
On Writing

A Publication of the Writers Guild of America, East

...In the case of "Woman of the Year" Michael Kanin and I talked it out in terms of movie scenes and then, instead of writing it as a screenplay, wrote it as a novella told in the first person by the Spence Tracy character.

...There was a knock on the door, and a woman came in with a big hat and a long cigarette holder and I knew it was Lillian Hellman. She said that the Writers Guild was about to amalgamate with the Authors Guild, that there was a lot of pressure being put on the Guild by the studio, and would

IN THIS ISSUE

**Ring Lardner, Jr.
Maurice Rapf
with an introduction
by Doug McGrath**

On Writing

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A Note from the Editor

The interviews in this issue cover five different elements: Hollywood screenwriters in the 1930s–1950s, the role of political involvement among Hollywood writers of that era, the formation of the Screen Writers Guild, the Hollywood blacklist, and the film *Woman of the Year*.

There are entire books written about each of these subjects, many of which quote Ring Lardner, Jr., and Maurice Rapf extensively. For some readers, therefore, much of what is contained in these pages will not be new. Other readers may find some details they consider superfluous.

But our hope is not only to inform. It is also to document the recollections of two extraordinary men whose personal experiences are a part of our collective history.

For us this is a very special issue. Because it is special, we have asked Douglas McGrath to introduce it.

Arlene Hellerman

About This Issue

When I was at my least informed and thus my most opinionated, which is to say when I was 12, my grandfather asked me who my favorite writer was. Without delay I answered, “Ring Lardner.” He asked me why. I cited not only Mr. Lardner’s crackling wit but also his versatility: After all, this was the man who had written the peerlessly observed baseball stories *Alibi Ike*, and *You Know Me, Al*, as well as the irreplaceably droll screen comedies, *Woman of the Year* and *M*A*S*H*. My grandfather said, “You don’t know it, but you have two favorite writers.” In a twist worthy of *Chinatown*, I was shocked to learn that Ring Lardner was the father of Ring Lardner. That’s a lot of what growing up was for me: every so often somebody said something and the world turned upside down.

It is Ring Lardner, Jr., and Maurice Rapf that *On Writing* is lucky enough to have as its subjects in this issue. In November, it will be 50 years since the Hollywood Ten went to Washington. That era, which Lillian Hellman memorably called *Scoundrel Time*, is one of many things that Mr. Lardner and Mr. Rapf discuss in the next pages: their politics, their roots, the craft and challenges of screenwriting in the golden age, as well as in the yellow age of McCarthy.

What makes this issue of *On Writing* of special interest is that it includes the original ending of *Woman of the Year*, which Mr. Lardner wrote with Michael Kanin. Their ending was disliked by the studio and replaced by one that was not theirs. Mr. Lardner tells us that the studio ordered the alteration based on preview cards, which complained that Katherine Hepburn’s character needed more of a comeuppance, though it is his suspicion that the men in power were those with that desire. Either way, the original ending was discarded and a new one stapled on.

It is particularly delightful to read the original as I always felt, even as a boy, that the ending in the movie felt phony, and worse, judgmental and punitive. It seemed absent of the intelligence and mocking good humor that make the rest of the film so much fun. The original ending has all that and a quality that marks the body of Mr. Lardner’s work: a compassion for his characters, which by extension spills over to, and elevates, his audience.

Douglas McGrath

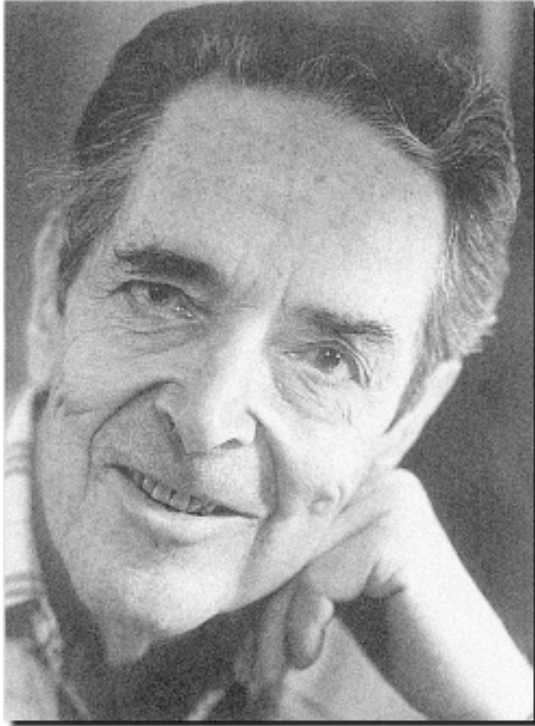


photo by Mitzi Trumbo

Ring Lardner, Jr.

Maurice Rapf

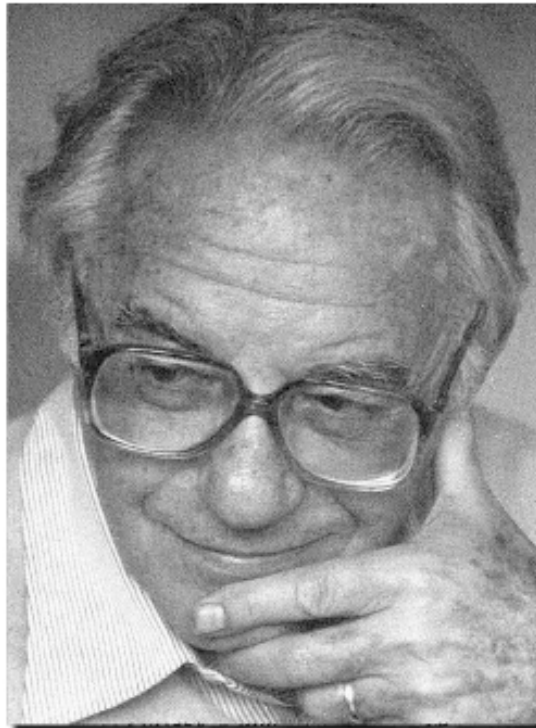


photo by Bill Rapf

October 4, 1996 • New York City

ON WRITING: What brought each of you to Hollywood?

RAPF: I was raised in Hollywood, but I went to college at Dartmouth and didn't want to go back to Hollywood when I got through with college. I thought, having grown up in Hollywood, that it was a cesspool. I initially went to work in New York in the theater, which I thought was incorruptible. I got a job with a theatrical producer — through Hollywood influence, of course.

ON WRITING: What year was this?

RAPF: '36, no, '35, I beg your pardon. All I seemed to do was run back and forth to Wall Street to pick up money from his angel, who, believe it or not, was named Gabriel. Gabriel had a girlfriend, and that's why he was investing in the theater. I mean, that's what I found the theater to be like. It was really bad. It was just like Hollywood. I got \$15 a week and I could barely eat on it. So I went to Hollywood.

ON WRITING: Were you also in New York at that time, Ring?

LARDNER: I was in New York in 1935. I had gone to Princeton but quit college after my sophomore year when I was 18 and went to work on a newspaper. I didn't know Maurice was in New York that year. We had met the previous year in the Soviet Union.

ON WRITING: What were you both doing in the Soviet Union?

RAPF: We didn't go on the same trip to the Soviet Union but we went to the same school there. I went with five guys from Dartmouth, including Budd Schulberg.

LARDNER: They were part of a group — was it the National Students League?

RAPF: The school was called the Anglo-American Institute.

LARDNER: I was traveling by myself. I stopped off in Moscow to see a friend who had been president of the Socialist Club at Princeton. He was at this school and said it was very interesting, so I signed up.

RAPF: I saw an advertisement on the wall at Dartmouth for the summer studying at the Anglo-American Institute and traveling around the Soviet Union. It sounded great. But my parents didn't think it was a very good idea to go to a Communist country. Don't forget that the Soviet Union had not been recognized by the United States until Franklin D. Roosevelt got elected. He recognized the Soviet Union in '33.

LARDNER: It was the first year that Americans could go freely.

RAPF: Well, Americans went before, but this was a mass exodus. There must have been 40 of us that went from Eastern colleges under the auspices of the National Students League.

LARDNER: I came home in September '35 and went to work on a newspaper in New York.

ON WRITING: How did you go out to Hollywood?

LARDNER: Through a friend. There was an interesting character named Herbert Bayard Swope who had been editor of the *New York World* and who wrote campaign speeches for Franklin Roosevelt. His family lived next door to mine when I was a child. I roomed with his son my second year in college, and went to visit the Swopes very often on weekends.

ON WRITING: Wasn't his son Herbert, Jr.?

LARDNER: Herbert Bayard Swope, Jr., yes. I met David Selznick at their house. He had just left MGM and was starting his own company with Jock Whitney's money. He asked if I would like to work there and learn about the movie business. I was making \$25 a week on the *New York Daily Mirror*, and I think Selznick offered me \$40 to start in his publicity department. So I took the job and went west. As a publicity man I was to be on sets a good deal of the time doing stories about the stars — Fredric March and Carole Lombard and others who were working for Selznick.

ON WRITING: Maurice, wasn't your father a producer?

RAPF: We moved out to Hollywood on my seventh birthday.

ON WRITING: From New York?

RAPF: From New York. My father went into the movie business in 1916. I was a child actor. Until I went to school I was in every movie he made. Whenever there was a kid, it was me. He made a lot of Jewish movies on the East Side.

ON WRITING: Then he went to MGM?

RAPF: First he was at Warner Brothers. He started the *Rin-Tin-Tin* pictures. He did those, and then he left when they started MGM. He had a very clouded crystal ball; he didn't think that Warner Brothers was going to last. He didn't know that they would be the ones to introduce sound. But he did all right at MGM because that did well, too.

ON WRITING: I've often thought that in the '30s and '40s Hollywood was one of the intellectual centers of the world. Is that true?

RAPF: Yes.

LARDNER: There were some very interesting intellectuals living there, some of them from Europe. And some very good writers. William Faulkner was working in Hollywood, Scott Fitzgerald —

RAPF: S. J. Perelman was there, Ogden Nash was there. Every great American playwright worked in Hollywood except Elmer Rice.

LARDNER: Moss Hart, George Kaufman, Robert E. Sherwood —

RAPF: They all came to Hollywood. The only one who didn't was Elmer Rice. He had contempt for movies and wouldn't come. They tried to lure him out there; it wasn't because he wasn't offered a job. The producers felt that Broadway writers—and novelists—were better than Hollywood writers. They thought so at first. They changed their minds after a while.

LARDNER: Selznick was particularly guilty of that.

RAPF: Yes, he was.

LARDNER: I had become very good friends with Budd Schulberg, who was working in the story department while I was in the publicity department. After I had been there a year, Selznick was making this picture, *A Star Is Born*; he had Dorothy Parker and her husband, Alan Campbell, working on the screenplay but they didn't have an ending. Typically, Selznick sent scripts to a number of writers around the country to see if they could think of an ending, and he also asked Budd and me to see if we could think of one. We thought of the scene that was actually used in the picture, and then again as an ending in the Judy Garland–James Mason version.

ON WRITING: What is the ending?

LARDNER: It takes place in Grauman's Chinese Theater. Janet Gaynor is playing a movie star whose husband, played by Fredric March, has gone downhill.

RAPF: By that time he's dead.

LARDNER: Yes, by that time he's killed himself. She's accepting an award, and she says, "This is Mrs.

Norman Maine speaking." We also wrote a couple of other scenes in the picture.

ON WRITING: Which scenes?

LARDNER: There was a scene—I can't remember it well. As a matter of fact, I do remember we had a big argument in Selznick's office with William Wellman, who was the director and original co-writer of the script before Parker and Campbell rewrote it.

Lionel Stander, playing a press agent, was very nasty to Fredric March who was on his way downhill. And I said, "I don't know why he's so nasty to him, they were friendly before." Wellman said, "Because he's drunk." I said, "Well, I think people who are nasty when they're drunk are nasty when they're sober, the drink just brings it out in them." I wanted to handle Stander's character differently. But Wellman very angrily said, "I'm nasty when I'm drunk." I said, "That proves my point." We didn't get along so well after that.

But after *A Star Is Born*, Selznick said we were writers and assigned us to work on a script for a fellow named Merian Cooper whom he'd hired as an associate. Merian Cooper had produced *King Kong* and some rather unsuccessful pictures, too.

RAPF: *The Four Feathers* was not successful.

LARDNER: We realized that Selznick was never going to allow Cooper to make a picture, and he was never going to allow anything we wrote to be the final script. Even though he had us in a

sense rewriting some of the fancier writers, he would always get somebody else in at the last minute, a big writer.

Anyway, he had another picture with ending trouble. Ben Hecht had written a picture called *Nothing Sacred* and left the studio with an ending which Selznick didn't like. The story was about a young woman named Hazel Flagg, played by Carole Lombard, who's diagnosed as having a fatal ailment that would kill her in a matter of months. Her cause gets championed by a newspaper and her impending death becomes a national event. Then it's discovered the doctor made a mistake. The ending problem was how to let her get back to a normal life. Hecht's ending was that a birth of sextuplets drives her story out of the papers and so everybody forgets about her. Selznick wanted something else. Budd was away at this time, so Selznick enlisted me to work with a writer named George Oppenheimer at Metro. And at the same time he again sent the script to George Kaufman, to Moss Hart, to Robert E. Sherwood—to see if they could think of an ending. Well, we came up with the ending for that one, too.

ON WRITING: Where Carole Lombard is on the boat?

LARDNER: Yeah. The newspaper has faked her funeral. She's on a ship when somebody recognizes her as Hazel Flagg and she says, "I'm getting sick and tired of people mistaking me for that fake." So they used that.

But I still realized I wasn't going to get very far at Selznick's, and that if I wanted to get some movies done it was a good idea to go somewhere else. So I got a job at Warner Brothers working in their B department. They made a lot of B pictures; you know, small budget pictures.

ON WRITING: You were working for Bryan Foy.

LARDNER: Yes. The first time I walked in Brynie Foy's office for an assignment, he had a stack of scripts on the floor that was a desk high. Apparently, as he finished shooting a picture he put the script on top of the stack. So he reached down to the bottom of the stack and very deftly pulled one out. The bottom of the stack meant it was —

RAPF: He had made 12 movies since then —

LARDNER: — a year or two since then. So he'd pull out a script, look at it and say, "Let's see, this one was about horse racing, make it about automobile racing."

RAPF: I had the same experience with Foy. I worked for Foy when he went to Fox. I've told this story to my students a lot. It's unbelievable because he was so frank about it. I was assigned to work for him on the story of Floyd Gibbons, who had written his autobiography. He was a nutty war correspondent, and nothing in his book made any sense. Foy said we had to find another movie to pattern it on. He said, "Don't you know of any other movies about a guy who's doing a dangerous job that he shouldn't do and is driving his wife

crazy?” I said, “Sure, there’s one playing right now called *Test Pilot* with Clark Gable and Myrna Loy.” He said, “Let’s look at it.” So he sent for it. It wasn’t even a Fox picture; it was an MGM picture. He said, “You can get the script, your father’s at MGM.” He got the script, read it, and said, “I’ll tell you what I want you to do, I want you to take this script home and switch it from a test pilot to a war correspondent.” You know the sequence in the beginning where Gable’s in an airplane and it crashes on a farm and he meets Myrna Loy? Foy said, “Well, he’s in a Tin Lizzie, he’s driving to cover a story in St. Louis, and he has a flat tire on a farm.” In *Test Pilot* they go to a baseball game. Foy said, “Make it a circus.” He changed every goddamn thing. But he said, “Keep the dialogue, I don’t want you to change a word.” I said, “But we can’t do that, it’s not a Fox picture.” He said, “We’ll fix it later.” Well, I never worked on it. I quit.

ON WRITING: Did the movie get made?

RAPF: No, it never got made. But when I objected to it he told me a story. He said, “Don’t worry about it, I made one movie at Warner Brothers 12 times.” He made a movie called *Tiger Shark* 12 different ways. *Tiger Shark* was with Eddie [Edward G.] Robinson and Richard Arlen and somebody else — Zita Johann or somebody that you never heard of. It’s about an older man who’s married to a younger woman and a shark bites off his hand. He becomes an embittered old man, and as a result his wife has an affair with his first

mate. And he did that in *The Circus* with a lion tamer where the lion bites the hand off. He did it in a lumber mill where the saw saws the hand off. I forget all the different versions, but he did it 12 times. And I said, “But you’re stealing from your own movies, that’s not so bad.”

ON WRITING: So, when you were writing for him, would you be rewriting the same movies over and over again?

LARDNER: Well, I worked on one script for Foy — or an assistant of his, I can’t think of his name at the moment. When I brought in this script, he put it on his desk and said, “I was just waiting until Jerry Wald and Dick [Richard] MacCauley got through with their script to give this to them.” He was going to pass my script on to them without looking at it. But then I got drafted into the A department to work with another writer on what was considered a big project. It never came to anything. I left after less than a year. I think I had some kind of a contract with Warner Brothers where they didn’t take up the option. And I started to try to write original stories to sell to studios.

ON WRITING: Was it a problem for young writers that they would just keep getting —

RAPF: Well, they didn’t get paid very much. I got \$40 a week to start. That was my first assignment.

ON WRITING: Were you at MGM?

RAPF: It was a little nepotism. My father was at MGM and he hired me to work on a movie with another writer,

Richard Maibaum, who was doing his first film. He wrote almost every single one of the James Bond movies until he died. But at that time he had written one Broadway play, and they hired him on a six-month contract — seven years, but the first option was at the end of six months. So it really was a six-month contract. They gave him \$200 a week, but he had never written a screenplay. And I knew a lot about movies, but I had never written anything except student plays. So I was a junior writer. A real junior writer.

ON WRITING: What did that mean?

RAPF: There was no Guild, don't forget. So they could pay you anything they wanted. Some people got \$25 a week; I got \$40. But the first screenplay we wrote got made. I worked on it six weeks — that meant I got paid \$240 for a screenplay that got made. Eddie Mannix was the general manager of the studio, and after one of the previews he called and congratulated me for the successful picture. It looked as if it was going to be a big success even though it was only a B picture — it wasn't even an A picture, we weren't important enough as writers — and he offered me a bonus. I said I didn't want the bonus, I wanted a raise to \$75 a week. And he wouldn't give it to me, he gave me the bonus instead.

ON WRITING: How did young writers work their way up?

RAPF: Going from job to job and asking for \$10 a week more or \$20 or \$30, or selling original material. The big thing that should be stressed, and it's very important — when Ring talks about

leaving Warner Brothers and starting to write originals — what are you doing when you're writing an original? You're working for the industry for nothing. We used to talk about that all the time. The pool of writers that existed in Hollywood — not the playwrights who could go back to work in New York and write a play, but the people who were dependent upon the movie industry as writers — worked for nothing when they weren't employed. They still worked for the industry.

ON WRITING: Did people write original screenplays or original stories?

LARDNER: In the case of *Woman of the Year*, Michael Kanin and I talked it out in terms of movie scenes and then, instead of writing it as a screenplay, wrote it as a novelette told in the first person by the Spencer Tracy character. The idea was that if you worked it out as a picture and then wrote it in this form, the producer who was reading it would think to himself: Oh, I can see that as a movie.

ON WRITING: Were studios more likely to buy a short story or a screenplay?

RAPF: They bought a lot of original stories. You tried all kinds of devices when you wrote stories. But they were useless stories. I mean, they couldn't sell to magazines. They weren't intended to sell to magazines. They were intended to sell to studios.

ON WRITING: What if you wrote it as a script? Would they be less interested?

RAPF: They'd change it.

LARDNER: It would be harder to get them to read it. But occasionally people did write scripts. They also used this form called a screen treatment, which was conceived as a screenplay but was just an outline in prose. And they would listen, too. They bought verbal stories, ideas.

ON WRITING: Weren't there two writers — what were their names?

RAPF: Well, the play *Boy Meets Girl* that Sam and Bella Spewack wrote is based on those two guys who talked their stories all the time.

LARDNER: [Ben] Hecht and [Charles] MacArthur.

RAPF: No, it was Graham and somebody. One guy who could write, and the other one couldn't write a word, he just talked. Hecht and MacArthur could both write.

LARDNER: Yes.

RAPF: But there was this other team. I remember Graham did all the typing, and the other guy walked around and talked. Gene Towne and Graham Baker. Towne was a Screen Playwright.

LARDNER: Who was the man at MGM —

RAPF: Bob [Robert] Hopkins. He sold *San Francisco*. That's a famous story. You know what he did? He had no office, he had no typewriter. He couldn't write. He walked around with a cigarette dangling out of his mouth, and a straw hat. And he came into Hunt Stromberg's office, I think it was, and he said, "The San Francisco earthquake. A gangster, an opera singer, and

a priest." And he walked out. And that became *San Francisco*. He got original story credit and won an Academy Award for that. But he never wrote it, never wrote a word. Stromberg thought it was a great idea and assigned it to a writer. I think Anita Loos wrote it, or somebody like that. But Bob Hopkins was famous for that.

LARDNER: There was another one who was always playing a baseball pitcher and winding up and throwing pitches as he told stories to producers. This was a guy who also never wrote anything down.

RAPF: I never knew of anybody but Hopkins. But I've looked at a lot of silent films lately and he's got credit on those. He must have done the same thing.

ON WRITING: Do you think studio executives had an appreciation for literature?

RAPF: They didn't read. They had readers. That was the other job for young writers, by the way — reading.

ON WRITING: What did a reader do?

RAPF: A reader synopsis literary material and then wrote a critique and suggested how a thing could be made.

LARDNER: Selznick's eastern story editor, a woman named Kay Brown, recommended this book *Gone With the Wind*, which had just been published. When Selznick saw the length of the manuscript, he asked three people in the studio to read it. One was his story editor, a man named Val Lewton. And one was his secretary, Silvia Schulman,

who later became my first wife. And the other was me. And both Val and I recommended against it.

ON WRITING: You had political reasons for that.

LARDNER: Well, yes. It was very pro-Confederate with a distorted picture of American history. But Silvia recommended it highly and thought it would make a good movie. And Selznick *then*, she says, read *some* of it. But she didn't think he ever read the whole thing. And, of course, he had a record number of writers working on the script.

ON WRITING: How much writing did you do on movies that didn't get made?

RAPF: Well, Ring wrote a piece for — was it *The Nation* — about the fact that all the best things he'd written never got made. I congratulated you for writing it. The fact that it was so true.

LARDNER: I don't remember the figures now. But at one time, for instance, they had 120 writers at MGM.

RAPF: Working. Being paid every week.

LARDNER: Yeah. And MGM was making, what, 30 or 40 pictures?

RAPF: Forty-five movies a year. But 120 writers.

LARDNER: So, most of what was turned out didn't get made.

ON WRITING: Were good screenplays passed over?

RAPF: Oh, sure.

LARDNER: The reasons they didn't get made didn't have much to do with the quality of writing. It had to do with an executive's appraisal of how good it would be at the box office.

RAPF: And who was hot and whether there was a role for the actor in it. They would say, "God, we need a Gable story badly, we've only got three. We promised them five Gables this year." You might have written a wonderful script for John Gilbert, but he's no longer at the studio. So they're not going to make your movie.

ON WRITING: Did people write for specific actors?

RAPF: On A pictures, very much so. You wrote with the actors in mind. You were asked to by the executives. They'd tell you who was going to be in it.

ON WRITING: Who assigned who wrote what?

LARDNER: Well, it was different at different places. Most studios had people called story editors who headed the story departments but also sometimes had supervision over writers or recommended who should write a particular script. I think the producer always had the final say.

RAPF: The story department, which is what dealt with writers, had three main operations. One was reading, which was like a funnel. Everything that was written in any form whatsoever was read and synopsisized for the literary tastes of the producers. That was one job. Another was what Ring just mentioned, to suggest writers for hiring. There were about 1,000 writers

in Hollywood, of whom 500 were employed. That's pretty good, you know. In those days it was about 50 percent employment. But, of course, they could hire outside of Hollywood and they frequently did. And that was the second chore of the story department. Then there was a third chore, and that was typing scripts. There was a thing called — at least at MGM — the script department, which was under the aegis of the story department. For those writers who came out from the East who didn't know what a screenplay was, the secretaries in the script department did. They would assign a secretary to a certain writer who would write in prose like a play, and she would transpose it into screenplay form.

ON WRITING: So she was collaborating.

RAPF: And never got any credit for that. But that was called the script department. At Metro, Sam Marx was the head of the story department for years, and then Eddie [Edwin] Knopf. That was a big job. They were big shots, the heads of the story department. MGM had a leading reader who was a very important person. Louis Mayer liked her storytelling ability. Every studio had a storyteller, like Scheherazade, who could tell a story well. She would meet with the producers once a week and tell her favorite story of the week. And they bought a lot of them.

ON WRITING: When you were under contract, were you constantly writing, or were you waiting for an assignment?

LARDNER: It depended mostly on the writer and somewhat on the studio setup. At Columbia Pictures, Harry Cohn ran a studio that was built around an open yard and you could see from one office into the others. He was notorious for looking through a window at a writer's office and calling him up to say, "How come you're not writing?" And you had to be strict about the hours. At Warner Brothers —

RAPF: Warner Brothers checked you in.

LARDNER: We came in every day at around nine in the morning, with an hour out for lunch or something, and worked until six o'clock at night. Saturday was a half day. You were supposed to show up Saturday morning and work till one o'clock or so. Warner's was pretty businesslike and saw to it that every writer was doing something. Whereas at MGM, I think it was not as disciplined. You were supposed to show up at the office, but if you said you wanted to work at home for this particular week and this particular stage in the script, you could do that.

RAPF: There's that Faulkner story when he said, "Can I work at home?" Well, he worked at home, but his home was in Mississippi.

ON WRITING: Were there writers who stayed at certain studios?

RAPF: Sure.

LARDNER: Warner's had several who stayed there for years. There were writers named Seton Miller and Casey

Robinson, I remember, and some others who just worked on one Warner picture after another over 20 years or more.

RAPF: Producers had favorite writers, too. They used them if they'd had any luck — producers are very superstitious people. They're like baseball players, and they want to put everything together the same way it was. They would hire a writer who was under contract to another studio if they were going to repeat something they'd done five years ago. I know my father did that. There was a woman who was really a Warner Brothers writer — there were a lot of women writers, you know. It wasn't a majority, but there were a lot. This woman's name was Lenore Coffee and she worked mostly at Warner Brothers.

LARDNER: Sam Goldwyn once had Lillian Hellman, Dorothy Parker, and Alan Campbell working at the same time. They were all in the office having lunch or something. And Goldwyn said, "You know, I really like women writers, I think I'm going to have just women writers from now on. Oh, of course, Dottie, if anybody like you wants to bring her husband, that's all right."

ON WRITING: What about the social life in Hollywood? Was it true that your social lives involved Communist Party activities?

LARDNER: Let me say something about the social life. When the Screen Writers Guild was reorganized, both Maurice and I served on the executive board for some years. That meant being on committees. There were weeks when

every night was taken up with either a Communist Party meeting, a Guild committee, or some other meeting.

RAPF: We were on the board of the Guild, it seemed to me, all the time. It was an evening a week. I never went home that day. I'd go right from the studio to Musso & Frank's and then to the meeting at eight o'clock. Also, the Party was very demanding of your time. You were involved in a lot of the community anti-Fascist activities and you ended up writing stuff for them. There were people making speeches who couldn't speak.

LARDNER: So there was no social life really.

RAPF: Well, the meetings were the social life.

LARDNER: Yeah.

RAPF: Weekends were for recruiting, if you remember. I always credit Ring with saying it, but I say it sometimes without giving him credit, that the prettiest women in Hollywood were all members of the Communist Party, and we used them for recruiting.

LARDNER: Oh, yes, I used that as a recruiting —

RAPF: You said it first. We used to have those beach parties for the purpose of recruiting. We had a lot of pretty girls and the guys came. The *Daily People's World* was well established — that was the Communist newspaper in San Francisco. I have pictures of people reading the *Daily People's World* openly on the beach at Malibu. So that was the social life. It was still Party related.

ON WRITING: Was membership in the Party at that point covert?

RAPF: Very.

ON WRITING: Was it always very secretive?

RAPF: Very secretive.

ON WRITING: Why?

LARDNER: Because we were pretty sure that there would be a blacklist if it were known openly. There were parts of the country where it was pretty open. In certain factories and in some unions, Party members worked as Party members. And even Los Angeles County Party meetings were held in a public place. It was much different in Hollywood. Anytime we had a meeting of more than a few people it was in somebody's house with certain precautions taken against people coming around taking license plates or anything.

ON WRITING: Ring, you had a story about meetings and poker games.

LARDNER: When I was at MGM, there was a very big poker game that the heads of the music department had started. A friend of mine, Sol Kaplan, was brought into this game and he brought me into it. These music department heads didn't want it known that they were in this poker game. So on the MGM switchboard, instead of a poker game they would say, "The meeting tonight is going to be at somebody's house." And this was such a switch because whenever we called on the phone about a meeting, we said, "The poker game is going to be at Maurice's house."

ON WRITING: Maurice, weren't you recruited into the Screen Writers Guild by Lillian Hellman?

RAPF: It was April or May of 1936, the first day I arrived in Hollywood. She knocked on the door of my office. I didn't even know she worked at MGM, and I don't know that she did. I had a miserable little office in what was then the writers' building at MGM. It should be noted, by the way, that the office you got depended upon your prestige and salary. I had a chair, a desk, and a typewriter. There was a knock on the door, and a lady came in with a big hat and a long cigarette holder and I knew it was Lillian Hellman. She said that the Writers Guild was about to amalgamate with the Authors League, that there was a lot of pressure against the Guild by the studio, and would I join? I said I didn't know anything about it, but I was always on the side of the workers against the bosses, sure I'd join. She invited me to a meeting that very night at Samson Raphaelson's house. I went, and Donald Ogden Stewart was there, and Dashiell Hammett. Lillian Hellman, Ogden Nash, S. J. Perelman—it was just incredible. I was so impressed to be in a room with these people.

LARDNER: Raphaelson is another very prominent playwright who was brought out at that time.

RAPF: He wrote *Suspicion* for Alfred Hitchcock.

ON WRITING: Could you describe the permutations that the Screen Writers Guild went through into formation? How did it start?

RAPF: That's before either one of us was in Hollywood. There was a Guild that was formed in '33. The first president was John Howard Lawson. I came at the very moment that the merger was proposed in '36. The president at the time was Ernest Pascal.

ON WRITING: The merger with —

LARDNER: The Authors League of America.

ON WRITING: Were the studios negotiating with the screenwriters?

RAPF: No, but this was how we were going to force negotiations.

LARDNER: The Guild was completely unrecognized, and it represented just a percentage of the writers. I don't know, maybe half.

RAPF: Half, I think.

LARDNER: And the others just didn't bother. They didn't want to pay dues, or they didn't think it was important. Or they were against the idea of unions for writers. But it was growing until this merger thing was proposed in '36. The people who opposed the idea of a Writers Guild used that issue to attack the whole idea of a guild. They said we really had nothing in common with eastern writers, and we would be dominated by the Authors League if we joined as a member guild along with dramatists and novelists. I was not a member of the Guild at this time. But at this famous meeting —

RAPF: I was at that meeting. It took place within about three weeks of the time I arrived. It was at the Hollywood Athletic Club, which was the standard place where the Writers Guild met. We had been getting people to join the Guild who would be in favor of the amalgamation. But it was going to be a close call because there were a lot of successful writers who thought people like me, who made \$40 a week, weren't entitled to the same consideration they were entitled to. And there was a real problem because the opposition to the merger were members of the Guild. James Kevin McGuinness was the leader of the opposition.

ON WRITING: I thought the opposition was the Screen Playwrights.

RAPF: Later. We're coming to that.

LARDNER: They hadn't formed yet.

RAPF: They were members of the Screen Writers Guild. But the afternoon before the meeting, the Guild board of directors, which were largely progressive people who wanted the merger, met with those in the opposition. The opposition agreed to vote in principle for the *idea* of the merger. They wouldn't vote it in officially until they got rid of a few things about autonomy for the West Coast. Some of their objections weren't ill founded — except that they weren't put forth with any good intentions; they were put forth to stall the thing, as we realized later. The meeting took place, and James Kevin McGuinness got up and proposed that we approve the merger in principle. And then everybody threw their arms around everybody else. It

was the biggest love fest. We all went out and got drunk because it was a great success.

ON WRITING: And then what happened?

RAPF: Another thing they did that night was put members of the opposition onto the board of the Guild. A lot of the progressives on the board resigned to make room for people like McGuinness and Howard Emmett Rogers. But the next day the opposition resigned from the Guild completely. And then they formed the Screen Playwrights.

LARDNER: The Screen Playwrights was really a company union. They didn't describe themselves as that. They claimed to be a legitimate union, but Irving Thalberg and Louis B. Mayer were responsible for starting it. John Lee Mahin was the president. It was formed mainly at MGM by some writers and producers, and then it spread to some other studios.

ON WRITING: What did that do?

RAPF: The Guild collapsed. We had no board because half the members of the Board resigned to form this new organization. And we were demoralized. We had accepted this move as if it were bona fide, and it was fake. It was carefully orchestrated by these guys to lull us into accepting a postponement of something that had been worked on for two months. I remember our euphoria, and I remember our disappointment. I overheard James Kevin McGuinness's drunken tirade in the next office. He engineered that whole plot, and he confessed to it.

ON WRITING: The whole plot about the—

RAPF: About the merger. He did that at Thalberg's behest. He knew damn well when he went to that meeting and embraced Dorothy Parker that the next day he was going to resign. He was promised that he'd be a producer for that. I heard him say, "Tell that Jew bastard loyalty is not a one-way street."

ON WRITING: Who was the Jew bastard?

RAPF: Thalberg. McGuinness was supposed to produce *Maytime*, and they didn't let him do it. That's what he was yelling about when I overheard it. I told Budd Schulberg and he used it in *What Makes Sammy Run?*

ON WRITING: Was there a blacklisting after that?

RAPF: There was presumably a blacklisting. For years it was said it was the first blacklist in Hollywood. They had the meeting in May of '36. As I remember it, they formed the Screen Playwrights about a week later, but Nancy Lynn Schwartz says in her book [*The Hollywood Writers' Wars*] that the contract with Screen Playwrights wasn't until '37.

ON WRITING: According to *The Hollywood Writers' Wars*, the Screen Playwrights signed a contract with the studios February 10, 1937.

RAPF: But they were recognized before that.

ON WRITING: On April 12, 1937, the Supreme Court declared the Wagner Act constitutional, which upheld

labor's right to bargain collectively. That's when the Screen Writers Guild started organizing again.

RAPF: That's correct.

ON WRITING: We may as well go through all of this. April 19, 1937, the Screen Playwrights contract went into effect. It was a five-year contract. The Academy relinquished control of credits, and directors were given the right to story credit. June 11, 1937, the Screen Writers Guild had its first open meeting attended by over 400 writers. Were you both at that?

RAPF: Must have been.

ON WRITING: What happened at that point?

RAPF: We had a real problem because there was going to be an election and we had to defeat a group that had a contract.

LARDNER: But before that June '37 meeting there was an awful lot of work going on getting writers to come to the meeting and to say that they were members of the Guild, to join up again. Because almost all of them had quit.

RAPF: There were very few people left and we didn't meet anymore. There weren't any meetings held in that particular period, except Party meetings. There were Party meetings about how to revive the Guild. I think we had some fraction meetings during that period.

ON WRITING: So the Party was very involved in reforming the Guild?

RAPF: As a matter of fact it was quite involved. We took it as a temporary setback. And it really looked very bad for a while.

ON WRITING: So now you have this election coming up between Screen Writers Guild and Screen Playwrights.

RAPF: You had a choice in both, yeah. Or no Guild. That was a third choice.

ON WRITING: And what were the studios doing about it?

RAPF: Plenty.

ON WRITING: Like what?

RAPF: Well, there's the meeting that was held in Thalberg's projection room at MGM, which I attended. It was full—of 120 writers at MGM, I'll bet 100 were there. Thalberg came in flanked by Eddie Mannix and Benny Thau. He looked grim. It really looked like gangsters coming in to address the mob, because they marched in, Thalberg at the head, and Mannix and Thau behind him. He got up in front and started to address us. He was very tough, and he said, "I'm going to remember everybody"—it was a secret ballot, you know, this was absolutely absurd—"I'm going to remember everybody who supports the Guild in this and they're never going to work here again." He threatened a blacklist, in other words, if you supported the Guild. I went with Richard Maibaum; we left that projection room and we were staggered. I understand they had similar meetings at every studio. I know they had one at Warner Brothers. And I think they had one at Fox. [Darryl]

Zanuck was not violently against the Guild, but he was forced to do it. They had to have a meeting at every studio before the election to urge people to vote for the Screen Playwrights, or for no Guild. They didn't object if you voted no Guild.

ON WRITING: Who was eligible to vote?

RAPF: Anybody employed at a studio as of a certain date and I forget what it was. But the voting was studio by studio. The weakest studio was going to be Paramount, I think. That was one studio that everybody was very worried about, and it barely squeaked through. It wasn't MGM. MGM was pretty strong for it.

ON WRITING: Once the Screen Writers Guild won the election, wasn't there a break between —

RAPF: We couldn't get a contract. But they had to cancel their contract with the Screen Playwrights. We were the official representatives of the screenwriters of Hollywood after that election. But we didn't have a contract.

LARDNER: They were compelled by law to negotiate and to meet, but that didn't mean that there was a time limit on the negotiations.

RAPF: I think they kept it going for a couple of years.

LARDNER: From '37 to '41.

RAPF: Four years. It was a long struggle. That's where the minimum wage came up. You see, when the Guild started there was a lot of opposition to the idea of a minimum wage. The more experienced writers said it

was going to pull their salaries down. But we really needed a minimum wage because they could hire writers for nothing. And most of us would have worked for \$20 a week just to get in the studio. The minimum wage was very important. It was people like Ring and I who made the case for the minimum wage in the first contract negotiations. The young writers were very important in this thing. And people like Dorothy Parker were very moved by our situation, the fact that we got so little money and so little recognition. We never got our names on anything because we had no power. And they put in a \$100 minimum wage in the first contract.

ON WRITING: What were some of the other things you were negotiating for?

RAPF: The notification of other writers working on a project. They could do what Ring was talking about earlier, bring in extra writers without telling the writers who already were on it. They didn't have to tell them. Under the contract they did.

LARDNER: Another point was to what extent a producer could talk to a writer about a project without putting him on salary. Producers who sometimes had an idea for a picture — or bought a book or something — would call 10 writers in succession, pretend they were thinking about hiring them to work on it, and ask for their ideas on how it should be done. They would get all the benefits of 10 writers' advice without paying them anything. So there were some fairly strict limits put on to what extent producers could do that.

RAPF: That's right. Producer's credit was another one.

ON WRITING: What do you mean?

RAPF: Producers, especially Selznick, had a tendency to put their names on pictures.

ON WRITING: As a writer?

RAPF: As a writer. Well, they did contribute. And it was almost impossible to get them off because they were there from the beginning. They'd hire 10 writers. Who contributed the most? The producer. But I think we had that in the contract, too, that they couldn't do that unless they did 50 percent, or something like that. There are some producers who do write their scripts.

LARDNER: Selznick did it under a pseudonym, Oliver Jeffries.

ON WRITING: Isn't it true that, before the Screen Writers Guild had a contract, it was completely up to the producers to decide credits?

RAPF: The contract used to say "the studio hereinafter known as the author."

LARDNER: For instance, when *Woman of the Year* was made into a Broadway musical, MGM got the share of author's royalties that went to the screenplay because they owned the screenplay and had been declared its author. We got tickets to the opening night.

ON WRITING: So the contract with the writer was calling the studio the author?

LARDNER: They claimed it was necessary for legal purposes that they be declared the author, that only they could copyright the thing they had bought.

RAPF: There were other things that I can't remember. The credits were the main thing. It was the producer's obligation to notify the writers of the tentative credits they chose. They had the right to name the first credits — they could put their relatives on that — but we could object. We had 48 hours, or 36 hours, or whatever it was. They claimed they didn't really need a contract because they were abiding by the credit rules.

ON WRITING: Were they?

RAPF: No, not quite. Almost. I mean, this business of producer credit, they hated that. They didn't want to give up those rights. I can't remember the details of that original negotiation, but I remember our saying, what the hell are they fighting it for? It was so mild that we didn't think it was a strong enough contract to begin with.

ON WRITING: How much would a screenwriter make, say, in the 1930s or '40s?

RAPF: Who was the highest paid?

LARDNER: Well, the top salary, I think was Ben Hecht.

RAPF: \$3,500?

LARDNER: No, I think he got \$5,000 for —

ON WRITING: In the 1930s?

LARDNER: Well, the '40s. But this was partly because of his ability to write a script in two or three weeks.

RAPF: He was the one demanding payment by the day.

ON WRITING: What was the average?

LARDNER: My salary had been established in the last job I had, at \$200 a week I think, before we sold *Woman of the Year*. After we sold the screenplay, MGM hired me for \$1,000 a week. Mike and I each got \$1,000. And by '46 or beginning of '47, just before the Hollywood hearings, I had signed a contract with 20th Century Fox starting at \$2,000 with raises every year. People like Donald Ogden Stewart, I'm sure got up to \$4,000 or \$5,000.

ON WRITING: What was the average writer getting?

RAPF: \$750.

ON WRITING: \$750 a week? Which was good.

RAPF: Yeah, it was pretty good.

ON WRITING: When were the first signs of the blacklist?

LARDNER: Everything changed after the war. There was a great deal of right-wing activity. The Republicans got a majority in Congress for the first time since Herbert Hoover's day. There were a lot of strikes that had been held off during the war that broke out in 1946. And the big employers got very worried about these strikes and the power of the unions. There was Churchill's speech in Fulton, Missouri, about the Iron Curtain. There was Truman's beginning of his own loyalty plan. And there was a California State Un-American Activities Committee

headed by a man named Jack Tenney, which started investigating Hollywood and called several people, including John Howard Lawson and Waldo Salt. In keeping with Party policy, when asked if they were members of the Communist Party, they said no.

Before the war, there had been a temporary Congressional committee, the House Un-American Activities Committee. In '46, with the Republican majority in Congress, the House Un-American Activities Committee was made a permanent committee. A Republican named J. Parnell Thomas was put in as chairman. And one of the first things they announced was that they were going to look into Hollywood. They held secret hearings in Hollywood in May of 1947, mostly with the people who later testified publicly as friendly witnesses: [Louie B.] Mayer, [Jack] Warner, Howard Emmett Rogers, Rupert Hughes, Adolphe Menjou — we just heard reports of what had been said there. But they had announced that there were going to be public hearings. In September of '47 subpoenas began to be handed out to 19 people. Others got subpoenas, too — Robert Taylor and Gary Cooper and so on — but 19 of us who got subpoenas named ourselves the Unfriendly Nineteen.

ON WRITING: Was it randomly 19 of you? How did they pick which ones?

LARDNER: Part of it was just haphazard, part of it — I had pointed out at the time, and I think it still has some validity — was that no one who had seen active service in the armed forces during the war, which was just over,

was among those 19. For instance Richard Collins and Paul Jarrico had written a picture called—

RAPF: *Song of Russia*.

LARDNER: — *Song of Russia*, which was very favorable to Russia. I think it was probably the reason Collins got subpoenaed. But Jarrico didn't get subpoenaed because he had been in the service.

ON WRITING: When this happened, did you realize that this was going to be—

LARDNER: The start of the Cold War? Well, we could see the threat of it being a start of such a thing, but we thought there was a still a chance—

RAPF: I thought it would be defeated. I didn't expect you guys to go to jail either. I thought it was a temporary thing. There were a lot of people who were against it.

ON WRITING: Maurice, did you—

RAPF: I fled town. I heard there was a subpoena out for me, and I didn't want to be subpoenaed because I didn't want to embarrass my father. I got mentioned in that '47 hearing. There was a newspaperman who was a witness. He had been writing about Ring and Budd and me as the leaders of the Communist Party in Hollywood. And that brought a response from, I forget if it was Goldwyn, who said, "If they're the ones that are the head of the Communist Party, we've got nothing to worry about." Goldwyn or [Jesse] Lasky or somebody said it. In any case, I left. I fully expected to be back in a couple of years, I left for the time being. But when they [the Holly-

wood Ten] lost their [Supreme Court] suit, I knew I was in the soup and that I'd never go back to Hollywood.

ON WRITING: This has been gone over before, but what was the strategy at the hearings?

LARDNER: We met, the 19 of us. Bertolt Brecht met with us only once or twice, but the other 18 met. There was a difference of opinion about what we should do. Some people wanted to say yes, we're Communists, and so on. But it was pointed out that they would then be asked about other people, and they didn't have the same right to talk about other people as they might have about themselves. We discussed the Fifth Amendment and decided not to take it because we would be saying it was a crime to be a Communist, and nobody had been indicted yet under the Smith Act. But there was another angle. Dalton Trumbo and I had talked about this in advance of these meetings, and we had decided the only thing was just to say we won't answer the question because we have a perfect right to be anything we want, and you have no right to ask us about it. The Committee has no right to investigate where it can't legislate and it's forbidden under the freedom of the press in the Constitution to legislate about movies. But then one of our lawyers, Robert Kenney, who had been an Attorney General of California, said, "Look, if this goes to a jury trial, I've got to have something I can argue about with a jury. I don't want any judge deciding this; I want a jury of Americans, and they might be sympathetic if I could argue with them that you were

trying to answer the question, but in your own way.” Well, this led to most of the witnesses defying the Committee, attacking the Committee, saying all sorts of things, saying, “I’m trying to answer the question, but I want to first establish that this Committee is unconstitutional.” And so on.

ON WRITING: What did you say?

LARDNER: I said, “I *could* answer, but if I did, I’d hate myself in the morning.” But anyway, following Kenney’s advice really had an unfortunate effect. A lot of people who would have been sympathetic, including some members of the Committee for the First Amendment who were there to cover the hearings, thought we should have been much more dignified and just said that we didn’t want to answer their question because it wasn’t their right to ask it.

ON WRITING: When did you realize that this thing was not going to be over?

LARDNER: Basically when we lost the case in the Court — that was in the spring of 1950 when the Supreme Court refused to hear it.

ON WRITING: You’re talking about the contempt of Congress citations. I just want to clarify that you were one of 10 members of the Unfriendly Nineteen who testified in those November ’47 hearings. All 10 were cited for contempt of Congress, and that group became known as the Hollywood Ten. The citations were appealed, and when the Supreme Court refused to hear the case, all 10 went to prison. You were in prison for a year.

LARDNER: And then there were a lot of other things happening. The Korean War broke out, the Rosenberg trial went on. Then while I was still in prison they started new hearings, and somebody came to my cell and said, “They’re talking about you on the radio.” Actually it was Richard Collins testifying before the Committee. So we knew then that it was going to spread very wide and last for a long time.

RAPF: It was devastating. And it was devastating to an entire family, not just to the person involved. My kids still remember it. They were there when the subpoenas were served. All my subpoenas were served at dinnertime except the one that was served by a friendly marshal who said, “Call the marshal’s office, we have a subpoena for you.” My first subpoena was in ’51. I thought I had abated the Committee by going to New England.

ON WRITING: What were you doing there?

RAPF: Nothing. Trying to write. But I’m a movie writer and I needed employment. So in ’51 I moved to New York. I wasn’t here one week before they rang the doorbell. I was convinced that they had lost me and then found me again. It wasn’t true because — remember the Freedom of Information Act when you could write to William Webster? I wrote and got a thing back that looked like a telephone book. They knew everything I was doing all the time. They knew I was in Hanover. My records went from Los Angeles to Trenton, New Jersey, to Rutland, Vermont, to Manchester, New

Hampshire. Wherever I went they switched my records, and they sent new guys out to watch me.

LARDNER: That's the only record I have of all my addresses.

RAPF: They knew when I lived there, they knew the name of the super. I mean, everything. They had it all, but some things were blacked out in my copy, unfortunately. They told me my car was parked in front of such and such a house, they had the name of the person whose house I was in. But they didn't tell me who told them that.

[Editor's Note: Frances Chaney, Ring Lardner, Jr.'s wife, was a patient listener throughout this interview. At this point she contributed a personal recollection we felt was important to include.]

ON WRITING: So you were followed?

FRANCES CHANEY: Oh, God. The kids and I were stopped on the way to the waterfront to go swimming. They asked me in front of the children, did I know such and such? And my heart pounding.

LARDNER: Did you know the Lardners? they said.

FRANCES CHANEY: And the kids said, "We're the Lardners!" And then this guy wanted to know if I knew somebody and named a name. My relief was that it was a name I did not know, that I could say, no, I didn't know that person, and we were just going swimming and will you excuse us. There were two guys who were standing at the corner of our road waiting for me and had spoken to the neighbors.

ON WRITING: This is in Connecticut?

FRANCES CHANEY: New Milford, Connecticut.

ON WRITING: Even after Ring went to prison and got out they were still following you?

FRANCES CHANEY: Yes. The super in our building in New York told us men had come around with questions about us.

ON WRITING: So it was constant harassment.

RAPF: Yes, constant. They used to stop my wife, Louise, on the street. When she'd come out of the subway, they'd be waiting for her. And they'd say to her, "Excuse me, but we want to ask you a few questions. Are you willing to answer them?" And she'd say no, and go on her way. But it's terrible to be harassed like that.

ON WRITING: What really changed things for writers, for everybody, was the Waldorf Declaration.

RAPF: That was held in '47.

ON WRITING: After the hearings.

FRANCES CHANEY: That really made life hell.

RAPF: That's when they initiated the blacklist.

ON WRITING: What did the studios agree to?

RAPF: The chairman of the [Motion Picture] Producers Association was Eric Johnston. He had sworn that he would never accede to a blacklist, but he changed his tune pretty fast after those '47 hearings. The Waldorf conference was held only a month later. The

producers declared their liberalism and their Americanism and all that shit, that they stood for the best of America and whatnot. And they said they would no longer knowingly employ anybody who was a member of the Communist Party.

LARDNER: Or anybody who refused to answer questions before a Congressional committee.

ON WRITING: It was selling out the Hollywood Ten.

RAPF: Well, and everybody else. And it went for people who were on the backlots as well.

ON WRITING: What do you mean on the backlot?

RAPF: Technicians. Carpenters, painters, electricians. They fired a lot of people from the backlot. Musicians, guys who played in the orchestras. Somebody told me that they came around with affidavits. You could sign an affidavit saying that you were not now and never have been a member of the Communist Party, and then they wouldn't fire you. I gather that was the case, but I wasn't in Hollywood, so I don't know.

ON WRITING: During the '47 hearings, the first question the writers in the group were asked was, "Are you a member of the Screen Writers Guild?" And the *second* question was, "Are you now or have you ever been..." Why was that?

LARDNER: They were trying to demonstrate that the Screen Writers Guild was a Communist-dominated organization. I don't know where they got this idea, but they had. And so those two

questions — especially considered together — were going to be part of their proof of this.

ON WRITING: Why were they singling out the writers? Why not SAG, or the DGA? IATSE was very conservative at that point.

LARDNER: Yes, it was. And the Screen Actors Guild was fairly conservative. Robert Montgomery and Ronald Reagan were presidents of it, and they were both quite conservative. Reagan had been a liberal and was becoming a conservative. There undoubtedly were many more left-wing people among the writers. The Writers Guild voted several times to support various strikes and certain causes that were not directly related to the Guild but had to do generally with censorship and freedom worldwide. The directors and actors never bothered passing such resolutions. I think probably some of us on the board pressed for those things unnecessarily. So I think the proportion of writers subpoenaed was probably a proper one in relation to the number of left, liberal people.

ON WRITING: How did the Writers Guild deal with the blacklist?

LARDNER: The Writers Guild really gave in to it completely. In a case involving Paul Jarrico and Howard Hughes, they permitted Hughes to take Jarrico's name off a script after he was named. They said that the rules about credit didn't apply to writers who were named by the Committee. They really just capitulated, because everybody practically did.

RAPF: Did you ever read Emmet Lavery's testimony? It's pretty terrible.

ON WRITING: What is it?

RAPF: Well, he was the president of the Guild, and he said he'd been used by the Communists. He came out with a very sharp and clever attack on Communist influence in the Writers Guild. So they took the position that they were justified in refusing credit to any Communist.

ON WRITING: Ring, there's a story you tell about credit arbitration during the blacklist —

LARDNER: Oh, yes, about *The Bridge On the River Kwai*. I was writing a piece for the *The Saturday Evening Post* about my life on the blacklist. It was published in 1960 or '61. And I wanted to say that *The Bridge On the River Kwai* was written by two blacklisted writers, Carl Foreman and Michael Wilson. *The Saturday Evening Post* asked me to verify this. A friend — a lawyer, Sidney Cohn, who represented Carl Foreman — called me because a photographer for *The Saturday Evening Post* had tried to take a picture of Carl in Switzerland to use for this story. Carl apparently called Sidney Cohn who called me and said, "If you say that was written by Carl Foreman and Michael Wilson, we'll sue because it was all written by Carl, and Mike had practically nothing to do with it." So I called Mike Wilson, who was living in Paris then. He read me a letter he had gotten from the director, David Lean, talking about the script and using the phrase "it's 75 percent yours." I thought that was enough to go on to

safely tell the *Post* they could print both names. It was really a quarrel between blacklisted writers about credit.

ON WRITING: How did each of you work during the blacklist?

RAPF: Well, I came to New York finally, but I was very lucky. There were some people in New York who didn't give a shit about the blacklist. I started work in 1953 on a different kind of film where nobody gave a damn. I never put my name on it. I worked for a guy who knew I was blacklisted and didn't care. I got one half of what I used to get — no, one third of what I used to get — and I didn't care. I was happy to be making a living. I wrote industrials. I worked for the biggest companies in America — Ford, General Motors, U.S. Steel — they couldn't care less. They didn't know, they didn't ask. They liked me. I never went back to Hollywood, and never tried.

LARDNER: Ian McLellan Hunter and I wrote a number of half-hour television programs that were produced by a woman named Hannah Weinstein. She had gone to England and set up a company there. Part of her idea was to use blacklisted writers. She was very sympathetic herself. She first had Abe Polonsky and Walter Bernstein. Then she asked Ian and me to write a pilot for a series about Robin Hood. We did, and that sold to an American network. We did one called *The Buccaneers* and one about Sir Lancelot. These were kids programs, although adults watched them, too. Robin Hood was the most successful of them, it lasted four or five years. By that time we had enlisted

about 20 other blacklisted writers. Some were written by English writers, but most were based in New York. Waldo Salt wrote a good many. And Maurice wrote one or two. We had all we could do. We finally had written four pilots, and all four of them had sold to American networks. And we had all these series going.

ON WRITING: Under pseudonyms.

LARDNER: Oh, yes. We had to each have a name to use for financial purposes, because you could open a savings account under any name and checks could be made out to that, and the bank didn't question who it was. And then you transferred the money from the savings account to your own checking account in your own name.

ON WRITING: Didn't the IRS have questions?

LARDNER: As long as you reported the income, it's perfectly legal for a writer to have a pseudonym. But he does have to report to the IRS.

ON WRITING: So one branch of the federal government was trying to make sure you'd never work again, and another branch of the federal government was recording all the money you made while you were working.

LARDNER: That's right. And all those years old movies we wrote were appearing on television with the original credits and nobody objected. No viewers even paid attention to who the screenwriters were. So Ian and I did that from 1953, I think, to about '58.

Hannah had wanted us to come over to England and do them there, but we couldn't get passports.

RAPF: The thing that marked the big change for me was the passport. I've often told the story about meeting Ring in the passport office the day the Supreme Court gave Rockwell Kent his passport back. We were both free, and I rushed down. Five years of no passport was pretty tough to take.

FRANCES CHANEY: Ring, tell the story about your passport experience.

RAPF: It is funny.

LARDNER: As soon as the decision was in the paper—

ON WRITING: What decision?

RAPF: Well, they took our passports away. I was told by my lawyer not to sue the State Department, because there were a lot of suits ahead of me by more important people like Rockwell Kent and Paul Robeson and others. And to wait on the decision, which would probably be favorable. They had no right to refuse you the right to travel.

LARDNER: When it became clear we could all get passports, we were living on West End Avenue, and I went up to Broadway where there was a photography place that advertised passport pictures in the window. I went in, and I said, "I want a picture for a passport." He said, "All right, I'll take it, and you'll have it tomorrow." I said, "You can't do it today?" This was before Polaroids were invented. And he said no, unless I wanted one of those pictures without a negative that they

take in those machines. He said, “You could do that, but you’ll end up looking like a Communist.”

Ian was able to get a passport before the Supreme Court decision. He went over to England to work with Hannah Weinstein. As soon as the decision came through and I got a passport, I went over there for a few months. But by that time we were able to get jobs in Hollywood again — still not under our own names, that is.

ON WRITING: What year was that?

LARDNER: 1959.

ON WRITING: So it lasted more than 10 years.

LARDNER: Oh, yes. The actual time between screen credits for me was 17 years. I was openly hired for a job in 1962 by Otto Preminger, 15 years after the hearings. But he never made the picture.

ON WRITING: Weren’t you working on an Otto Preminger picture when you got fired from 20th Century Fox after the 1947 hearings?

LARDNER: Yes, I got the message in his office. I had finished a script for a producer named Bill [William] Perlberg that I worked on during the hearings and started working on this Preminger thing. In November his secretary got a message that Mr. Zanuck wanted to see Mr. Lardner. And Otto said, “He wants to talk to just the writer, he doesn’t want to see me?”

ON WRITING: Otto Preminger was the one who first gave Dalton Trumbo —

LARDNER: Credit on *Exodus*. Though when I wrote that in an obit of Trumbo that appeared in *The New York Times*, the day it appeared I got a call from Kirk Douglas saying they had decided to put Trumbo’s name on *Spartacus* before Otto.

ON WRITING: How did you know you were off the blacklist?

LARDNER: Otto Preminger asked me to do some work on a script he was shooting. And then he hired me to adapt a book he wanted to make into a movie. He had just given Trumbo this credit on *Exodus*. So he decided to announce that he had hired me to work on this thing called *Genius*, from a book by Patrick Dennis. Within days he got a letter from the Americanism Committee of the American Legion saying, “There are plenty of good American screenwriters, why do you have to hire one of these?” Otto wrote back that they were entitled to their opinion, they were entitled not to go to see the picture when it came out, but he was entitled to hire whom he wanted. That was his right. Unfortunately, he said this part had to be played either by Alec Guinness, Lawrence Olivier, or Rex Harrison, and he couldn’t get any one of them. So the picture was never made.

ON WRITING: But that got you off the blacklist?

LARDNER: Yeah, from then on I was hired openly. The first picture I did in ’64, which came out in ’65, was called *The Cincinnati Kid*. That was the first credit since my pre-blacklist credit for *The Forbidden Street*.

ON WRITING: What do you think was the point of the Hollywood hearings?

LARDNER: Very briefly, I think the main reason the Committee investigated Hollywood was not because they expected to find that Communists were controlling the content of pictures or that there was any sort of danger, some kind of subversion through writers getting their terrible thoughts into the pictures. It was mainly that the Committee wanted something that would give them a lot of publicity and would be good for the whole Cold War atmosphere. Hollywood was chosen because it was the one place that would get them most attention in the press.

ON WRITING: When you went back to screenwriting after the blacklist, the studio system you had worked under was in decline. Do you feel that the studio system enabled writers to get better educations as screenwriters than they can now?

LARDNER: In one way, there was much more association among writers than apparently there is in the present day. Writers frequently talked to each other about writing problems. And this was also true in the Communist Party, to talk specifically about certain writing problems that people were running into. Now I gather there's very little of that. There's no such thing as a writers' table at a studio.

ON WRITING: There was a writers' table at a studio?

RAPF: There was at MGM.

LARDNER: There was at Warner Brothers.

RAPF: Yeah. And at 20th Century.

LARDNER: The writers would sort of all sit at the same table, a large table.

RAPF: Actually during the Guild conflict, it was quite confrontational because there were two writers' tables at MGM. The Screen Playwrights had a different table. They also associated with the bosses — not so much the producers, because the producers didn't eat in the dining room, but the heads of departments and people like that. You'd see the production managers eating with Jimmy McGuinness and Howard Emmett Rogers. But the other table was not Communist Party people, it was just progressive writers who believed in the Guild.

ON WRITING: There was a community of writers.

RAPF: Yeah.

ON WRITING: Did the Communist party give you a stronger sense of community or was there a community even without that?

LARDNER: When you were working at a studio, you associated with other people who worked at the studio, mainly the writers. Some directors. The political part of it was not too relevant. And you had some social life with other writers at the studio. Philip Dunne and I, who worked together on a couple of projects, were also good friends.

ON WRITING: Did your work in the Party affect your work in screenplays at all?

RAPF: Sure it did. And not because anybody told me how to write. For example, I think if you look at *Woman of the Year*, most of that movie would seem to be an expression of an attempt on the part of writers to introduce a strong woman in movies. Unfortunately they took the ending of Ring's movie and turned it around the other way. But I constantly tried to write stronger women in movies. You didn't ask me about *Song of the South*, which is the usual subject I get into. When I went to work on that, I went to work on it as a Party member to prevent it from being anti-black. It didn't work. You certainly couldn't do anything very positively in a movie in Hollywood. The producers controlled the medium. But I think as a Party person you did try to avoid racial stereotypes, and you did try to make women more important. I did at any rate. I tried to.

ON WRITING: Did you, Ring?

LARDNER: Yes, but it wasn't a very important part of the job. ■

Ring Lardner, Jr.

Feature Films

The Greatest, 1977
*M*A*S*H*, 1970 (Academy Award)
*The Cincinnati Kid**, 1965
The Forbidden Street, 1949
*Forever Amber**, 1947
*Cloak and Dagger**, 1946
*Tomorrow the World**, 1944
*The Cross of Lorraine**, 1943
*Woman of the Year**, 1942 (Academy Award)
*The Courageous Dr. Christian**, 1940
*Meet Dr. Christian**, 1939

Musical Comedy

Foxy, 1954 (co-written with Ian McLellan Hunter)

In 1989, Ring Lardner, Jr. was awarded the WGAw Laurel Award for Screen Writing Achievement. In 1992, he was the first recipient of the WGAE Ian McLellan Hunter Memorial Award for Lifetime Achievement in Writing.

During the blacklist, Ring Lardner, Jr. collaborated with Ian McLellan Hunter on five different television series which they wrote and sold under pseudonyms. Lardner is the author of two novels, *The Ecstasy of Owen Muir* and *All for Love*, and a memoir, *The Lardners: My Family Remembered*.

This fall, *The Ecstasy of Owen Muir* will be republished by Prometheus Books in the Literary Classic series. The series includes works by such authors as Anton Chekov, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Edgar Allen Poe, and Aristophanes.

Maurice Rapf

Feature Films

*So Dear to my Heart**, 1948
*Song of the South**, 1947
*Call of the Canyon (story)**, 1942
*Dancing on a Dime**, 1941
*North of Shanghai**, 1940
*Winter Carnival**, 1940
*Jennie**, 1939
*Sharpshooters (story)**, 1939
*Bad Man of Brimstone (story)**, 1938
*They Gave Him a Gun**, 1937
*We Went to College**, 1936
*Divorce in the Family**, 1931

During the blacklist, Maurice Rapf began writing and directing industrial films, which he continued to do through 1975, for companies including *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune* magazines, Esso, Ford Motor Company, American Cancer Society, American Iron and Steel Institute, and Liberty Mutual Insurance. Rapf has also written and directed a number of short films and animated films. He wrote film reviews for *Life* and *Family Circle* from 1967 through 1970.

In 1966, Rapf began teaching film theory, writing, and production at Dartmouth College, and in 1970, he taught and launched film studies at Brown University. From 1971–85 he was Adjunct Professor of Drama/Film and Director of Film Studies at Dartmouth College. In 1990, he was named Director of Film Studies Emeritus at Dartmouth where he continues to teach on a part-time basis.

*co-credit

Doug McGrath

Feature Films

Emma, 1996 (Writers Guild Award nomination)
*Bullets Over Broadway**, 1994 (Writers Guild Award nomination, Academy Award nomination)
Born Yesterday, 1993

Television

L.A. Law, 1989 (one episode)
Saturday Night Live, 1980–81

Theater

Political Animal, 1996
The Big Day, 1990

Douglas McGrath is a contributing editor to *The New Republic* and has written essays for *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The New York Times Book Review*.

*co-credit

Woman of the Year: The Writer's Cut

*The original ending of **Woman of the Year** never made it to the final cut. We are printing it here for the first time. We are grateful to Grace Ressler of Warner Bros. for helping us secure permission to reprint this ending.*

Preceding the ending, Lardner talks about how the screenplay was written, and why the ending was changed. The following is from an interview that took place with Ring Lardner, Jr. on October 10, 1996, and March 1, 1997, in New York City.

ON WRITING: What is *Woman of the Year* about?

LARDNER: It's a story of a relationship, a love story, between a man and woman who work for the same newspaper. He's a fairly tough-minded sportswriter and she's a political columnist. She writes something about giving up things like baseball for the duration of the war and he is pretty shocked by this. They attack each other in their columns. Then they meet in the managing editor's office and are delighted with each other's appearance and manner. They quite abruptly decide to get married, and the problems of their life together continue after their marriage.

It reaches a climax when she asks if he's ever thought about having a child. He gets very excited about the idea and thinks she's saying she's pregnant. It turns out that she's brought home a Greek orphan for them to adopt. And this is not his idea at all of the way to have a child. At the same time, she is voted Woman of the Year by an organization and she prefers to go to the ceremony rather than stay home to

take care of the child. Sam decides to take the child back to the adoption agency. The child is actually very happy to get back with his friends because he wasn't happy at all in their house. When she comes home from having been declared Woman of the Year and getting all these honors, she finds the child is gone, and her husband has gone. That's where this ending begins.

ON WRITING: What's the ending they used in the movie?

LARDNER: When she finds he's gone, she realizes how much she cares for him and decides to do a complete switch. She gets into his new apartment by telling the doorman she's his wife. Then she starts to cook him breakfast — which she knows nothing about — and makes terrible mistakes. He wakes up and finds her botching this job of fixing breakfast. Finally he asks her what all this is about. She says she wants to just be his wife. He says he doesn't want to be married to *just* Tess Harding anymore than he wants to be married to *just* Mrs. Sam Craig. And he

says, “How about being Tess Harding Craig?” She says she thinks it’s a wonderful name.

ON WRITING: They kept the final speech of your original ending.

LARDNER: Yes. But it was almost a slapstick ending because she does some very improbable things. It’s improbable that she doesn’t know anything about cooking an egg or making coffee. It was done more for laughs than anything else and it had the effect of saying she was overboard in being a career woman. In effect, it was saying that a woman’s place is in the home.

Mike [Kanin] and I kept in pretty close touch with the picture until it seemed finished. We saw the finished, edited version and went off to New York for a vacation. When we came back we found that they had decided to change the ending with a version written by John Lee Mahin. They allowed us to change a few things and rewrite some lines, but we couldn’t get back to our own ending or work out something different. We didn’t like the fact that it seemed kind of anti-woman in the end.

ON WRITING: Why did they decide to change the ending?

LARDNER: They said there was a preview and that some of the preview cards seemed to say the woman should get more of a comeuppance. But I got the impression that this was not so much what any preview audience thought as what Louis B. Mayer and Joe Mankiewicz and George Stevens all thought. Katharine Hepburn agreed with us. She liked the original ending

better. But she was under contract to make this picture and to do it the way the producer and director said. And so although she agreed with us — and still does — that the original ending was better, she had to go along with it.

ON WRITING: What about Spencer Tracy? What did he think?

LARDNER: I don’t think I ever discussed it with him. I’m sure she did, but he was also pretty used to doing what he was told at the studio.

ON WRITING: Where did you get the idea for *Woman of the Year*?

LARDNER: It was Garson Kanin who knew Katherine Hepburn — actually, he was kind of in love with her at the time. As a matter of fact, she asked me once whether she should marry him, although he was several years younger than she was. He thought of casting her as a newspaper columnist like Dorothy Thompson, who was Sinclair Lewis’s wife and the only woman columnist at that time. Gar was going into the army so he mentioned this idea to Mike Kanin and me, and the three of us worked out the character of the sportswriter on the same newspaper. Mike and I developed a story, talked it out as a movie, and then decided to write it as a novella told by the sportswriter in the past tense. Gar mailed the novella to Hepburn, who was in Connecticut, and she responded very enthusiastically. She called Louis B. Mayer and had us send a copy to MGM. When MGM expressed an interest, Kate said she wanted \$211,000 for the thing.

ON WRITING: Why \$211,000?

LARDNER: She said \$100,000 for herself, \$100,000 for the screenplay which we would write, \$10,000 to pay her agent, and \$1,000 for her expenses coming from Hartford. And they agreed to it. Our names were not on the script so there was a lot of speculation at MGM. They thought it was Hecht and MacArthur who for some contractual reason or something didn't want their names on it. But they were kind of surprised when they found out it was two pretty obscure writers who had gotten very low salaries at their last jobs.

ON WRITING: Did Hepburn give the script to Joe Mankiewicz to produce?

LARDNER: She sent it to Mayer. Mayer may have passed it on to Joe Mankiewicz to read first. Joe had been a writer who had become a producer. He wanted to be a director, which he eventually was, but Mayer told him he should be a producer, saying, "You have to learn to crawl before you can walk."

ON WRITING: He produced *The Philadelphia Story*, which was Hepburn's comeback vehicle.

LARDNER: Right. I think it was probably Kate's idea to get George Stevens, who was not a Metro director but mainly worked for RKO and Paramount. He had directed one of her pictures and she particularly liked him.

ON WRITING: Was it *Alice Adams*?

LARDNER: I think it was, yes.

ON WRITING: So you got \$100,000. In the realm of what people were getting paid for scripts in 1941 —

LARDNER: It was the largest sum paid for an original screenplay to that date.

ON WRITING: Who had the clout that got MGM to agree to do this?

LARDNER: Hepburn.

ON WRITING: Was she that big a star after *Philadelphia Story*?

LARDNER: Yes. And they very much wanted a picture for her. Then Spencer Tracy, whom we had not thought of, was doing a picture called *The Yearling* when production on it was called off. As a matter of fact, it was later done with Gregory Peck and another director. But they had already started shooting so MGM had Spencer Tracy on salary and no vehicle for him. That was another lucky thing that made them anxious to go ahead with the deal and get the script as soon as possible.

ON WRITING: Who were you thinking of when you wrote it?

LARDNER: Because of MGM we thought Gable was more likely.

ON WRITING: Hepburn and Gable together would have been...

LARDNER: Well, Hepburn and Tracy worked very well. Of course they had not met before. I think their attraction for each other showed in the film.

ON WRITING: Just as a footnote, how did Garson Kanin feel about helping to create the vehicle by which he lost Hepburn to Spencer Tracy?

LARDNER: I don't know. He went into the army, so I didn't see him during the time the picture was being made. I think he probably realized it was a very unlikely thing with Kate. Although, as I said, she did say to me, what do you think? I don't think she ever took it too seriously or that she was in love with him.

ON WRITING: I gather this was before Ruth Gordon.

LARDNER: It wasn't much before Ruth Gordon. Two years maybe. He was still in the army when he married.

ON WRITING: How was the script written, you worked with Mike and with Hepburn?

LARDNER: Mike and I worked mainly at his house at first, I think, until we finished a first draft screenplay, and then we moved into the MGM offices. But Kate sat in on several sessions, and she suggested a number of things.

ON WRITING: I noticed in the script you were very specific about camera shots in a way that would be unusual for a screenplay nowadays.

LARDNER: We meant to do that only when they seemed particularly relevant to getting a point across. Although we knew that the director was not going to follow them literally, it was just easier to describe what we wanted emphasized by sometimes saying, go from a close-up of her to a shot of him. For instance, in the first scene of the ending, the camera pulls back from Sam's side of the bed and picks up Tess's. We wanted it to be the telephone ringing and just seeing that

empty side, and then seeing her occupy it. Now, I don't remember if Stevens shot it that way.

ON WRITING: Also during the fight sequence you were very explicit: two-shot, wide shot... Did writers do that more then than they do now? Or was that just something that you decided to do for this script?

LARDNER: No, I think it was more general. There were writers, of course, such as playwrights who came out to Hollywood and hadn't worked in movies before. They would write a script more or less like a play, and then the secretary would put it in screenplay form. But screenwriters who worked in movies all the time tended to think in visual terms and what they thought the audience should see. They would indicate that by the camera directions — knowing, as I said, that the directions wouldn't be literally executed. I think there was more of that in those days than there is today.

ON WRITING: Do you do that in your more recent screenplays?

LARDNER: I think I do less of it — only where it seems very important to make a point about how the audience should discover something. Also in my experience I've found, as some other writers have, that some directors have reacted badly to seeing this stuff in scripts and I've made a point of not doing it.

ON WRITING: Was that true in the '40s, or less true?

LARDNER: It was less true. But I think only some directors react that way.

ON WRITING: In this script there's a lot of dialogue in dialect, particularly in the scenes in the gym.

LARDNER: It seemed particularly important there because we wanted it to sound like a foreign language to Tess. And so we wrote the particular grammatical and pronunciation mistakes more specifically than we perhaps would have if there hadn't been this factor of hearing it through Tess's ears.

ON WRITING: Did you and Mike hang around gyms? Did you do research?

LARDNER: Well, I was never a sports-writer myself, but both my father and my older brother were. I was kind of interested in boxing and had talked to some fighters. Also, in the course of working on a newspaper in New York and occasionally going to the fights—they had fights in Hollywood and I remember I went sometimes with Budd Schulberg and his father, B. P. Schulberg, who went weekly. So I probably picked up some of it there. My recollection is that I was the one who did the main writing of that dialogue, and Mike Kanin wasn't as familiar with that as I was.

ON WRITING: How long did it take to write the script?

LARDNER: Not too long because as I said we had worked it out in quite a bit of detail scene by scene. I would say the first draft took about six weeks. Both Stevens and Mankiewicz had suggestions. And we did revisions at the studio.

ON WRITING: Were you on set during filming?

LARDNER: MGM signed us to a contract—paying us each \$1,000 a week—and we started working on another script. But because we were on the lot we could walk onto the set anytime while they were shooting, and we did. And sometimes Stevens would consult us about a problem with a line or a situation.

ON WRITING: What was the development process then? Or, was there a development process then?

LARDNER: Not anything formal. It was simply that you listened to what the producer and the director had to say either together or separately. And you weren't bound to accept everything they said.

ON WRITING: Was this an unusual situation with *Woman Of the Year* in terms of you and Michael being able to stay on the movie for the whole movie? Were writers kept on a movie, or were they reassigned to different scripts?

LARDNER: Writers were reassigned, and many different writers were assigned to the same script. *Woman of the Year* was exceptional in the sense that we had a certain amount of power through Hepburn and through the fact that the script had been received so well. There was never any question of anybody else working on it until the ending thing happened. But there were many times that a whole succession of writers worked on a project. *Gone With the Wind* was probably the most extreme case.

ON WRITING: Is it true that in the studio system the directors weren't involved with editing the film?

LARDNER: Some directors, even in those days, had first cut. Certainly George Stevens did because he was considered an important director. Also he had been a cameraman before he was a director and knew a lot about editing. But some lesser directors didn't have those privileges and the studios preferred to just have their editors take instructions from the producer. And then you had extreme cases like David Selznick who would really supervise every bit of the editing himself and run the film constantly with different arrangements of editing. He really worked with a project from the first script and rewriting, trying to change it through every phase of the production.

ON WRITING: On every movie, not just *Gone with the Wind*? He was always like that?

LARDNER: Oh, yes.

ON WRITING: Was Mankiewicz an intrusive producer?

LARDNER: Not very. He was a little uncomfortable being a producer, I think. Joe did some rewriting on the script and strangely enough, unlike most producers' rewriting, it was always *adding* dialogue. Although he was quite a good writer, his scenes had much more dialogue than ours and longer speeches. In almost every case we persuaded him to go back to what we had or to cut a lot of what he had rewritten. But it was the only time I ever had the problem of a producer trying to pad the lines.

ON WRITING: They usually tried to cut the lines?

LARDNER: Yeah.

ON WRITING: Do you think that was his style as a writer as well?

LARDNER: I don't know. When he became a writer-director and directed his own stuff, I don't think there was any sense of it being overwritten. I think as he started directing he realized the value of having shorter speeches.

ON WRITING: What's your favorite part of writing? Does story come easily to you?

LARDNER: I haven't written many original screenplays, and a couple that I wrote never got made. I think the most interesting part is working out scenes and trying to tell things in visual terms. Trying — in many cases where I've adapted books — to find ways of changing things that are expressed only in dialogue or description to something that is what the audience sees on the screen.

ON WRITING: You've also written novels and a family memoir. Is it harder to go back to prose?

LARDNER: It's a question of just doing what you're supposed to do. I certainly think differently about the effect. In a novel, I'm thinking of the effect of a particular word or a turn of phrase and how a reader will react to that. This is especially true in a comic or satirical novel like the *The Ecstasy of Owen Muir* where the language is very important to the points I'm trying to get across. ■

Woman of the Year

Original Ending

FADE IN:

INT. TESS'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING - CLOSE SHOT TELEPHONE

At Sam's side of the bed. The telephone is ringing. CAMERA PULLS BACK to disclose that Sam's side of the bed has not been slept in. The CAMERA PICKS UP Tess asleep on her side. The telephone's ringing awakens her. She reaches across Sam's pillow to answer phone.

TESS

(into phone)

Hello...who's calling him? Oh, yes, Mr. Whitaker. No...no, Sam isn't here. He's...well, he's out...

(in disturbed surprise)

He hasn't?

(then)

Have you asked in Pinkie's?

INT. PINKIE'S - CLOSE SHOT - PHIL AND PINKIE

both standing by the phone into which Phil is talking.

PHIL

(into phone)

I'm there now. Pinkie was with him last night, but he hasn't shown anywhere since.

PINKIE

I shouldn't of left him go.

PHIL

Quiet.

(into phone)

What?...Yeah, we got his column in. Put it together out of some stuff from his files.

PINKIE

I should of knocked him cold, even.

PHIL

Quiet.

(into phone)

We've got to find that guy, Mrs. Craig --
he's got a feature to do on that fight
tonight! Haven't you any idea....

INT. TESS'S APARTMENT - CLOSE SHOT - TESS

She is worried and embarrassed. Sam's disappearance is very upsetting to her, but is also a problem she would like to solve privately and without public knowledge.

TESS

Well...well, not entirely... You see, he
spent the night with some friends in --
Westchester. I'm quite sure he'll be back
in time....

INT. PINKIE'S - CLOSE - PHIL AND PINKIE

Phil covers the mouthpiece with his hand and turns to Pinkie, puzzled.

PHIL

She thinks he spent the night in
Westchester--

(into phone)

Look, Mrs. Craig, this is a very important
story! Prize fights may be a frightful
waste of energy, but about two hundred
thousand readers want to know what Sam
Craig thinks about the one tonight! The
minute you hear from him...

INT. TESS'S APARTMENT - CLOSE SHOT - TESS

She is very determined now. She sees her course ahead clearly.

TESS

Stop worrying, Mr. Whitaker. Sam will get his story in on time. By the way, who's fighting tonight?

(pause – while Phil bellows his answer.

She holds the phone away from her a little distastefully)

I'm sorry, Mr. Whitaker, it seems I didn't know it was a world's championship. What world, Mr. Whitaker?

(she hangs up, dials another number, and makes a note as she waits)

Tess Harding, please...hello, Gerald. I'm coming right in. Go down to the morgue and get me all the clippings on...

(referring to her note)

Al Dunlap...what? Where've you been all your life? He's fighting the champion tonight...

(slight pause)

How should I know which champion? Get those clippings for me...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ACME GYM - DAY - FULL SHOT

A huge barn of a place. Two regulation rings dominate the center. The rear of the gym is full of fighters exercising and boxing, and that strange and colorful set of characters without which no professional gym would be complete...big and small-time managers, trainers, ex-pugs, gamblers, casual gapers, chiselers and chiselers who chisel the chiselers.

SHOT OF THE ENTRANCE -

This is a large archway leading to the outer corridor...guarded by a gnarled mastiff of a man.

Tess appears and stops hesitantly at the sight of the weird bedlam inside. A fighter, clad only in trunks and perspiration, comes hurrying out, puffing like a bellows. Tess jumps aside to let him pass. A few men circle her on their way in. Finding herself blocking traffic, Tess takes a deep breath and starts in.

DOOR ATTENDANT

Hey!

(as Tess stops and turns to him)
Where ya goin'?

TESS

I...I'm from the Chronicle.

DOOR ATTENDANT

Since when?

(Tess takes her press pass from her
handbag and hands it to him. He holds
it off, and reads it not without an
effort)

Tess...Harding.

(looking up)

Who's 'at?

TESS

That's me.

DOOR ATTENDANT

(handing back pass)

Outside.

TESS

(a bit ruffled)

I'm afraid you don't seem to...

A red-faced man with a stuffy piece of cigar in his mouth
appears.

RED-FACE

What's up?

DOOR ATTENDANT

Some dame...crashin'.

RED-FACE

(to Tess)

What's on yer mind, sister?

TESS

(a bit angry now)

Look here, I've come to interview Mr.
Dunlap...

RED-FACE

(to Door Attendant)

Outside.

TESS

It's an important story! Sam Craig sent me...

At the mention of Sam's name, their faces brighten. They unhand her.

RED-FACE

Sam Craig? You his sec'etary or somethin'?

TESS

I'm his wife or somethin'.

RED-FACE

(pumping her hand heartily)
So you're the doll!! Pleased t' meet'cha.
(to Door Attendant)
What'sa matter wit'cha. It's Missus Craig.

DOOR ATTENDANT

(defensively)

She gimme a fake name.

RED-FACE

(to Tess)

Come on in.

A loud bell rings throughout the gym. Tess looks around blankly.

SHOT - FROM TESS'S ANGLE -

All over the place men start into action, at the sound of the bell...whatever they're doing they snap from relaxation into full speed.

TWO SHOT - TESS AND RED-FACE

He follows her puzzled glance.

RED-FACE

Dey all work out like in real fights.
Three minutes goin'...one restin'.

He leads her inside. CAMERA DOLLIES AHEAD.

RED-FACE

Sam's been sellin' ya all over the joint.
No more'n he unbuttons his kisser, he's sendin' on ya...

TESS
(doesn't understand a word)
I beg your pardon?

A group of men leer at Tess as she passes.

RED-FACE
(to the men)
Can it, y' lugs...she's Sam Craig's
missus.

They immediately tip their hats.

TESS
(trying to be expert)
Tell me, do you think Dunlap's going to
win the fight?

RED-FACE
(astounded at this question)
Dunlap? One'll get ya ten. They're namin'
the round he kisses the canvas.

TESS
(completely confused)
I'm terribly sorry. I just don't under-
stand a word you're saying.

RED-FACE
It's the noise in here.
(speaking louder)
Dunlap's got moxie t' threw 'way...but no
pins.

TESS
No pins.

RED-FACE
Yeah, no pins...they fold 'round the sixt'
frame.

VOICE
Hey, Pete..!

RED-FACE
(calling off)
Comin'!
(to Tess)
The joint's yours. Anybody get outa line,
speak up. See ya 'round.

TESS
(gulps)

See ya' round.

The red-faced man leaves her and Tess starts walking around the place, CAMERA FOLLOWING. She feels like Alice in Wonderland.... Five fighters in one of the rings, each shadow-boxing individually, confound her for a few moments...a tough mug skipping rope with the grace of a dancer...the rat-a-tat of the small punching bags, artfully manipulated. The snatches of conversation she overhears are, for once, in a language she doesn't know.

VOICES

They turn in the towel, an' it wuz on'y a
gash over the right peeper...
Sweat dat lard off yer basket.
I ast for a welter... I get bantams,
feathers, flies...

At this point, when Tess is most bewildered, she spots a woman sitting and knitting complacently on the other side of the gym. She's the only other woman in the place, and Tess makes a bee-line toward her...as to an oasis. As Tess approaches and sidles close to her, the woman looks up without interrupting her knitting and smiles...a friendly smile. She's a full-bosomed pleasant woman whose many tribulations have not warped her practical good sense. Tess smiles back and comes closer.

TESS

Sweater?

MRS. DUNLAP

Mm-hm.

TESS

What long sleeves!

MRS. DUNLAP

(rather proudly)

He's got an eighty-three-inch reach.

TESS

(doesn't quite understand, but
it sounds impressive)

My!

Just then, the bell rings again. Like all the fighters who stop for their minute's rest, Mrs. Dunlap puts down her knitting, too, and turns her attention to Tess. Tess is intrigued by this conditioned reaction...it tells so much about the woman.

TESS

Mind if I sit with you?

MRS. DUNLAP

I wish you would.

(as Tess does so)

Your first visit here, isn't it?

TESS

(smiling)

I didn't think it would be so obvious.

(then)

I've come to interview Al Dunlap. I wonder if you could tell me which one he is?

MRS. DUNLAP

(smiling)

Well, just look for the sweetest puss in the whole place...that'll be Al's.

(as Tess begins to understand)

I'm his wife...so maybe I shouldn't be the one to talk.

TESS

Oh... you most certainly should.

(then warmly)

I'm so glad to know you, Mrs. Dunlap. I'm Tess...that is, Mrs. Craig...Mrs. Sam Craig.

MRS. DUNLAP

(pleasantly surprised)

You're not!

(then)

Why me an' Al read his column more than any.

(solicitously)

He sick or somethin'?

TESS

Well...sort of.

MRS. DUNLAP

Tch...too bad.

(then)

But it's sure nice you're able to fill in
for him when he's laid up.

(laughingly)

Wish I could do that much for Al.

A small boy, about nine, comes running up...he's dressed
in a gym suit and has large ten-ounce gloves on his
hands.

DICK

Ma...Bobby don' wanna box no more.

MRS. DUNLAP

You better leave him rest now... he's only
a little boy. Go punch the bags some more.

(as the boy turns to go)

Dick, say hello to Mrs. Craig.

TESS

Hello, Dick.

DICK

(shyly)

'lo.

He runs away. The two women smile.

MRS. DUNLAP

Imagine! Al wanted to take them to the
fight tonight...got two extra tickets an'
all. If I'd of let him, he'd take the
baby, too.

(then)

Where you sitting?

TESS

Sitting?

MRS. DUNLAP

At the fight.

TESS

I don't know... I haven't arranged...

MRS. DUNLAP

(pleased)

Well, I'd love to have you sit with me if
you'd care to.

TESS

I'd be glad to.

(looking off)

How old are your children, Mrs. Dunlap?

MRS. DUNLAP

Nine, six, an' ten months. We only had the little one because we wanted a girl. He's a boy, too.

(the bell rings and she resumes her knitting)

You got any children, Mrs. Craig?

TESS

(somewhat embarrassed)

No...no, I haven't

MRS. DUNLAP

Guess you've got your hands full with the one you married.

(as Tess looks at her)

Mr. Craig, I mean. They're all just overgrown kids.

(smiling and pointing o.s.)

Look at mine over there...showing off his muscles.

SHOT OF AL DUNLAP - FROM TESS'S ANGLE

He's at one of the light bags, posing for a newspaper photographer...pulling in his slightly bulging midriff, and flexing his biceps. He's past thirty...with a nice though battered face.

SHOT OF TESS AND MRS. DUNLAP

They're looking at Al Dunlap o.s. Tess turns and stares at the unashamed love and tenderness glowing in Mrs. Dunlap's eyes...and is deeply moved.

MRS. DUNLAP

(still looking off)

And it wasn't six months ago, he came home one night an' cried like a baby...ashamed 'cause he couldn't make a living. Somebody's called him a has-been. Imagine...feeling like a has-been at thirty-three.

TESS

How did you do it?

MRS. DUNLAP

Oh, I just fed him, an' kissed him...an' got him a fight. I made him think he could win it...an' he did. That's all.

TESS

It seems like a great deal.

MRS. DUNLAP

(shaking her head)

No more than what you're doin' right now, is it?

TESS

(a confusion of emotions)

I...suppose not.

MRS. DUNLAP

(looking off toward Dunlap)

Big lug! When he tries to say he loves me an' don't know how, I get the feelin' I'm 'way ahead by plenty of points.

(suddenly taking Tess' arm)

Here he comes now.

SHOT OF GYM - FROM THE WOMEN'S ANGLE

Dunlap is coming toward them.

MRS. DUNLAP'S VOICE

Please don't ask him too many questions. He gets flustered when he has to think too fast.

SHOT OF TESS AND MRS. DUNLAP

Tess, moved, shakes her head. Dunlap joins them. He's a picture of childlike confidence.

MRS. DUNLAP

Finished?

DUNLAP

Yeah.

MRS. DUNLAP

You were pushin' with that left again, instead of hittin'.

DUNLAP

Eddie ast me. He's got a bad eye.

MRS. DUNLAP

(turning to Tess)

This is Mrs. Craig...Sam Craig's wife.
She's writing a piece about you.

DUNLAP

Yeah? Hi'ya.

He shakes Tess' hand...Mrs. Dunlap watches proudly.

TESS

Hello.

There's an awkward pause.

MRS. DUNLAP

(to Tess, helpfully)

Maybe there's just one thing you'd like to
ask him.

TESS

(at a loss)

Yes, of course. How...how are your pins?

Tess doesn't know what "pins" are. She's relieved to find
out when Al slaps his thighs exuberantly.

DUNLAP

Great! Never better! An' y' can say for me
I'll knock that guy kickin' tonight.

MRS. DUNLAP

(chidingly)

Now, hush up, Al. Leave the sayin' to
other people. You do it.

TESS

(impulsively)

He'll do it, all right.

(as the Dunlaps looks at her in
happy surprise)

Somehow, I'm sure he'll...knock that guy
kickin'.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TESS'S OFFICE - DAY - CLOSE SHOT - TESS

at her work table, typing. This is a Tess whose every feminine instinct and emotion has been aroused by her experience at the gym. It's the first time she's ever felt really sentimental and she's making up for past omissions with a vengeance. Tears form in her eyes as she types. Suddenly she interrupts, flips the lever up on her inter-office communications.

TESS
(into communication)
Gerald, how do you spell 'moxie'?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PINKIE'S - NIGHT - SHOT OF BAR

featuring the radio behind the bar, over which is coming the broadcast of the fight. On his side of the bar Pinkie is leaning on his elbows, unhappy and nervous, not paying any attention to the broadcast. Opposite him two or three customers are listening attentively.

ANNOUNCER
(over radio)
...There goes the bell for the end of the third, and the crowd's just as excited as if it was the main event. Both boys are really digging in there...looks like the title bout might be an anti-climax...after this...

The telephone at the end of the bar rings. Pinkie springs out of his lethargy as he reaches over to turn down the volume of the radio and rushes to the phone. The men at the bar react in dismay at the radio being turned down. CAMERA FOLLOWS Pinkie into a close shot at the phone as he picks it up.

PINKIE
(into phone)

Yeah...?

(in joyous relief)

Sammy! Where are ya? Phil called me from
ringside...says ya didn't show up....Huh?
..But, Sammy, it's yer job. Ya gotta...

(plaintively)

Sure, it's none of my business. That's
what I'm saying...it's your business.

(slight pause)

Okay, okay. Why did ya call me then,
if...? Huh? San'wiches and coffee f' four?
...Yeah, I'll send it right over. Where
to?

(his eyes widen in surprise)

Mademoiselle Sylvia...! Who...where...?

(then instinctively, he crowds
the phone and his voice drops to
almost a whisper)

Look, Sammy, I ain't buttin' in, honest,
but...

(then, with unhappy resignation)

Okay, what's the address?

He writes something on pad, as he says this. He hangs up,
very disillusioned.

DISSOLVE TO:

FULL SHOT - EXT. - BROWNSTONE HOUSE

Pinkie gets out of cab, carrying his provisions. He pays
the taxi driver and looks up at house as he does so. He
slowly climbs steps and opens door.

INT. BROWNSTONE HOUSE -

SHOOTING from the head of the stairs toward the entrance.
Pinkie comes up the stairs, and CAMERA PANS him to a door
opening on the corridor. He reads sign on door:

"Mademoiselle Sylvia - By appointment only"

He reacts, starts to knock, then straightens his tie, and
then knocks.

WOMAN'S VOICE
(from within)

Come in.

He slowly opens the door, enters.

INT. MADEMOISELLE SYLVIA'S - NIGHT

Pinkie enters, still looking back at the sign. This is the front room of the apartment, fixed up with a few tables and desks to serve as a classroom. At present, Sam is the only pupil. He sits, head in hands, pouring over a text book and muttering to himself. There is a determined driving expression about the set of his mouth. His tie is loose, his jacket off. He looks like he's on the tail end of a bat. As a matter of fact, he is - yet through the scene he has that driving, over-correct speech of a man who has been drunk but is still stubborn enough to carry on with what he started when drunk. At the table with him is Mademoiselle Sylvia, a Swiss woman in her late forties. She looks exhausted. On a couch, in almost virtual collapse is a Spanish looking gent.

SAM

(as Pinkie enters)

Hyah, Pinko - thanks - put 'em there.

(back in book)

J'si - tu as - Il or elle a - nous avons
(noo avon) vous avez (voo avey)

He does not run the "s" and the "a" together.

MADMOISELLE SYLVIA

(correcting him, wearily)

Vous avez (You have) - please remember.

PINKIE

(exploding)

What gives out here? Sammy - the fight!
The preliminaries are on already!

SAM

(to Mademoiselle Sylvia)

Let me get this straight -

(indicating Pinkie)

He's a friend of mine - an intimate. So I don't use the "vous" (you) on him - I give him the "tu" (thou) - right?

MADMOISELLE SYLVIA
If you are affectionate with him.

SAM
I get it.

PINKIE
Affectionate!

SAM
(to the Spanish guy)
Is it the same in Spanish?

SPANISH TEACHER
(rising wearily)
Senor, it is enough for today...no?

MADMOISELLE SYLVIA
Thirteen hours, Mr. Craig. After so long -
- it is difficult to assimilate and...

PINKIE
(peers at Sam closely, then to
Mademoiselle)
You got a liquor license, lady?

SAM
(munching on a sandwich)
You're on the wrong track, Pinkie. None of
that for me any more.
(determinedly)
Soon's I get the hang of these two lan-
guages, I'm going after German and Rus-
sian.

PINKIE
(gently)
Maybe we better call a doc, huh?

SAM
(overriding him)
And if my tongue'll stand the gaff, I
might even try Chinese. Got to know how to
talk your way around to be important.

PINKIE
(worried)
But ya are important, Sammy...

SAM

Me...important? What did I ever do...except to put one empty word after another? But that's all over with.

(as Pinkie tries to say something)
Just wait and see, Pinkie...in a year, maybe less...I'll have people hanging on my words like mesmerized grapes.

PINKIE

(almost frightened)

Sammy, cut it out, will ya? Ya ain't talkin' human!

SAM

I don't want to be human...I want to be important!

(turning to Mademoiselle)

Okay, let's have at it again.

PINKIE

(miserably)

I knew it...I knew somethin' was wrong with ya. When I read in your column how ya picked Dunlap...

SAM

(wheeling)

Column? What column? Who picked Dunlap?

PINKIE

Ya know the guy's washed up.

SAM

What are you raving about?

PINKIE

(taking a folded copy of the Chronicle from his pocket)

The stuff ya wrote today...here! Don' cha read it when ya write it?

Sam grabs the newspaper from Pinkie, and looks at it apprehensively.

SAM

(in slow horror)

Little Woman's faith will win for Dunlap,
says Craig. Love and the Comeback Trail...

(looks at Pinkie - stands up
quickly, looks around for coat
and hat)

I've got to get out of here.

MADemoisELLE SYLVIA

The day's tuition is eighteen dollars, Mr.
Craig.

Sam hands paper to Pinkie and rips out check book and
pen.

SAM

Read me that story.

PINKIE

(reading with difficulty)

Al Dunlap will whip the champion tonight -
as surely as the puny power of muscle must
always bow to that invincible spirit which
springs from the tender, constant devotion
of a woman for her man...

By this time even the Spanish teacher sits up, amazed.

SAM

(signing check)

That's enough!

He hands Mademoiselle the check and frantically collects
his coat and hat, straightens tie.

SAM

(accusingly)

Who did it? Who wrote that tripe?

PINKIE

(bewildered)

Who wrote it? Don't do this to me, Sammy!

SAM

(putting on his coat)

Was it Whitaker?

PINKIE

Wasn't it you?

SAM

Let's go!

PINKIE

To the fight - ?

SAM

(as he goes out the door)

Yeah. There's going to be an added attraction tonight, but it can't go on without me!

Pinkie hurries after him, as we --

DISSOLVE TO

INT. MANHATTAN ARENA - NIGHT - FULL ESTABLISHING SHOT

It's filled to the rafters for a championship fight. The main event is about to begin; the fighters, Al Dunlap and the champion, are getting their instructions from the referee.

CLOSE SHOT - TESS AND MRS. DUNLAP

sitting together about sixth row ringside. Mrs. Dunlap's eyes are fixed on her man in the ring, but Tess's are searching what she can see of the press row for Sam. Suddenly her face lights up with joy and relief.

SHOT OF SAM AND PINKIE

walking down the aisle toward the ring. Pinkie reaches the row his seat is in, gives Sam a farewell slap on the back and makes his way in toward his seat. Sam continues down the aisle, CAMERA DOLLYING in front of him. His hat is pulled down over his eyes and he's trying generally to look as inconspicuous as possible. His face is set in grim resolution.

MED. SHOT - SECTION OF PRESS ROW

A half or dozen or so sportswriters, including Ellis and Phil Whitaker, are seen. Sam pauses in the aisle by the press row. As he starts to make his way in -

A MAN'S VOICE

Here he is, boys...greatest little wife
and mother a newspaper ever had...

Sam stops and throws a cold glance along the press row. An uncertain baritone starts humming "Hearts and Flowers." The cracks fall thick and fast about Sam's ears as he pushes his way toward his seat, which is about six from the aisle.

AD LIBS

Bring a couple of extra handkerchiefs
along, Sam? In case it's a long fight?

It won't be. I don't see how the champ can
stand up under Dunlap's tender, constant
devotion...

I hear Dunlap's gonna lead with an invin-
cible spirit to the heart...

...an' get clipped with a puny power of
muscle on the chin.

Sam reaches his seat between Ellis and Phil and sinks
into it gratefully.

ELLIS

(as he sits)

It was beautiful, Sam. Best thing of its
kind since little Goody Two-Shoes.

He and Phil both laugh. Sam is not amused.

SAM

(to Phil)

Who did it?

PHIL

It happened to me once. A feller dropped a
Mickey in my milk, and I picked Willard to
murder Dempsey in a round --

SAM

(quietly)

I know it wasn't you, because you'd know
better than to be here if it was -- who did
it?

PHIL

I know just how it happened. Everything went black, and when you came to - there was that smoking pistol in your hand...

During the preceding, the ring has been cleared of seconds and the fighters stand up, waiting for the gong. The gong sounds and Phil's eyes turn to the ring. Sam takes one last look along the press row, then he, too, looks at the fight.

CLOSE SHOT - TESS AND MRS. DUNLAP

Tess is straining to catch a glimpse of Sam. The sudden pressure of Mrs. Dunlap's hand on her arm switches her attention to the ring.

LONG SHOT - RING

Dunlap rushes out with such speed and force that the champion is thrown off his guard. The first four blows are all Dunlap's, and the last of these drops the champ to the floor.

FLASH SHOT - SPORTSWRITERS

They react in astonishment, their glances switching involuntarily from the ring to Sam, who's the most surprised of all.

FLASH SHOT - TESS AND MRS. DUNLAP

Now it's Tess who's gripping the other woman's arm in excitement.

LONG SHOT - RING

Dunlap's in a neutral corner. The referee's raising his arm for the count of one when the champ bounces up to his feet again.

MED. SHOT - SPORTSWRITERS

featuring Sam and Phil. Sam is not any happier about it than before. Phil pulls up his sleeve, and bares his forearm.

PHIL
(pointing to a vein)
May I have a loan of your needle, Profes-
sor?

Sam throws him an annoyed look.

DISSOLVE TO:

SHOT OF ROUND INDICATOR

above the ring. Number eight is lighted up.

CAMERA PANS DOWN to SHOT OF THE ring. Dunlap is still holding his own.

THREE SHOT - SAM, PHIL, AND ELLIS

featuring Sam, who's in the middle. Ellis is looking at him with genuine respect.

ELLIS
Who tipped you off, Sam?

SAM
(impatiently)
Look, for the last time...I don't know anything about it. I didn't...

Phil's elbow digs sharply into his other side. Sam turns, looks around. CAMERA ANGLES to take in Tess who is standing directly behind him.

TESS
(smiling tentatively)
Hello, Mr. Craig. Remember me?

SAM
(quietly)
Aren't you a little off your beat?

TESS
No, I'm exactly where I should be.

Sam doesn't get it...he stares at her, trying to figure her possible angle.

TESS (cont'd)

Isn't it wonderful...I mean, Dunlap winning?

SAM

Yeah...

TESS

Certainly makes you a pretty smart picker.

SAM

Oh, so you read that column! Probably the first column of mine you ever read, and you had to pick that one.

(Tess is confused)

Now get this straight: I didn't pick Dunlap, and I wouldn't have written that tear-jerking hokum at the point of a gun!

TESS

Sam — I wrote that story.

Phil gives them a quick look, and then, back to the ring:

PHIL

Oh, brother.

Sam looks at Phil. Then, back to Tess. The ensuing scene is played intimately, at first quickly and then growing with the increasing clamor of the crowd about them.

SAM

(coldly)

Why?

TESS

We didn't know where you were. It had to be written.

SAM

Then why not tell Phil you didn't know where I was, and let him write it? Or Ellis. Or anyone of a half dozen friends of mine?

TESS

Because it wasn't their job. It was mine.

SAM

(incredulously)

Take it easy, Tess...you're still writing that column.

TESS

No, darling, I'm trying to live it now.
Meeting Mrs. Dunlap's made everything
clear to me. I haven't been a woman or a
wife or anything!

The crowd grows suddenly wild at the activity in the
ring. It mounts. Tess and Sam are forced to speak louder.

SAM

(with heavy skepticism)

And now you know just how to go about it?

TESS

(enthusiastically)

Yes, Sam...we'll move out of the apart-
ment, get a little house out of town some-
where. I'll make it a real home, honest.
I'll learn how to take care of it...and
you.

SAM

And you'll cook, sew and order the grocer-
ies? Drive me to the station every morn-
ing?

TESS

(exultant now in the picture)

Yes, Sam -!

SAM

You're not making sense.

TESS

I am!

SAM

You're confused. You can't fix you and me
up with an apron and a dusting cap. For
the first time I'm a little disappointed
in you.

TESS

Sam - it's the answer. I know it is!

SAM

Now you are off your beat. It won't work!
You can't make it work, Tess!

TESS
(like a candidate's promise)
I'll make it work! It'll work just as sure
as Al Dunlap will win this fight and be
champion of the world!

At this moment there is a screaming roar and the figure of Al Dunlap comes crashing through the ropes past CAMERA and sprawls at their feet. Tess and Sam, both look at him, Tess in horror and shock.

WIDER SHOT - RING - TESS AND SAM IN B.G.

The referee waves the champ back and is starting to count on the edge of the ring.

REFEREE
One - two - three - four - five - six -

TWO SHOT - TESS AND SAM

Tess is staring at Dunlap, her mouth open, Sam turns and looks at her, a gentle, tender smile growing on his face.

REFEREE'S VOICE
Seven - eight - nine - ten!

By this time, Al is struggling dazedly to his feet. Sam pats him on the back in affection. You can hear nothing in the bedlam. The handlers arms come in and help him through the ropes o.s. Tess watches him go.

EFFECT SHOT - HER ANGLE - RING

Cops are trying to keep the crowd out. The referee has the champion's arm raised. Mrs. Dunlap climbs through the ropes and throws a mother's arms around Dunlap.

TWO SHOT - TESS AND SAM

There are tears in Tess's eyes. She suddenly covers her face with her hands. Sam takes her hand.

SAM

(gently)

Al will have a little headache, but a nice piece of money goes with it. And he and Mrs. Al are going to buy that farm up in the country. And they're going to live up there - where they belong...

They stand. He turns to her.

SAM

(smiling at her)

Why do you always go to extremes. First you want to be just Tess Harding and now you want to be just Mrs. Sam Craig. What's wrong with Tess Harding Craig?

During his speech the sense of what he's saying gradually gets over to Tess. It's a big emotional adjustment, but she makes it.

TESS

I think it's a wonderful name.

She looks at him adoringly and he responds in kind. Suddenly she notices his hat.

TESS (cont'd)

Sam, you've got a new hat.

Sam looks puzzled for a moment, raises his eye to the brim. Then he takes it off and looks at it with growing distaste.

TESS

(with false enthusiasm)

I like it.

Sam gives her a suspicious glance. Searching his eyes, she realizes her faux pas. They both break into understanding grins as Sam scales the hat away over the crowd.

FADE OUT

the end.