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In September 1910 John Howard Lawson entered Williams College, an upper-class private liberal arts men's college in Williamstown, Massachusetts. He was one of the few Jewish students who had just begun to attend school there. And he was the youngest man in his class — He was not quite 16.

A former classmate of Lawson's at Williams who requests anonymity has described Lawson at that time as a "rather quiet type and perhaps a bit shy" because he was the youngest in his class. In "A Calendar of Commitment" Lawson points out that "in experience as well as in years, most of my classmates enjoyed social advantages, family and community relationships, which I had not had. I was more naive than most of them, and at the same time I was more advanced intellectually."

This anonymous classmate recalls that Lawson once commented that at Williams "life outside the classroom was more interesting than anything concerned with studies." Similarly, the Williams College Senior Class Book of 1914 reports that Lawson, who majored in English, treated the curriculum with "nonchalance" but notes that in comparison the curriculum treated him in an "excellent way... in the matter of marks" — 11 Bs, 21 Cs, 6 Ds, in unspecified courses.

Lawson's nonchalance toward the curriculum did not extend to at least one class that in his junior or senior year aroused his "passionate" interest

1) This is a revision of pages 112-124 of "John Howard Lawson — The Early Years" (Keiei to keizai, vol 57-1 No 146 July 1977) and includes material earlier omitted and material later read in "A Calendar of Commitment," Lawson's unfinished and unpublished autobiography, parts of which his daughter Susan Amanda Lawson has permitted me to read.

2) In The International (1928) young David Fitch calls colls college a "fool factory" because it has not given him knowledge of the "real" world.
— Asa Henry Morton’s course in the thought of the Middle Ages. As a
child, Lawson had tried to write verse plays about the “mystery and glo-
ry” of the Middle Ages, to which Morton gave a “new dimension, reveal-
ing the modes of thought underlying the historical pageant.” The textbook,
Henry Osborne Taylor’s *The Medieval Mind*, which Lawson kept all his
life, introduced Lawson to “mystic aspirations” which touched his “dark-
est desires.” Lawson was “profoundly affected” by Taylor’s chapter on
the “Heart of Heloise.” In “A Calendar of Commitment” Lawson says
there was an “analytical and subjective element in the suffering of Abelard
and Heloise which was attuned to my own psychological condition.”

The lovers /he writes/ were intellectuals, and their tragedy did
not end in death but in long frustration. The correspondence be-
 tween them after their separation... the continuing devotion and
intellectual understanding that bound them together, seemed to me
more beautiful, and closer to some truth which I could not define,
than the mischance that destroyed Romeo and Juliet.

Lawson adds that his interest in Abelard and Heloise “betokened an inner
conflict which brought me close to exhaustion. Sex was everything and
everywhere. There was no way to escape it or to ease the pain.”

Nor did Lawson’s nonchalance toward the formal curriculum extend
to extra-curricular activities. The *Senior Class Book* reports that Lawson
at once “sprang into prominence” at Williams. He was the first man in
his class to be published in the *Williams Literary Monthly* and he “con-
tributed steadily to that publication all through his four years, serving also
/in his senior year/ as a member of the board.” As the *Senior Class
Book* discreetly puts it, in his second year at Williams Lawson ran a “very
close race” for the editorship of the *Williams Record*, the student newspa-
per. Lawson actually quit this race because of the open anti-semitism of

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3) Lawson quotes from this book almost 40 years later in *The Hidden Heritage*
(1951).

4) The heroine of *Roger Bloomer* (1923) is named Louise; the heroine of *The
International* is named Alise.

5) In the summer of 1913 Lawson fell in love with a beautiful intellectual
girl whose name was Berenice. They became engaged. Then she married
a childhood friend of hers. Lawson suffered a long frustration, but he con-
tinued a long correspondence with her until her death in 1933.

6) In *Roger Bloomer* Roger suffers this painful sexual condition.
a Record editor who said in public that Jews were not wanted on the Record.7)

The Senior Class Book records other examples of Lawson's extra-curricular activities. He contributed to The Purple Cow, the student humor magazine to which contributions were anonymous. He contributed to and served on the 1914 Gulielmensian, the college yearbook published, contributions anonymous, by the junior class. He was a member of the Classical Society, Pipe and Quill, and the Good Government Club. He was also a member of the Socialist Club, a small Fabian group, which he says he joined after the defeat in the presidential election of 1911 of Theodore Roosevelt, whom he had supported. Lawson was disappointed that the Socialist Club had only five or six members besides a faculty advisor who was disturbed when Lawson recommended that the club invite anarchist Emma Goldman to speak at Williams. (Emma Goldman was not permitted to speak on campus, but she spoke off campus to the members of the Socialist Club and a few of their friends.)

Lawson did not belong to any fraternity at Williams. As he puts it in "A Calendar of Commitment," although most of his friends at Williams were not Jewish, he was "one of the victims of the fraternity system, it then being taken for granted that a Jew be excluded" from fraternities. However, in their junior year, apparently at the suggestion of Lawson, Lawson and eleven other "barbs" banded together under the name Swithe Blithe — in Anglo-Saxon, exceedingly joyful. They had a happy association together, and Lawson, who was very careful about his friendships, said 50 years later: "I felt intensely about our pledge of eternal brotherhood."8)

7) In "A Calendar of Commitment" Lawson says that at Williams the rule was polite anti-semitism, so this editor later made a required apology to Lawson and other Jewish contestants in the race for Record editor. (At the time, the editor-in-chief of the Record was Morris L. Ernst, a Jewish student, who later became one of the most important attorneys in the Eastern United States.) Lawson adds that in his second year at Williams he was passed over as a member of the board of the Literary Monthly because of anti-Semitism; he was made a member of the board in his senior year when the editor-in-chief, one of his closest friends, smoothed the way for him.

8) Among the members of Swithe Blithe were John C. Mosher, later a member of the staff of the New Yorker for many years, Ernest Lothrop, Kenneth C. Lincoln, cousins James and Fred McKown, Carl J. Austrian, Durand H. Van Doren.
The Class of 1914 elected John Howard Lawson as its Class Poet. He had already written the words to the song of the Class of 1914, "Williams, Forever Williams":

Williams, forever Williams, We sing to thee With shouts of comrade voices, With cheers and jollity, Good fellows Always with song and laughter, Always light-hearted glee; Tho' years bring sorrow after, Now let us take our fill of pleasure, And days of friendship treasure, Within thy bonds, Williams.9)

In his senior year at Williams, Lawson, who had a "zest for argument" and called the "glorious art" of argument one of the "primal passions," spent a lot of time and energy in public speaking (as he did most of his life). He scoffed at debate as a "formal institution," but he was a member of the Williams varsity debating team. And on the evening of March 23, 1914, he reviewed for the Classical Society Dr. Frank Frost Abbott's The Common People of Ancient Rome, which "finds many points of similarity between ancient and modern conditions" and which is interested in the "common people of Rome because they made the Roman Empire what it was."

In the spring of 1914 Lawson also competed in the Van Vechten Prize Contest for extemporaneous speaking which continued for several Mondays. First he spoke on "The Panama Toll Question" and explained the importance of the U. S. policy of Pan-Americanism. Second he spoke on "The Capture of Torreon" and advocated non-interference by the U. S. in the internal affairs of Mexico. Third he spoke on "The Small College versus the University" and contended that the "salvation of the small college lies in the development of the cultural courses and the creation of an appreciation of the 'beautiful and gracious'." In his fourth and last talk in the Van Vechten Contest he offered suggestions to ameliorate labor strife in the coal mines of Colorado.10)

Early in May 1914 Lawson addressed the Socialist Study Department of the Good Government Club (into which the Socialist Club was incorporated over Lawson's strong and sole objections) on "Will Socialism be an

10) In Processional (1925), The International, Marching Song (1937) and Thunder Morning (1953) Lawson deals with the theme of labor strife.
adequate remedy for the evils of the present capitalistic system?" and he indicted capitalism as being theoretically and practically unsound, wasteful and outgrown, unsuited to the needs of the time.\(^{11)\)

Lawson himself had not quite outgrown capitalistic culture, however, and the *Senior Class Book* reports that in his final year at Williams he "suddenly developed business genius" and achieved "audacious success" with a tutoring bureau and "various other / unspecified/ schemes." The *Senior Class Book* notes that "achievement comes easy" for Lawson and sums up the "keynotes" of his character as "cheerfulness and optimism combined with a very great willingness to oblige."

Attorney Carl J. Austrian, a former member of Swithe Blithe, has written that he still remembered Lawson as "very bright, alert, kind, considerate. He had an excellent sense of humor and a bright cheery face."\(^{12)\} \) Attorney Durand H. Van Doren, also a former member of Swithe Blithe, has written that the *Senior Class Book* 's description of Lawson's character is a "very good one" and that "Despite the great difference in our economic philosophies and separation for the better part of 50 years... I have never lost my affection for him; and I think that when he is not theorizing or lecturing he is much the same cheerful agreeable chap he always was."\(^{13)\}

The day he graduated from Williams College, June 24, 1914, John Howard Lawson was, according to the *Senior Class Book*, 19 years, eight months and 30 days old. He was 5'8" tall and he weighed 139 pounds. In "A Calendar of Commitment" Lawson sums up his four "happy" years at Williams, where he made "friendships that have lasted, loyalties that cannot be forgotten" : Williams was a "small world, self-contained : the campus was ringed by lovely mountains, and there was another wall, similarly clothed in beauty and assuming the appearance of a natural phenom-

\(^{11)\} \) *Williams Record*, May 9, 1914, p. 2. In the fall of 1913 Lawson read Karl Kautsky's *The Class Struggle*, introduced to him by his brother Wendell, who had brought it home from Germany. This book gave Lawson his first knowledge of Karl Marx and Marxism, with which he at first disagreed, though he brought Kautsky's book to Socialist Club meetings and, to the faculty sponsor's annoyance, quoted from it as a basis for discussion. 

\(^{12)\} \) Letter to me, December 2, 1963. 

enon, around our minds. It was the same cultural enclosure in which I had always lived and I felt at home in it... routine procedures, organized activities, social relationships, competitive ambitions, which made it a minuscule replica of the social order for which the college intended to prepare us."

At the graduation ceremony of the Class of 1914 in Grace Hall, John Howard Lawson, the Class Poet, recited the Class Poem, which he wrote:

We stand today upon the brink of change, A moment breathless, fateful, wonderful: Here shall burst forth, as fire bursts from coals, From the ashes of our childhood the full flame Of life; and from the soul of peacefulness, Shall blossom brightly the red rose of strife.

Lawson was active right up to graduation day and on June 22, 1914, in the Graves Prize Contest, he delivered a spoken essay on "The Poetry of Alfred Noyes." On the same day, two days before graduation, John Howard Lawson also attended Williams College President Harry Augustus Garfield’s Baccalaureate Sermon. Garfield’s text, taken from Second Corinthians 4:18, was: "For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are unseen are eternal."

To the Class of 1914 Garfield said: "Gentlemen, your lives will count. Look up until you behold the vision of your country and then seek to transform its temporal concerns accordingly."\(^{14}\) Although we do not know what he at the time thought of Garfield’s sermon (throughout his four years at Williams, Lawson resented compulsory chapel because it "honored the believers and disparaged the free thinkers"), John Howard Lawson devoted a great deal of his career as playwright and screenwriter, social

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14) Garfield, son of a former president of the United States, addressed a Williams alumni dinner on February 16, 1918, and said that "neither labor nor capital has a monopoly of virtue." He hoped for a "new freedom uncontaminated by the old foundations of feudalism and imperialism." He criticized men "striving to serve both themselves and the country—a political God-and-Mammon service impossible of fruitful results...They are far less concerned at justice and fair dealing than they are about efficiency and large profit." Williams College in the World war. Williamstown 1926. p. 37. In Standards (1916) Lawson had made much the same criticism of businessmen.
critic and historian, seeking to transform the temporal concerns of his country.

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John Howard Lawson's writings in *Williams Literary Monthly* include two "Chats", four "Shears" (reviews of writing in student publications of other colleges), eight poems, one short story, seven essays and five articles.

In his "Chat" of May 1913 entitled "On the Naturalist" Lawson begins: 

> It is Spring! 

Then he notes that the Naturalist as a "species" is "surprisingly abundant" and that the Naturalist talks of Nature in terms of *Gleditsia Triacantha* and *Cornus Florida*. But "Chat is sick of the biological fad. He is convinced that science and botany are destroying the romance of Springtime."

In his other "Chat" (January 1914), entitled "Tea Cups and Radiators," Lawson mentions the cold winter weather, describes his room as "somewhat barnlike" and says there are "two possibilities of warmth": a radiator which makes a "midnight racket" and could leak on his "best Persian carpet," or tea-drinking. He chooses tea. Though tea "has never achieved collegiate fame..." he considers it a "pleasant companionable drink, a stimulator of conversation and of laughter."

In his "Sign of the Shears" of December 1913 Lawson begins: "Shears has a horror of that which is trite. He cannot overcome his objections to literary conventionality... without the spark of personal feeling. He would prefer something which was really bad — if it were only just a trifle new, startling, inspired." Shears approves of a one-act play in *The Colonnade*, "Across the Sea." He calls it "une drame symboliste" and says it is mysticism with an obvious attempt to point a moral: A woman and a blind man con-

15) *Roger Bloomer* begins in *Springtime* and may be considered a romance of springtime.

16) In *Gentlewoman* (1934) heroine Gwyn Ballantine is said, disparagingly, to know all about flowers and to call them by their Latin names.


18) Almost all Broadway drama critics of the 1920s found Lawson's plays startling, if not inspiring.
verse at the edge of the sea at Dawn. The woman, thrilled by the sunrise, sails entranced toward the Dawn. She leaves her blind companion on the shore with "longing, outstretched arms." But Shears says his favorite story of the month is, in Bema, "Daughters of Croesus": A chorus girl, drugged and betrayed, is lured to a "house of ill-fame." 19) Lawson concludes with a mention of a Westminster Review essay, "Defense of Laziness": "Shears rather likes the idea — for he is inclined to be a lazy fellow himself."

In his "Sign of the Shears" of January 1914 Lawson finds in 30 college magazines one "major chord — a note of aspiration." He mentions reading five student dramas playing on this note of aspiration, and also an essay in The Colonnade which gave him his first knowledge of Frank Wedekind.20) He encourages undergraduates to write drama: "The dramatic form is particularly adaptable to the expression of serious thought." He also says that an essay in Smith College Monthly has brought him his first knowledge of Arturo Giovanitti, the "Walt Whitman of the Twentieth Century."21) He quotes from a Giovanitti "hymn in prose poetry to the glory of modern labor": "Whirred the great wheels of the piousant machines, rattled and clanked the chains of the great cranes, crashed the falling rocks...wonderful and fierce was the might symphony of the world, as the terrible voices of metal and fire and water sreed out into the listening ears of the gods the furious song of human toil." He calls this "stirring, human, thoroughly beautiful."22)

In his "Sign of the Shears" of February 1914 Lawson says: "Literature should be as broad as life itself — no phase of experience should be foreign to it. But whatever one writes, one should write it well and humanly," He then quotes from a Columbia Monthly short story, "Sub-Stratum": "I am down in the muck and ooze and

19) The heroine of The Pure in Heart (1934) is a chorus girl who is betrayed by a famous actress.
20) Wedekind's Spring Awakening and Roger Bloomer have some affinities. See Clara Belle Blackburn, Influences on American Expressionistic Drama, 1937.
21) Interestingly, the Ettor-Giovanitti-Caruso trial in 1912 had been an international cause celebre.
22) The International expresses something of this "symphony of the world."
swirl of soulless bodies and throbless hearts..." — and he calls this "melodramatic bosh."

In his "Shears" /sic/ of March 1914 Lawson says he is tired of Wanderlust poems. He likes in *The Occident* a play called "Beyond" : A malignant Hindu sorcerer called the Savior gains a baneful influence over a young married woman through his hypnotic power,23) but her knowledge breaks this influence and in sudden revulsion she kills him.24) He also likes but does not name a "psychological study" in *The Vassar Miscellany* : A country girl comes to New York and makes a success in theatrical life.25)

Here are the eight poems that John Howard Lawson published in *Williams Literary Monthly* between December 1910, when he was a little over 16 years old, and February 1912, when he was a little over 17 years old.26)

*The Elves*27)

The demons dance like sparkling flame;
They sit in crannies of the earth,
Like fairy thoughts without a name,
Without a death, without a birth,
Wondrous phantom fairies bright,
Laughing in aerial mirth -

Amongst the shadowed glooms of night,
Upon the corner of a star,
They sit and gaze in weird delight
At comets hurtling from afar,
At all the wondrous, mystic things,

23) *A Hindoo Love Drama*, also written in 1914, includes an evil Hindu sorcerer with hypnotic power.
24) In *Success Story* (1932) Sarah Glassman, in sudden revulsion, kills Sol Ginsburg, who has had a kind of hypnotic power over her.
25) In *The Pure in Heart* country girl Annabel Sparks comes to New York and almost makes a success in theatrical life.
26) In "A Calendar of Commitment" Lawson remembers most of these poems as "love poems." (These poems were probably influenced by Edwin Arnold, Alfred Noyes, Shelley, and occult poets whose works Lawson read in theosophical publications.)
That of the night’s dim silence are -
The demons fly on the wind’s wild wings,
Or wafted on breath of a dreaming rose,
Or where a fairy forest sings,
They hide amidst the evening glows -
On wavelets foaming in the breeze,
Where some deep stirring river flows,

They float and sing strange melodies
That mingle with the lapping tide,
Amidst the rippling harmonies -
Or on a ship of cloud they ride,
With castellated turrets high,
Tossing in tempestuous pride,

Across the spaces of the sky.
Oh, ye fantastic fairy storms,
Ye phantom visions weird that fly
Midst twilight glooms, in mystic swarms -
Oh, what are ye, ye visions born,
Like voices, in the roar of storms?

“We blow the trumpets of the dawn
Upon a glorious, golden horn,
In liquid, silver notes.
We are the dreams of things long gone,
We are the voices of the morn
That in the heaven floats.”

The Muses

Beyond the ken of human glance,

28) In an essay “Idealism” (Williams Literary Monthly. Vol. XXVII. No. 5. December 1911) Lawson says that the “ancients” personified idea or emotion in the form of “familiar demons,” invisible creatures directing life, webs of potent spells. As for the “elves of the ideal,” he says: “It is their eternal business to make dull mortals realize that ‘Joy is wisdom, Life an endless song!’ He says that idealism will very likely be alive until the end of time. “The vast machinery of life may creak as inharmoniously as it pleases; but the laughter of the elves of the ideal will rise above its harshness.” He ends the essay with a question: “Which one of us is not an idealist in his heart of hearts?”

Upon a bank of rosy clouds,
Wreathed within drifting shrouds
Of golden glowing mist,
The shining, laughing muses dance,
By shimmering rainbows kissed.

Beyond the reaches of the night,
Beyond the world's pale rim,
Bright as glistening seraphim,
In mystic measures, weird, they weave,
From glittering threads of golden light,
The dreams which poets' minds conceive.

Twisting threads of moonbeams, bright,
In celestial harmony
Of gorgeous, rhythmic melody,
In rhythms, wild and glad, they form
Glittering dreams of mad delight,
Dreams, dark with the omen of storm.

The Trumpet Call of Dawn

The fiery angels of the dawn
Are blowing their trumpets, loud and long,
And a thrilling joy is in their song. —
At the triumphant blast that rings
Through spaces of primeval things,
The morning rises to be born,
Drifting wide on azure wings.

In a mighty, mad array,
At the glowing trumpet call,
Nature's quivering spirits all
Rise in shimmering mists of light,
From the dimness of the night,

31) As a child John Howard Lawson sometimes sang the “Missionary Hymn” (second in the Christian Science Hymnal), which begins: “A glorious day is dawning / And o'er the waking earth / The heralds of the morning / Are springing into birth.” In the final scene of Thunder Morning (1953) which begins at dawn, trumpets call as the first rays of the rising sun strike a group of labor picketers who sing a song whose last verse says: “Freedom's day is surely dawning / Sing your joy on thunder morning.”
To the glory of the day,
Veiled in flooding sunrise, bright.

Billowed seas, in mystic trance,
Throb and palpitate, and cry
To the gleaming heavens, high,
Where ardent colors fuse and play,
Sparkle, flash, and melt away
Where clouds and rainbows seem to dance
And revel in the new born day.

Pastoral Love Song\textsuperscript{32)}

The perfume of the summertime
Lies heavy on the sunny land,
On emerald pastures, where there browse
Almond and auburn colored cows,
In blooming orchards, snowy white,
O'er shadeless hillocks gleaming bright,
Whereby bees buzz and hover,
Lazy, through the shimmering heat,
Droning in the scented clover.

The perfume of the summer time
Is sweet in hidden copse and grove,
In winding vales where streamlets run,
And froth and glitter in the sun,
Fringed by grasses that enfold
Twinkling daisies white and gold.

But, where'er we two shall rove,
In shining field or shadowed grove,
Beneath the cloud-bedabbled space,
All the glories of the world
Shall seem but setting for your face;
As one glorious, precious stone
Glows 'midst heaps of jewels alone,
Brilliant and supremely fair;
So, 'midst lustrous lands and skies
With traceries of light empearled,
I shall only see your eyes,

\textsuperscript{32)} Williams Literary Monthly. Vol. XXVII. No. 3. October 1911.
And the halo of your hair.\textsuperscript{33)}

\textbf{Invention}\textsuperscript{34)}

The brightness of our Eden has been blighted by our ill,
We have sunk from angel glories to the pettiness of ghouls —
But the thought of dim sublimities is trembling in us still;
And the thrill of holy passion pants and rises in our souls.

So we cast away the trammeling of ages that have gone,
And we cast aside the ignorance that fell with Eden's curse;
And we pry into the primal night where worlds and stars are born,
And we learn to chain the thunders of the vibrant universe.

And we ride, with wings like angels, on the billows of the air,
And we dream our daring visions on the bosoms of the skies;
we seek the depths of coral seas, and steal the treasures there,
And we tamper with the secret things of Hell and Paradise.

But all our visions burst and bloom, to do the dim desires
Of God, who makes the lightnings flash or thunderings be still —
Our quenchless hopes and yearnings burn like sacrificial fires
Upon the altar of his own inviolable will.

\textbf{Her Letter}\textsuperscript{35)}

It is a strange and foolish thing
That I, so wise and old,
Should kiss a blurred and blotted page
So tenderly — a doting sage,
Whose heart is dull and cold.

But love is stronger far than age,
Than devils, saints, or men —
Yea, defy it, if you please:
But as a sudden autumn breeze
Scatters leaflets from the trees,
It scatters all your homilies;

\textsuperscript{33)} I do not know to whom, if anyone, "Pastoral Love Song" and "Her Letter" (p. ), both of late 1911, are addressed. In "A Calendar of Commitment" Lawson describes a platonic love affair with a girl he met in the summer of 1913. At 80, he recalls her as a "pastoral dream" and calls her "impossibly lovely, impossibly intellectual."

\textsuperscript{34)} Williams Literary Monthly. Vol. XXVII. No. 4. November 1911.

\textsuperscript{35)} Williams Literary Monthly. Vol. XXVII. No. 5. December 1911.
And thralls your soul again.

A monotone sublime,
A rune of destinies undreamable and great,
Fulfilled in aeons and milleniums of time,
Completed in the course of unremembered years.
A song that vast, embattled ranks of nations sing,
Enrolled beneath emblazoned banners of their fate,
Whose rhythms thunderously radiate and ring
Among the wind-swept spheres.

A monotone sublime,
Whose mingled measures, thrillingly reverberate
And sound adown the dim cathedral aisles of time;
Recounting vast heroic deeds, whose finished span
(Diviner than the prophecies of poets or of seers)
Was written, registered by dim decrees of Fate —
Before the mighty space of mortal time began —
Among the wind-swept spheres.

I stand alone and fearless in the whirlwind of the years;
Some men are born to waste their lives in prayer, to bend in tears,
Like cowering figures graven in the marble of a tomb —
But I, I am unconquerable of chance, or death of doom!
Alone and unabashed, despising Fate that that threatens or defies,
A soul as stark as any star among the windy skies;

37) In his childhood drama “Savitri” Lawson has Savitri bleed with Yama the Destroyer, Death, to free her husband from a fate “decided millions of years ago.”
38) Williams Literary Monthly. Vol. XXVII. No. 7. February 1911. Lawson must have read W. E. Henley’s “Invictus” and he may have read Jeanette Gilder’s “My Creed”: “I do not fear to...stand before the living God.” (In Caroline Miles Hill, Ed. The World’s Great Religious Poetry. New York 1943.) Ella wheeler Wilcox has a similar poem: “There is no chance, no destiny, no fate / Can circumvent, or hinder or control / The firm resolve of a determined soul.” (Quoted in “The Mastery of Life,” Rosicrucian pamphlet, 1676.) The first line of Lawson’s poem is very similar to one spoken by the main character of Parlor Magic (1964): “I must ride the whirlwind alone.”
I walk alone among the seething crowds, unutterably alone,
Alone in death and life — to dim eternities unknown.

When stars are quenched like candles, and the final doom is born,
When worlds and suns are splintered, rent, like playthings that are worn —
And men and angels trembling low before the Judgment Throne;
Even before the living God, my soul shall stand alone.

Lawson may have stopped writing idealistic lyrics of this particular kind after February 1912. Anyway, he stopped publishing them. And he abandoned the world of ideality for his next contributions to *Williams Literary Monthly*. Besides, in his first essay in the *Monthly*, “Idealism” (December 1911), he had already emphasized another aspect of idealism: “We are still trying to transform facts into hopes, dead actualities into living longings. Indeed, that is the great business of life: to idealize realities, and to realize ideals.”

In his second essay in the *Monthly*, “The Zest for Argument” (January 1912), Lawson refers to Darwin, Schlegel and Gibbon as authorities for his opinion that “conflict is the law of life” : “It is the disposition of all things to disagree.” And John Howard Lawson’s “Current Topics” and “Current Events” in *Williams Literary Monthly* in 1912-1913 show that the teen-age journalist, who had joined a campus group supporting Theodore Roosevelt and the Bull Moose Party, was mainly interested in foreign affairs, particularly foreign conflicts.

In his “Current Topics” (November 1912) Lawson takes up two problems of the pre-World War I period. First, about the Balkans, he says the daily changes there are “kaleidoscopic” and information is often contradictory, and accurate judgment is al-

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39) In his travel journal of 1909 Lawson at 15 described the Mormon religion as an attempt to materialize things, to bring symbols down to facts, and to apply dreams to realities. In *Theory and Technique of Playwriting* (1936) Lawson at 42 or so says that idealism “manifests itself in courage, a willingness to face danger, to oppose accepted standards.”

40) In a note for his childhood play “Charlemagne” Lawson had written: “Complexity is the law of life.” In *A Hindoo Love Drama* one character says: “What a tangled web / Life is! A thing of clamorous confusion.” (“The Zest for Argument” is preceded by a verse from *The Mikado*: “Fair Moon, to thee I sing / Proud regent of the heavens, / Tell me, why is everything / Either at sixes or sevens?”)
most impossible.\textsuperscript{41}) But, after discussing the political balance of power then prevailing in Europe, he concludes there is "imminence of a general European conflagration."\textsuperscript{42}) He also considers Russia: "We are disposed to underestimate the importance of the Russian Empire...Russia is just beginning to realize her power and her possibilities...Russia is pursuing a vigorous policy of territorial and commercial expansion, with the ultimate aim of creating an immense Slavic empire which would dominate Europe and perhaps the whole world. The control of Balkan territory is necessary to such a scheme of imperial expansion."\textsuperscript{43}) Second, about the "Chinese Loan," he gives a detailed account of the operations of various groups of international bankers competing for a monopoly on all loans to the new Chinese government.\textsuperscript{44}) He sums up: "China seems destined to the financial control of the grasping continental powers." He doubts that the participation of American financial interests in the Six Power Monopoly can be reconciled with the United States government's "open door" policy.

In "Current Events" (December 1912) Lawson writes on "Panama Canal Tolls." President Taft had issued a proclamation fixing tolls for foreign ships entering the Panama Canal. There remained open the question whether American coastwise shipping was exempt from the payment of tolls. Lawson quotes the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, according to which American shipping was not exempt, and he supposes Great Britain will protest Taft's discrimination on behalf of American shipping and if necessary take the case to the Hague Court for arbitration.\textsuperscript{45})

\textsuperscript{41}) Fifty years later, Alan Valentine says of the political affairs of the Balkans in 1913: "It is difficult to reduce their confusions and constant realignments to clarity in a few paragraphs, and to do so one must fall back on unsatisfactory generalizations." \textit{1913: America Between Two Worlds.} New York 1962, p. 58.

\textsuperscript{42}) In \textit{Nirvana} and \textit{The International} Lawson suggests the imminence of a second general European conflagration.

\textsuperscript{43}) In \textit{The International} Lawson's image of Russia in 1928 is still very much like the one in this "Current Topics" of 1912.

\textsuperscript{44}) In \textit{Standards} and \textit{The International} Lawson develops the theme of grasping international bankers.

\textsuperscript{45}) Events have overshadowed the importance of this problem, perhaps, but the 1978 treaties between the United States and Panama entail tariff increases for ships passing through the Panama Canal, 95 per cent of whose traffic is non-American.
In "Current Events" (January 1913) Lawson discusses "Home Rule for Ireland." He says the British Home Rule Bill is "internationally significant" because: "It is the first step in the inauguration of a change in the system of controlling the British Empire." He explains the system now known as indirect rule and says: "It is becoming more and more obvious that the empire can no longer exist as a highly centralized and centrally governed collection of nations."

In "Current Events" (February 1913) Lawson writes about "Dollar Diplomacy." He says President Taft's administration has developed a foreign policy based upon "dollar diplomacy" and "has put the diplomatic transactions of the United States upon a frankly commercial basis, to subordinate idealistic or broadly patriotic motives to matters of material importance such as the securing of contracts for American firms, arranging for participation of American bankers in foreign loans, and for the exploitation of Central and South American resources by American financiers." Lawson hopes Woodrow Wilson, Democratic president-elect, who had run on a platform against imperialism and colonial exploitation, would somehow modify dollar diplomacy and make of it a "less grasping character."

In "Current Events" (March 1913) Lawson discusses "Disturbances in Mexico." He views the events of February 1913 in the recent revolution, events happening with "startling rapidity." He criticizes the American press which is "full of so many strange rumors and unbelievable stories...that it is almost impossible to form any calm, clear judgment of the actual causes and inner details of [the situation..."

46) In Standards Lawson develops a scene in which American bankers discuss the exploitation of South American resources, namely oil.

47) In March 1913 President Wilson withdrew the United States from the Six Power Monopoly which he said was being imposed on China, "obnoxious to the principles on which the government rests."

48) In Processional and Loud speaker Lawson criticizes the American press, e.g., the Hearst press, in much the same terms.
strongly opposes American intervention "in all its forms."^{49)\)

In "Current Events" (April 1913) Lawson concludes his college articles on current events with a discussion of "The Chinese Republic." He says the Chinese Republic is the "prey" of "grasping" European powers, and, amidst "conflicting reports from all quarters," he describes the situation in Mongolia and Thibet /sic/ as the result of a conflict between competing imperialists, British, American, Russian, and Japanese.\(^ {50) \) "The immense state of Mongolia," he says, "has been practically adopted by Russia." He says that the revolution and establishment of the Mongolian Republic was "engineered by a small coterie of leaders" without the consent or support of the "mass" of the people. He says that China and England are trying to control Thibet, and that Japan is trying to control Manchuria. He attributes much of this situation to the United States' relinquishment of the open door policy, which "prevented foreign nations from securing any special control over, or monopoly of, Chinese affairs." He adds the United States with its "cold reserve" is giving "tacit acquiescence" to the "predatory actions" of the European powers. Again he invests a hope in president-elect Wilson: "The fate of the young Republic depends largely upon the attitude of the United States."\(^ {51) \)

In *Williams Literary Monthly*, in 1913 and 1914, John Howard Lawson wrote essays about art, movies, theatre and vaudeville.

In "Art for Cube's Sake" (May 1913) he defends cubism, futurism and impressionism in painting. (He and his sister had earlier in 1913 seen the world-famous post-Impressionist Show at the 69th

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49) He quotes from a *Nation*-writer, Dr. Luis Pardo: "We must reject intervention in all its forms." (In the spring of 1914 in the Van Vechten extemporaneous speech contest Lawson returns to this subject.)

50) In *The International* Lawson develops the theme of imperialistic competition among these same countries.

51) It was not until a considerable time later that Lawson came around to opinions similar to that expressed by Brook Adams as early as 1900 in *America's Economic Superiority*: "The United States has been converted from the most pacific of nations into an armed and aggressive community." In *Parlor Magic* (1963) Lawson develops this theme of an aggressive America.
National Guard Regiment Armory.)\(^{52}\) Lawson says that the Cubist does not conform to accepted standards but has standards of his own. The Cubist does not attempt photographic representation but tries to interpret life and give it more spiritual significance from the fullness of his own personality. The Cubist's purpose is the expression of his own consciousness, Lawson says; and Lawson identifies himself with this new movement in art: "We base the wildest sublimities of our artistic imaginations upon the calculations of science. We go mad according to rules; we see visions and dream dreams by mathematical principles...Let us look forward to that distant day when all art shall have further elevated to the mystic realms of the Fourth Dimension.\(^{53}\)

In "The Movies" (October 1913) Lawson discusses some of the artistic possibilities of a motion picture: "sudden shift and contrast, variety of time and place, breadth of horizon, multitude of impressions." (He had seen *Quo Vadis?*) He says: "The time will come when the Nickolodeon will have its classics, no less prominent than their theatrical rivals in another sphere."\(^{54}\)

In "The Temperamental Journey" (November 1913) Lawson reviews a David Belasco stage production, *Jacques Dupont*, about an artist presumed to be dead. He calls it a charming atmospheric comedy, "intellectually satisfying." He likes the pantomime in the play as a vehicle for "quiet comedy" and for the expression of "poignant

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52) Adelaide Lawson later married Wood Gaylor, an artist who exhibited his work in this famous art show. *Art in America* (December 1963) contains excerpts from Wood Gaylor's diary of the 1920s and 1930s and prints of some of his paintings.

53) As a boy Lawson had read Charles H. Hinton's *What Is the Fourth Dimension?* (1883). In *Nirvana* Lawson develops the theme of the mystic realm of the Fourth Dimension, a concept publicized in the early 1920s by George Gurdjieff, whom Lawson met at Muriel Draper's, and by P. D. Ouspensky, some of whose works Lawson read, e. g., *Tertium Organum* (1922).

54) The first book to discuss the movies as an art form was Hugo Münsterberg's *The Photoplay*. New York 1916. Fifty years later Lawson writes: "I remember the shock and wonder that came to me as *Intolerance* thundered across the screen in 1916. I recall the certainty with which I realized, as the images clashed and flowered before my eyes, that I was witnessing the birth of a new art."
passion." He is most interested in the play's "scenic equipment." He sets forth certain principles of dramatic art: "The essence of true art is suggestion... A realistic setting is distracting... Let the scenery be soft and subdued, twilit and unobtrusive. Let the background suggest an emotional state corresponding to that of the play—nothing more. The scenery for intense love should be a curtain of dark, passionate red, for despair slate-colored grey draperies."

In "The Oriental Drama" (February 1914) Lawson reviews two plays, *Omar the Tentmaker* and *A Thousand Years Ago*. He says that an atmosphere of romance pervaded these plays, and he denies that romance is "childish simplicity" or "senile sentimentality." He

55) Lawson uses pantomime in *Nirvana*.
56) In *Omar the Tentmaker* a prince disguises himself to woo a princess. In *Servant-Master-Lover* (1916) Lawson has a young novelist disguise himself to woo Cinders, a Cinderella-type character. Percy Mackaye's verse drama *A Thousand Years Ago* is subtitled "A Romance of the Orient." Its settings include a City Gate at Pekin, a room in an Imperial Harem, and the Great Hall of an Emperor; the latter two settings are similar to some suggested by Lawson in his verse drama *A Hindoo Love Drama*, set in India, and in *The International*, set in Thibet. Some of the lines in *A Thousand Years Ago*, e.g., "What is so heavy as an empty heart / Hollow with yearning," are similar to some in *A Hindoo Love Drama*, e.g., those spoken by the rajah (whose heart burns with a "sick desire") who wants his Minstrel's help for the / "weariness and pain / That eats my spirit." Another line, "Who said Romance is buried?," is echoed in Lawson's review's denial that romance is dead; and another line, "All true love romances / Are hatched in harems," is similar to lines spoken by Cinders in *Servant-Master-Lover*, who, kidnapped, wakes up in a kind of harem. (In *The International* one scene takes place in a harem-like bordello.) *A Thousand Years Ago* uses Commedia dell' Arte techniques similar to those used by Lawson in *Processional* and *Lord Speaker*. In *A Thousand Years Ago* music is heard off-stage—a technique used by Lawson in his childhood verse play "Savitri" and later in *A Hindoo Love Drama*, *Servant-Master-Lover*, *Standards* and *Roger Bloomer*. In *A Thousand Years Ago* that music is "barbaric martial music"—in Lawson's *Processional* the jazz wedding music is also barbaric. *A Thousand Years Ago* includes a dream sequence wholly in pantomime representing a state of distracted mind—teasing words, mocking laughter; a similar dream sequence appears in *Roger Bloomer*. 
concludes: “Chesterton once said that all true literature must combine the East and the West, because only the East possesses the proper scenic background for literature, while only the humanity of the Occident is susceptible of great literary treatment.” Lawson says he agrees with this idea “generally.”

In “Local Vaudeville” (April 1914) Lawson asks about vaudeville, which he often saw in North Adams.57) “What is it? Why is it? What are its effects?” He says it is strange that in a time when “originality is a byword in all walks of life...such a prominent phase of our national entertainment should be characterized by its remarkable lack of newness.”58)

The one short story that John Howard Lawson published in Williams Literary Monthly was “The Wrong Cue” (June 1913).

Actor Jefferson Edwards, a tired star of the stage, has been performing in a Russian melodrama called “The Convict.” Edwards’ face “betokened” his profession: “it was one of those strangely mobile and expressive countenances, ‘capable of innumerable changing moods, full of alternating light and shadow.” Despite the “Puritanical affectation” of his clothing (he is “like a clergyman” dressed in black), Edwards has the manner of the “suave and affable man of affairs.” Edwards has given to the role of the convict his “whole energy and force” in an attempt to “saturate himself with the individuality” of the character. Now Edwards is suffering “nervous strain.” He is “on the verge of a nervous breakdown.” In a kind of trance, “he did not stop acting,”59) “he was the convict.” Edwards suddenly hurries out of theater and “rushes off into the twilight.” He turned his “frenzied steps” toward a Catholic church in the 37th Street theatre district. The

57) Where he sometimes “haunted the streets” trying to pick up factory girls, one of whom invited him to meet her French-Canadian working class family—Lawson’s first visit to a working-class household.

58) In his preface to Processional (New York, 1925) Lawson says: “I have endeavored to create a method which shall express the American scene in native idiom...this new technique is essentially vaudevillesque in character—a development, a moulding...of the rich vitality of the two-a-day and the musical extravaganza.”

59) In Nirvana novelist Bill Weed, who is suffering from nervous strain, says that he is “always acting.”
church is dark except where a "circle of light was cast by the candles that flickered above the altar," where there is a statue of the virgin Mary. "The faint smell of incense pervaded the musty edifice." "The place seemed foreign, mysterious, uncanny-like the hidden interior of some sealed and forgotten catacomb." A priest listens to Edwards' story, the convict's story of escaping from prison and killing his wife. "The little priest is sorely troubled." He is frightened and puzzled: is this man here in Manhattan talking of plains and forests and Cossacks a "madman"? The priest says: "Cast yourself before the altar of the virgin. Offer her the sacrifice of your distressed spirit. She will raise you." Edwards says: "Death...death" and falls upon the altar steps in front of the Virgin Mary. "His drawn features relaxed. The tense look went out of his eyes and he put his hand to head with a gesture of puzzlement and dizziness. 'The cue, the cue,' he mumbled, 'You forgot the cue!''

Although John Howard Lawson did not participate in the activities of the "Cap and Bells" drama club at Williams, he did write his most ambitious work to that time, a verse play finished one month before his graduation — *A Hindoo Love Drama*, "Narrating the Mythical Adventures of Nala and Damayanti, based in part upon Ancient Hindoo poems," namely the *Mahabharata* as translated by Edwin Arnold in "Nala and Damayanti."61)

*A Hindoo Love Drama*, an episodic drama, has a prologue, five acts (eight scenes), and an epilogue. The six settings include a palace garden, a king's alcove, a grand ballroom, a harem, a forest glade, and the campside of a nomad tribe in Central India. These settings are suggestive rather than realistic.

In the prologue, a middle-aged rajah, whose heart burns with a "sick desire," wants his Minstrel's help for the "weariness and pain

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60) Lawson has written (letter, January 2, 1964) that the point of this story is "simply that Edwards is always acting, and is revived from his 'madness' when he realizes that no one is giving him a cue."

61) Arnold's translation is in *Hindu Literature*, edited by Epiphanius Wilson 1900. This may be the book that Lawson bought in 1908 when he needed more information for his version of "Savitri." Whichever book, Lawson still had it in 1964.
That eats my spirit." In the king's alcove, a "dim recess" in which resides a "grotesque idol," a place of "dim arches" and "swinging lamps" and "vague lights," the Minstrel sings a song of cheer — which is the love drama that follows, a song of "love that struggled in the net of Fate," a hundred years before.

Before the Minstrel sings, there is heard music of "drums and cymbals in the distance," and six dancing girls do a "strange and mysterious measure, growing wilder and wilder." In a luxuriant palace garden, Nala and Damayanti, a handsome young king and a beautiful young queen, are enjoying perfect happiness in an oriental Eden. Their love can know "no changing or decay." But Pushkara, the king's shifty-eyed brother, covets his brother's wife. Pushkara consults an evil magician "of the hunchback and the eagle eyes, of the bearded face and spider hands." The magician, having "great potency in things of Sin," arranges for Pushkara to deceive his brother. The magician bewitches the king, who, in a trance, gambles away, with "demon driven dice," his crown and his queen. When he awakens from his trance, the king asks for a chance to recoup his losses. To do so, he must solve a certain riddle within 40 days.

"There is a silence. A ball of light glows from the darkness of the alcove. A mysterious voice speaks the riddle." The king sets out on a quest to find the answer to this riddle. "Quest," he says, "this word of darkness and of mystery."

Meanwhile, the queen follows the advice of a lady-in-waiting and

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62) Lawson uses the image of the net of Fate again in *Roger Bloomer* and uses variations on this image in other dramas.

63) In *The International* Lawson has dancing girls do strange and mysterious measures, growing wilder and wilder.

64) In *Parlor Magic* novelist Jed Merton covets his scientist brother Owen's sweetheart.

65) In *The International* a British general says he has spent 40 years in the desert. In *Success Story* the action takes place in an office on the 40th floor of a skyscraper.

66) The structure of *Roger Bloomer* takes the form of a quest. In *Thunder Morning* Eben Carter, a black sharecropper, tells the spirit of his dead wife that "all around...there's a stirring and a questing, and a seeking and a searching..."
“guilelessly” inflames the passion of the king’s brother, who, expecting to conquer the queen,\(^6\) tells her the answer to the riddle. The queen eludes him and escapes from the palace.

The queen gets lost in a forest of “strangely twisted and distorted” trees. She is found by a savage tribe of this “realm of mystery.” The tribesmen consider her a goddess—until, in “flickering jungle light,” they are attacked by invaders who wound the queen’s arm: “Immortals cannot bleed.” They prepare her as a human sacrifice to their Tiger-God.

The king comes into this camp of the savage tribe and to a barbarian priest he tells the riddle: “What is that light that darkness cannot quell, / More pure than moons and fiercer than the sun / In its first golden radiance of rising- / What is that light so all-surpassing, Tell?\(^6\) The queen hears the king’s voice and rushes to him with the answer to the riddle: “Love, flaming bright, unconquered, death-despising.”

The king saves the queen from the savages and on the 40th day of his quest returns to the palace and demands his rightful throne and crown. To get them, he kills his brother in a duel.\(^6\)

In the epilogue, the Minstrel sings that the king and queen lived happily ever after with “flame of white fire in their secret hearts, / More pure than moons and fiercer than the sun- / Unconquered, death-despising.”\(^7\)

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67) Pushkara “seemed to lose himself”: his eyes “bulged, dull, wicked,” he “grasped her with a sudden cry, mumbed incoherently, a jumbled madness,” In Roger Bloomer businessman Rumsey grasps Louise Chamberlain, mumbles incoherently and collapses, and she eludes him.

68) This riddle and the answer to it echo Shelley’s *Magico Prodigioso*, Scene III: A Voice: “What is the glory far above / All else in human life?” All: “Love! love!”

69) In Edwin Arnold’s translation of “Nala and Damayanti” the bad brother is merely exiled.

70) See Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, Act II, Scene 3, Line 39: “heaven-defying minds.” In *The Pure in Heart*, in a scene in which two young lovers die together, Lawson uses the same expression to describe their love, “death-despising.” In regard to this he has written: “Two young people dying on a New York roof-top because they are rebels without a cause is not the same as the happy outcome of the love story of Nala and Damayanti.” Letter, January 2, 1964.
This verse drama of 1914, the first play John Howard Lawson had written in six years, was shown by dramatists agent Mary Kirkpatrick to actors Cornelius Otis Skinner and E. H. Sothern and Julia Marlowe, all of whom Lawson had seen perform. Although it was never produced, A Hindoo Love Drama was John Howard Lawson's introduction to the commercial theatre, under the aegis of Mary Kirkpatrick, upon whom for several years he depended, accepting her "determination to mold /his/ career as a simple matter of kindness and friendship." 

(Received June 14, 1979)

71) In 1915, Lawson wrote an unfinished drama called "Atmospheres," a modern drama set in New York, into which he incorporated settings similar to some of those in A Hindoo Love Drama -- alcoves, dim recesses, dim arches, vague lights.

72) In "A Calendar of Commitment" Lawson describes Mary Kirkpatrick, his earliest "mentor" in the commercial theatre, as a "wistful, emotionally starved, desperate woman, a combination of Puritanical reserve and business acumen." Mary Kirkpatrick's "tragic flaw," Lawson says, was her "faith in Broadway, which she saw through the eyes of a stage-struck girl."