1958 to July 1962 in Professor Moore's collection.

2. Alister Kershaw, *A Bibliography of the Works of Richard Aldington from 1915 to 1948* (Burlingame, Calif.: William P. Wreden, 1950), p. 4. Kershaw states (item 17) that but ten copies were printed.

3. George Orwell called it "the best of the English war books, at least of those describable as novels"; Maxim Gorky said, "I would never have thought the English would produce anything like it," and William York Tindall wrote of it in *Forces in Modern British Literature, 1885-1956* as ". . . one of the best war novels."

4. Alister Kershaw and F. J. Temple, eds. *Richard Aldington: An Intimate Portrait* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 175-86.

5. These letters currently are being edited for publication by Professor Moore.

6. In his early years Warman hoped to emulate Aldington and become a successful novelist. He did write several novels and detective stories but later became associated with publishing ventures which were highly successful.

7. Warman had joined with Paul Hamlyn (now the Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited). Warman sold his interests several years ago and retired to Malta.

8. This is still in print (new edition 1968, ninth impression 1974), and the copyright is held by Warman's old company, the Hamlyn Publishing Group.

9. G. P. H. Dutton, author and Lecturer in English, Adelaide, S. A., and his wife Ninette, who hold over 200 letters written by Aldington between 1954 and 1962. Dutton met Aldington through Kershaw.

10. Aldington told Warman in 1956 that C. P. Snow wrote that the "Establishment" now admitted in private that Aldington was at least eighty-five percent right. Aldington also was cheered by *Times* editor Sir William Haley's friendly article. In both 1957 and 1961 Aldington writes that increasing sale of his books, including *Lawrence of Arabia*, indicated the "bitter" fight against the Lawrence biography had obviously failed.

T.S. Eliot, Robert Graves and *The Criterion*

Richard F. Peterson

The unpublished T. S. Eliot letters in the Robert Graves collection at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale provide substantial information on a relationship that had a courteous beginning but then erupted into a brief public controversy. The immediate cause of the dispute was John Gould Fletcher's poetry review in the August 1927 issue of *The Criterion*. In the review Fletcher surveys the latest poetry of several modernists including Graves, John Crowe Ransom, and Laura Riding. His comments on Graves's *Poems (1914-1926)* hardly seem capable of arousing hostility. Fletcher praises Graves as "a leader of the modernists" and, even though his description of Graves as a "Jude Fawley who has succeeded in getting his education at Christminster" may be open to more than one interpretation, he concludes his review by advising his readers that Graves's poems reveal "what English poetry is doing to-day."¹ Fletcher's view of Laura Riding's poetry, however, is considerably less generous. He finds the poems in *The Close Chaplet* unsatisfactory because they are too obviously indebted to the poetry of Marianne Moore and Gertrude Stein as well as to Ransom and Graves.

Graves's reaction to Fletcher's review surfaced two months later in the form of a public letter to the editor of *The Criterion*.² The stated intention of the letter is to refute Fletcher's "absurd notice" of Laura Riding's poems. The tone of the letter is what Eliot regarded as excessively warm and Fletcher later described as ill-mannered. Not only does Graves attack Fletcher's name-dropping approach to criticism, but he also ridicules the "false writing that passes for criticism throughout the 'advanced' literary press." He refutes each instance of alleged derivations in Miss Riding's poetry, but more significantly he attacks Fletcher as a superficial, political reviewer and further suggests that he is a conscious participant in a

literary conspiracy which suppresses new talent and slavishly praises established names. He also contends that Fletcher fails even in his effort to stay with the fashions because he does not follow the more advanced movements in modern poetry.

Fletcher quickly responded to Graves's charge that he was an untalented literary parasite. In the December 1927 issue of *The Criterion*, his public letter to the editor appears in answer to the "ill-mannered" tone and "wrong-headed" conclusions of Graves's letter.³ Fletcher first attempts to expose what he regards as the ineptitude of Graves's previous attempts at literary criticism. He points out that John Livingston Lowes, in his study of Coleridge, has shown that Graves's Freudian analysis of Coleridge's poems is incompetent and superficial and "how disposed Mr. Graves is to misquote, to transmogrify, to alter the meaning of his authorities in order to support some hare-brained notion." Accordingly, the vicious attack on Fletcher's review is another sample of Graves's irrational criticism, particularly when he accuses Fletcher of following the fashions at the same moment in which he claims that he is out of touch with the times. As for Laura Riding, Fletcher suggests that she should speak for herself in the future if she wants to be taken seriously.

The public controversy ended with the publication of Fletcher's letter, and it appears that the editor of *The Criterion* remained neutral and detached during the heated exchange. The T. S. Eliot letters to Graves during this period, however, reveal an entirely different situation. In a letter dated 3 August 1927, Eliot passes judgement on a letter to the editor from Graves which he finds too personal. Even though Eliot carefully points out that he would never protect one of his reviewers from criticism, he informs Graves that he is returning the letter for further consideration. His final words to Graves imply that he prefers to be in an editorial position to publish Graves's verses and that Graves's letter may serve to isolate him from Eliot's good opinion.

If Eliot hoped for a diplomatic end to the developing controversy, Graves's reaction to the return of the letter was a clear indication that his efforts had failed. In a letter to Graves dated 9 August 1927, Eliot, in reply to new charges by Graves, insists that the decision to publish the letter to the editor rests entirely with Graves, and he does not want Graves to think that Fletcher wished to

suppress the letter or that he wished to suppress it in Fletcher's interest. Eliot forsakes any further comment on Graves's letter to the editor, but he does respond to certain allusions in Graves's latest private letter that *The Criterion* is pursuing an establishmentarian policy in regard to modern poetry. Eliot contends that Humbert Wolfe, F. S. Flint, and Fletcher offer a diversity of literary opinions rather than a popular front devised to protect certain interests. As to Graves's fear that he will soon be without literary friends, Eliot consoles him with the ambivalent thought that it is a fate to be desired by all those who truly care for the future of literature.

Eliot's last letter to Graves, dated 11 August 1927, reveals a further wrench in their relationship. Eliot's request in his previous letter for clarification of Graves's objections to *The Criterion* provoked an even stronger reaction from Graves. Eliot was now forced to respond to charges that his reviewers were literary politicians and the new intimation that he had vulgarized his monthly in order to increase its sales. The style of Eliot's letter is uncharacteristically curt and personal. He praises Flint and Fletcher for their disinterestedness as reviewers and confesses despair that Graves would regard them as literary politicians. As to the criticism of his own efforts, Eliot asks for specific details from Graves, but admits that he resents Graves's intimating a mercenary attitude on his part as editor. Graves's letter to the editor was published, then, in the October issue of *The Criterion*, but he had already drawn blood through the brief and heated exchange of private letters in early August.

Graves's immediate reason for attacking the politics of *The Criterion* was to defend the literary talents of Laura Riding against an adverse review, but several letters that Eliot wrote to Graves during the period from 1923 to 1925 reveal a possible long standing reason for Graves's sudden display of open hostility. In a letter dated 9 October 1923, Eliot apologizes for rejecting some poetry sent by Graves for publication in *The Criterion*, and mentions some other sources that Graves might consider, including Harold Munro. Several months later on 13 May 1924, Eliot wrote again to offer his apology and the reason he was returning Graves's poems. He explains that his monthly publishes very little poetry and that he is unable to consider any new submissions for another nine months. He recommends that

Graves send him some prose instead. Graves's ensuing strategy was to propose a collaboration on modern poetry. In an undated letter, Eliot expresses a mild interest in writing a series of essays with Graves. The letter is significant as an indicator of a few of Eliot's preferences for truly modern voices in poetry (Gertrude Stein, T. E. Hulme, and Wallace Stevens) and his rejection of Frost as obsolete, but it also contains the same evasions Graves encountered in his earlier attempts to publish poetry in *The Criterion*. In a letter dated 2 November 1925, Eliot responds again to the idea of a collaboration, but this time he points out that he cannot begin work for a full year. He finally recommends that Graves consider writing the book by himself.

The letters that Eliot wrote to Graves from 1923 to 1925 reveal that in the years preceeding his controversy with *The Criterion* Graves failed in his efforts to publish poetry in the monthly and in his later scheme to involve Eliot in a collaboration on modern poetry. Graves's sole contribution to *The Criterion* was review of three books on anthropology that was published in 1927 just three months before Fletcher's review.⁴ When Graves wrote his letter to the editor in defense of Laura Riding's poetry, his admiration for Miss Riding may have been his immediate motivation, but his frustration with Eliot and *The Criterion* had begun as early as 1923 when his poetry was first rejected. Behind Graves's public response to Fletcher's review was the exasperation of his fruitless correspondence with Eliot as well as the importance of his relationship with Laura Riding. Though Eliot's letters clearly indicate that he wanted to remain on good terms with Graves, he nonetheless had no intention of publishing Graves's poetry. No poetry, reviews, or letters by Graves appeared in *The Criterion* after the controversy. Indeed, in addition to his failure to interest Eliot in his work, Graves seems finally to have alienated Eliot's good will. On the other hand, John Gould Fletcher would continue to review poetry for *The Criterion* for several years more.

NOTES

1. John Gould Fletcher, rev. of *Poems (1914-1926)*, by Robert Graves; *The Cyder-Feast and Other Poems*, by Sacheverell Sitwell; *Two Gentlemen in Bonds*, by John Crowe Ransom; *The Close Chaplet*, by Laura Riding Gottschalk; *The City*, by Ruth Manning Sanders; and, *Babel*, by J. Redwood Anderson,

"Recent Books," *The Monthly Criterion*, 6, No. 2 (August 1927), 168-72.

2. Robert Graves, "Correspondence," *The Monthly Criterion*, 6, No. 4 (October 1927), 357-59.

3. John Gould Fletcher, "Correspondence," *The Monthly Criterion*, 6, No. 6 (December 1927), 546-47.

4. Robert Graves, rev. of *Crime and Custom in Savage Society and Myth in Primitive Society*, by Bronislaw Malinowski, and *Psychology and Ethnology*, by W.H.R. Rivers, "Recent Books," *The Monthly Criterion*, 5, No. 2 (May 1927), 247-52.

The Cairo of Maud Rittenhouse

Johnetta Jones

Isabella Maud Rittenhouse was a petite, dark-haired, pug-nosed, vivacious, and artistically inclined member of one of Cairo, Illinois' socially and, at one time, financially prominent families. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, beginning when she was sixteen, Maud kept a series of six perceptive and detailed diaries.¹ Each one conveys a vivid picture of her life, loves, family, and friends. More importantly, she depicts the special world of Cairo's economic and cultural elite.

Cairo was not the most elysian setting for a young woman's diary. Located at the southernmost tip of Illinois where the Mississippi and the Ohio rivers merge, it had a reputation for being a backward wasteland. This small community (approximately 11,000 people in 1890) was reputed to be a hot, lawless, flood-ridden, unhealthy, mosquito-infested mudhole. Charles Dickens had described his 1842 visit to the area:

At length, upon the morning of the third day, we arrived at a spot so much more desolate than any we had yet beheld, that the forlornest places we had passed were, in comparison with it, full of interest. At the junction of the two rivers, on ground so flat and low and marshy, that at certain seasons of the year it is inundated to the house-tops, lies a breeding-place of fever, ague, and death. . . . A dismal swamp, on which the half-built houses rot away: cleared here and there for a space of a few yards; and teeming, then, with rank unwholesome vegetation, in whose baleful shade the wretched wanderers who are tempted hither, droop, and die, and lay their bones; the hateful Mississippi circling and eddying before it, and turning off upon its southern course a slimy monster hideous to behold; a hotbed of disease, an ugly sepulchre, a grave uncheered by any gleam of promise: a place without one single quality, in earth or air or water, to commend it: such is this dismal Cairo.²

This negative image persisted throughout the nineteenth century for a number of excellent reasons. Although an immense levee system surrounded the town on three sides, it failed to solve the annual spring problem of flooding and underground seepage. The problem was of such magnitude that the city was derisively known among commercial rivals as "the American Venice." The *Paducah Daily News* commented editorially that all Cairoites needed was a fleet of gondolas to replace the flatboats normally tied up outside the backdoor.³ Frequent epidemics of smallpox and yellow fever only added to this negative picture. In one particularly virulent attack of yellow fever in 1878, one-third of the population left town for two and a half months to escape the contagion. At least fifty-two of those who remained behind died.⁴ Population growth was further retarded by the city's persistently high crime rate. Some citizens blamed it on the community's large Negro population (during the eighties and nineties, Cairo had a permanent black population of approximately thirty-six percent).⁵ Others attributed it to the liquor-vice economy established to serve the large floating population working on the river and the city's seven railroads. Liquor license fees (\$500 each) for forty-eight saloons supplied half of the municipal revenues in 1895. Lackadaisical law enforcement combined with a general lack of public interest in city government to produce the town's reputation.⁶

Moreover, Cairo was a community which never quite lived up to its full economic potential. Although early land speculators envisioned the establishment of a large commercial center at the junction of the two major inland waterways, the city did not achieve any measure of success until the completion of the Illinois Central Railroad in 1856. When the Civil War turned Cairo into a bustling military camp, many people who never expected to attain more than a comfortable existence became comparatively wealthy. After the war was over, Cairo spent the next fifteen years trying desperately to recapture the economic prosperity of its golden era. Business failures, slow population growth, and the 1873 depression combined to destroy nearly all hopes of recovery.⁷ But prosperity did begin to return in the eighties. On 3 July 1881 Maud Rittenhouse wrote enthusiastically:

Three years ago people said all the hateful things they could about Cairo. Now they are lavish in their praises. . . we'll monopolize all the trade of the Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and the Cumberland Rivers. Our new grain elevator is one of the largest in the world, new railroads are constantly striking us. We've the most magnificent hotel (run on the grandest scale) in this part of the country, telephone system, new opera house, elegant one, going up, streetcars soon to be running and we are altogether citified.⁸

Once again, it was possible for shrewd and ambitious men to accumulate a large amount of wealth. Unfortunately, Cairo's new, expansive, boom economy was based on the shifting sands of excessive railroad construction, land speculation, and the speculative grain trade. Any change in the nation's economy such as the 1893 agricultural depression could and did produce disaster. Business and railroad failures were not strangers to Cairo. By the turn of the century, this river community had begun to scale down the size of its great expectations.⁹

Despite all these facts, Maud commented in 1881, "I am always filled with happiness upon reaching home. Every rickety old house looks familiar and sweet—every tree an old friend. I was born here and have lived here and can never do ought but love our dear ugly Cairo."¹⁰

The Rittenhouses were members in good standing of Cairo's elite. Maud lived in a fifteen-room red brick house constructed during the prosperous Civil War era. Although the house was considered to be one of the best in town, like most others of the period it had no plumbing. Wood Rittenhouse, her father, arrived in Cairo in the late 1860s and worked his way up from a retail clerk to a successful commission grain merchant with his own business. Maud boasted proudly:

Papa has possession of all the corn between here and New Orleans, over 30,000 bushels shelled and is going to make an immense profit on it. His traveling agent at New Orleans is holding on to it and corn is rising everyday. . . He also has another big lot at St. Louis, which he can sell now at a profit of about five cents a bushel . . . The reason that I speak of this to you is that I think he will get me a grand Steinway piano, if all goes well.¹¹

Moving into the leadership group in the eighties, he was elected to several terms on both the City Council and the school board. In addition, he served with distinction as president of the Cairo

Chamber of Commerce for a number of years. The mayor also appointed Rittenhouse a trustee of the public library from its inception in 1882 to his death in 1896. At that time, his wife, Laura A. Rittenhouse, was appointed to replace him. Maud's mother was a socially prominent clubwoman and an early, ardent supporter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Maud's four brothers, Harry, Fred, Wood, Jr., and Robin, had successful careers as a doctor, dentist, superintendent of the Cairo Electric Plant, and grocer respectively.

Maud had no doubts about the family's status, writing in 1882, "The skum of the town caught the small-pox, but we hardly thought that clean, respectable, comfortable families would catch it. So much for our thoughts. The upper class *has* caught it, and where but in our own family. . . . Is not it too horrible!"¹²

Normally, Maud's family had only limited social contact with people outside of their own loosely knit but increasingly isolated circle. Viewing the scene from a distance, she stereotyped each of Cairo's various groups. The Germans were all chronic alcoholics. Maud commented irately that "those Germans seem to think nothing of it, yet how many of them right here die yearly from it. They boast of the health of their race while the great, fat men (*beer-fat*, too) die continually of apoplexy and goodness knows what all else."¹³ Irish servants were incompetent, untrustworthy, and criminal. Little darkey boys caught frogs while their parents worked as janitors, porters, delivery boys, maids, and cooks. Light-skinned darkey girls were impudent and "too bold."¹⁴ Often, these people became a large source of frustrated irritation when they were not in their assigned places. Ironically, "Miss Maud" confided to her diary:

The week has been a round of pleasure. This morning we woke up to find no girl, besides the house to sweep, extra chamberwork to do, and it being scrub day, baking day, churning day, mending day, and the cold remains of some house-cleaning to do. Well you can imagine the situation. To wake up at 7:15 expecting to dress and eat a warm breakfast, but to be compelled to swallow instead the bitter truth that there isn't even a fire in the kitchen stove or a "girl" in the kitchen-door-way. . . . Monday, a "black angel" in calico will be reinstated on the throne below and we shall be saved, provided that there's anything left of us.¹⁵

At the same time, these common folk could be amusing.

Although Maud was extremely fond of her French dancing master, she still found him funny. Maud described him as being "little and lively, with a superfluity of gray and dark beard, a lovely genial smile, pretty teeth, garlic-y breath" and the habit of always saying "splee-endid!"¹⁶ In another instance, the family saw several blacks riding by one warm summer evening. "'Niggers on Mules,' remarked Harry. 'Horses,' said Papa. 'Don't the middle one step cute?' I remarked just as they passed, and I beheld to my amusement, Williamson (the one nearest us) *with a cigar.*"¹⁷

In many respects, Cairo was very much a southern town racially. Early in 1883, a small section of the black population attempted to integrate the community's segregated schools. Predictably, Maud reacted with hostility: "Cairo would not be Cairo without some excitement. . . We've got done with yellow fever, cyclones, smallpox, earthquakes, and floods so now we've an insurrection by the colored element." She believed fundamentally that they were "the most impudent, irrational, unruly race that ever walked the globe." As the daughter of a current school board member, she most probably reflected her father's point of view. Maud was convinced that the Negro school was just as good as the two white ones. Moreover, she was positive that the "march" on the schools was a mob action instigated by an "ignorant, unreasonable black preachah." Peace was restored only after a direct confrontation with the police and the board of education. Once this black threat to the status quo was removed, Cairo's elite returned to their normal placid existence.¹⁸

Everyday life in Maud's world revolved around a continuous series of social activities stressing culture and refinement. Cairo had a large number of organizations and clubs which served the dual role of providing both cultural pursuits and social entertainment. Among the various organizations were the Yacht Club, the Methodist Epworth League, the Presbyterian Christian Endeavor, the Glover Tennis Club, the Young Men's Literary and Social Club, the Music Club, the Cairo Philharmonic Society, the Cairo Opera Company, the Schiller and Goethe Societies, the Woman's Club and Library Association, and the Ideal League.¹⁹ Depending on the focus of the organization, members might be treated to an evening of Schumann by the Music Club or a vocal recital by the ladies of the Presbyterian Christian Endeavor. The Young Men's Literary Society, to which both Harry

and Fred Rittenhouse belonged, intended to improve the reading, writing, and public speaking abilities of its membership. Maud was a charter member of the "quite exclusive" dramatic literary society called the Ideal League. This organization sponsored lectures, public forums, debates, and the presentation of original essays. In addition, the league gave dances, teas, receptions, and dinners for its members and their guests. The snobbishness and elitism of some of these groups is evidenced by the Ideal League's practice of allowing a single individual the power to blackball an applicant for membership.²⁰

Social organizations and clubs were only one facet of the elite's busy social life. On an individual basis, young men courted eligible young ladies with serenades, flowers, small gifts, buggy rides, river excursions, and books of poetry. Private home parties could be either simple luncheons or more elaborate evening functions with string quartets and separate rooms allotted for dancing, conversation, and cards. Fancy dress balls, lavish dinner parties, parlor concerts, socials, and all kinds of receptions were extremely popular among successful hostesses. Usually the more elegant and prestigious events were held at the Halliday House, a hotel famous up and down the Mississippi River for its superior cuisine and southern hospitality. Maud described one large reception aboard the steamer *City of Cairo* in the following terms: "The boat was lovely and large, the music grand, crowd jolly, and supper really delicious (but too much Champagne) . . . The speeches were good, colors and banners pretty, officers kind, and everything bon-ton."²¹

Theatrical productions were also avidly supported. Cairo's \$25,000 Opera House provided the elaborate backdrop for professional and amateur presentations. Professional productions of *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and others provided the community with both entertainment and culture. In addition, Maud and her friends delighted in appearing in amateur dramatic and operatic productions such as *The Mikado*, *Damon and Pythias*, *Suzanne*, *The Queen of Fame*, and *Priscilla*. When the *Cairo Citizen* reviewed the Cairo Opera Company's touring production of *The Mikado*, it noted that "Miss Rittenhouse could not have been told from a professional. Her manner was easy and graceful."²²

Cairo's elite placed great emphasis on the value of education as well. Children were given private art, foreign language, dancing, and singing lessons at an early age. Although some parents sent their

children to the city's public schools, others sent theirs to private academies and military schools in Missouri, Kentucky, and upstate Illinois. More importantly, even those who graduated from the Cairo public high school were sent on to such private colleges as Vanderbilt, Vassar, Princeton, Northwestern, St. Louis, and Washington University. In these institutions, they were trained to be doctors, lawyers, dentists, teachers, and businessmen. Several individuals completed their educations in Europe. For example, Maud's artistic rival, Mary Halliday, studied painting under Whistler in London while her brother read law at Cambridge.²³ Education was generally considered to be the key not only to intellectual achievement but also to economic success.

Despite increasingly severe financial problems, the Rittenhouse family continued to place primary importance upon education and social refinement. After graduating from the public high school in 1885, Maud was sent to the St. Louis School of Fine Arts at Washington University. During her first year in St. Louis, money difficulties threatened to curtail her studies. Mrs. Rittenhouse wrote her apprehensive daughter in February 1886:

Papa thinks you ought to stay the year out, or that you ought at least to stay a while longer and take painting lessons. He says he isn't positive that he can send you back next fall and that it would be better to stay while you have such a good start. I expect it would be, but you must do as you think best. I want you at home, oh! so badly, but not enough to deprive you of a chance for improvement. That must be my first consideration, my own feeling afterward.²⁴

Maud successfully completed the first year and returned for the second. Parental permission was subsequently given for her to move "beyond the gates" into the "highest class" in school. She anticipated the change with growing sophistication. "A year ago to-day I was an 'infant' in the nursery. . . . Then the nude class was a mystical, semi-barbarous affair, and I felt nervous at the idea of drawing from the nude figure. How easily that silly mock-modesty is overgrown!"²⁵ Brother Harry later studied medicine at Bellevue Hospital in New York City with \$300 in financial aid from Maud while Fred went to dentistry school in Chicago.²⁶ The financial sacrifice and the emotional strain of separation demonstrated in Mrs. Rittenhouse's letter to Maud were justified to give the Rittenhouse

children the sophistication and intellectual achievement produced by an advanced education.

Education broadened the horizons of this second generation of the elite to such an extent that they rejected and abandoned the city of Cairo. Regional provincialism combined with the lack of alluring economic opportunities to make the city less attractive. Most never returned, but those who did rarely stayed permanently. Even the older generation gradually drifted away. Some left as soon as they had made their fortunes. Others departed because of health reasons or a lack of job opportunities. Ultimately the gap between those who remained and the rest of the community began to widen and become fixed. Except for infrequent reform movements, the elite generally withdrew from political leadership. Furthermore, they rejected responsibility for helping the community solve basic problems except in those instances where their own personal interests were involved.²⁷

Maud Rittenhouse went back to "dear ugly Cairo" after finishing art school. Over the next eight years, she slowly changed from a "frivolous child" into a mature individual of intellectual merit. Re-adopting the accepted life style of her circle, she received and returned calls, engaged in church work, performed in local theatrical productions, and attended various social functions. However, the desire to become financially independent made her seek new avenues for potential achievement. In one attempt to remedy the situation, she began to write short stories for *Godey's Ladies Book*, *Cottage Hearth*, *Wide Awake*, and *Interior Today*. Maud's writing was only moderately successful financially until she won a \$1,000 prize offered by a real estate company for a historical novel about Linville, North Carolina—a town which she had never seen. As a result, she became Cairo's literary lion, although the novel was apparently never published. On a less exceptional level, Maud taught in the public schools for one year before resigning in frustration because she had difficulties maintaining discipline in the classroom. Finally Maud opened an art studio in which she made pottery for sale and gave art lessons to the local children for fifty cents. While this last occupation was not always profitable, she was content. Art was her first love.

In many ways the Rittenhouse family was an excellent example of Cairo's elite, but its members did not completely fit the mold. Financial problems and temperance activities helped to widen the

perimeters of their isolated world.

When Maud first began her diaries in 1881, Wood Rittenhouse owned a successful commission house. Bad investments in western lands and the general depression of the 1890s destroyed the family's comfortable existence. Even though money was found to educate the children, pleasure trips, large social functions, and necessary house repairs were curtailed. In spite of Maud's best efforts to relieve the financial strain, the situation continued to get worse. Frustrated and worried, she confided to her diary in 1891:

Papa's investments in the west are *dead*, and poor Papa himself seems to have lost all courage and back-bone. Mama thinks we ought to go to Chicago, but Papa's afraid to venture in anything. And he owes money, due in a few months, which *I* don't see how he's to pay without selling property. . . . It seems as though we all work as hard as we can, and economize in every direction, and then barely eke out an existence.²⁸

Despite the lack of money, the family remained an accepted part of the group, sharing the same goals, ideals, and aspirations.

While financial problems forced a cutback in some of their later temperance activities, both mother and daughter were hardworking members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Maud began attending the meetings early in the eighties. Being a reformer at heart, she made numerous unsuccessful attempts to reform her beaux. Mother and daughter worked well together for the cause. On the Fourth of July, "Miss Maud" would read the Declaration of Independence in the city square while her mother set up a lemonade stand to combat the "beer interest." Mrs. Rittenhouse often gave dinners, receptions, and dances for the W.C.T.U. with considerable success. While Maud hated to collect donations for these gatherings, she declared proudly, "I'm about as good a hand at the business as ever you saw. . . . Mama nearly fainted when I read her the list of contributions. The wives of brewers and saloon-keepers themselves gave. But it requires tact."²⁹ Both mother and daughter were publicly honored for their temperance activities in the nineties.

Added to this, Maud pushed for and helped to organize the Cairo chapter of the Parish Young Woman's Christian Temperance Union in 1892. When friends suggested that she be elected president, Maud grumbled privately, ". . . I just knew it would be another load for *me* to shoulder. I am dead tired of working for poor ungrateful

humanity. If I gave every minute of my time to the public, I couldn't begin to satisfy the demands made of me. . . . I was ready to help the 'Y-' work with a vim, but *not* to run it." Upon her election, she wrote, "I wanted to screech!"³⁰ Needless to say, she did not. Under her guidance, the organization grew and prospered.

"Miss Maud" discontinued her diary in June 1895, just prior to her marriage to Dr. E. H. Mayne of Brooklyn, New York.³¹ When she marched down the aisle at the age of thirty, the local paper devoted two columns on page one to covering one of Cairo's most important weddings. Numbered among the guests and bridal party were the sons and daughters of the city's first families. The *Cairo Evening Citizen* described the bride as being a "favorite with every one." Having a "bright and vivacious personality, she was always willing to lend her time and talents to forwarding a good cause." The article concluded with a wish for the groom that "he may prove a worthy companion for his bride!"³²

Once again the Rittenhouse family followed the general pattern. Ultimately both Maud and her brother Dr. Harry returned to Cairo only temporarily. Maud's marriage to Dr. Mayne and Harry's failure to establish a successful medical practice caused them to leave Cairo. After the death of Wood Rittenhouse in 1896, Mrs. Rittenhouse and the youngest son, Robin, moved to Chicago to be near the medical and dental practices of her two sons. Only one son, Wood Jr., remained behind in business in Cairo.³³

Except for rare visits, Isabella Maud Rittenhouse Mayne left Cairo permanently after her marriage. But her diaries had captured the life style of the community's economic and cultural elite. Here was an increasingly isolated, socially prominent, well-educated group whose intellectual activities gave it a sophistication which was out of place in a town with Cairo's particular past and reputation. The success of this elite ultimately resulted in the rejection and/or abandonment of the city. As a result, Maud's diaries also document the emergence of a problem which would plague Cairo, Illinois, well into the twentieth century with increasing severity and disastrous results.

NOTES

1. The diaries span the years 1881 through 1895; each contains over 100,000 words. They were donated to Morris Library's Special Collections by Maud's son-in-law, Richard Lee Strout, who also edited and prepared them for publication (*Maud*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1939). He also added explanatory notes. Hereafter, the diary will be cited as *Maud*, with page references given first to the printed version and dates of entry in the diary in parentheses. A seventh, earlier diary, was destroyed by Maud.
2. Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, ed. with an introduction by John S. Whitley and Arnold Goldman (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 215-16.
3. Herman R. Lantz, *A Community in Search of Itself: A Case History of Cairo, Illinois* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1972), p. 132; *Paducah Daily News*, 13 February 1882, p. 1. Maud gives a particularly vivid account of the battle against the rivers in February 1882 (pp. 55-62).
4. John M. Lansden, *A History of Cairo, Illinois* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley and Sons, 1910), pp. 123-24.
5. Lantz, p. 49.
6. See Lansden, p. 187; Lantz, pp. 39, 65-71; *Cairo Democrat*, 19 February 1868.
7. Lantz, pp. 7, 20-25; Lansden, pp. 129-30.
8. *Maud*, p. 22 (3 July 1881).
9. Lantz, pp. 50-51, 111-20.
10. *Maud*, p. 37 (8 September 1881).
11. *Ibid.*, p. 4 (7 May 1881).
12. *Ibid.*, p. 86 (27 April 1882).
13. *Ibid.*, p. 178 (11 March 1883).
14. *Ibid.*, p. 188 (5 April 1883).
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 244-45 (3 November 1883).
16. *Ibid.*, p. 50 (22 January 1882).
17. *Maud Rittenhouse diaries*, I, 105.
18. *Maud*, p. 175 (9 March 1883).
19. Names of the various organizations and clubs were culled from the social section of the *Cairo Citizen* and those specifically mentioned in the diaries.
20. *Maud*, p. 246 (7 November 1883).
21. *Ibid.*, p. 79 (15 April 1882).
22. *Cairo Citizen*, 25 May 1893, p. 1.
23. *Ibid.*, 2 May 1901, p. 3.
24. *Maud*, p. 369 (5 February 1886).
25. *Ibid.*, p. 373 (19 February 1886).
26. *Ibid.*, p. 537 (17 February 1892).
27. Lantz, pp. 36-39.
28. *Maud*, p. 518 (29 March 1891).
29. *Ibid.*, p. 113 (28 June 1882).
30. *Ibid.*, p. 545 (5 June 1892).
31. Earl H. Mayne, an engineer, came to Cairo in the late 1880's to build a railroad bridge across the Mississippi River. Maud and the "Dear Adorable" got engaged on her twenty-fifth birthday. Their marriage was postponed when she

- encouraged him to take a four year medical course with Harry. The engagement was broken in 1891 at his request. After his graduation and a long series of letters, they became engaged again in 1894.
32. *Cairo Evening Citizen*, 13 June 1895, p. 1.
 33. *Ibid.*, 6 August 1901, p. 3.

Contributors

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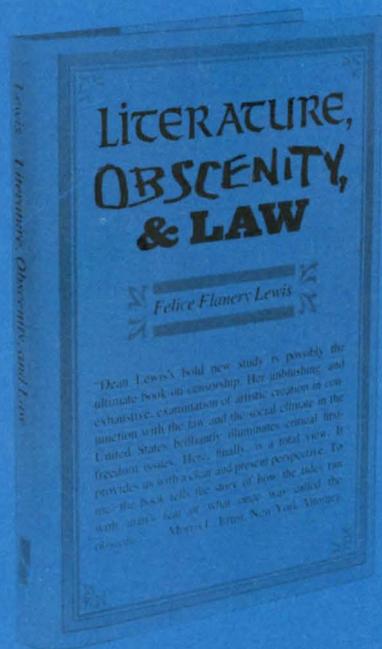
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