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JOHN HOWARD LAWSON’S THE MAD MOON
(1917)—A SECOND VERSION

LEROY ROBINSON

In “John Howard Lawson’s The Mad Moon (1917)”¹ I described for the first time that play, begun sometime in 1916 and copyrighted July 11, 1917, but neither produced nor published. Lawson probably wrote several versions of The Mad Moon,² which eventually became A New England Fantasy (unproduced and unpublished),³ which itself finally became Nirvana (produced in 1926 but never published).⁴

In the present article I describe a second version of The Mad Moon—that is, Acts II and III of a second version whose Act I is almost identical to Act I of the first version. This second version seems to have been written somewhat later than the first. This present description also provides historians of American drama an example of Lawson’s early writing which has both historical and biographical importance.

First, a brief thematic summary of the version of The Mad Moon previously described:

In Act I the puritanical New England Sheffield family wants to confine their “insane” relative Tommy Weed, a poet who wants to be free from convention, decency, dullness and duty. Tommy, who compares himself to Pan, “fluting joy to the stars,” wants to save Priscilla Emerson, once his childhood sweetheart, from becoming a “mummy” by turning her away from fear and

¹) Keiei to keizai (March 1980).
²) None of which can I accurately date, at this time.
³) See “John Howard Lawson’s A New England Fantasy (1924), Keiei to keizai (March 1979).
prudence and turning her toward careless and chance and kisses. "Let this be our moment of madness."

In Act II each of the Sheffields is taken by a moment of madness which transforms each, libidinously. But Tommy, seeing his family becoming "babbling fools," now doubts whether Priscilla and he should run away, and Priscilla now says her madness is dead, and leaves Tommy.

In Act III Priscilla promises to marry Tommy's cousin Alonzo and to live for duty. Tommy tries to get Priscilla back. Priscilla tries to decide whether to choose Alonzo and a sensible life or Tommy and a million mad tomorrow. At the final curtain, Priscilla has not quite made up her mind.

* * *

Act I of the second version of *The Mad Moon* is almost the same as Act I of the version previously described.

* * *

Act II of the second version of *The Mad Moon* (entitled "If I Were Pan") takes place in the fireplace in the living room of the Sheffield house.

In the midst of greyness without form or shape but full of shadowy possibilities, one spot is clearly visible: the chair in which Priscilla sits, facing at an angle, illumined by reddish flickers. As Priscilla speaks "I see a red spot and a white glow and grey ashes" --a red glow into which Priscilla gazes becomes visible, brightening into a flame, and a white mist slowly takes form and grows into a round space of moonlight.

Out of the greyness comes Tommy's whimsical voice: "Dryad, won't you come?" To mysteries and shadows, to forests where trees dance minuets, weaving spells among fantastic fireflies. "Here where Pan still laughs against the echoing moon." Triumphantly: "I am Pan." 5)

The red fire is now seen as coming from a stove, one small door open to its glowing interior. 6) The silver circle of moonlight discloses a portion of a

5) When he was a child John Howard Lawson saw Maude Adams in *Peter Pan*.
6) In *Marching Song* (1937) unemployed workers and vagrants live inside a no-longer used boiler or furnace.
fantastic woodland—queer plants and ghosts of twisted grotesque trees.

The background to this setting is a startling contrast.

A stone gate of Japanese design. Through the stone work, framing thin perpendicular spidery iron bars, the dim vista of a Japanese garden: twisted forms of flowered bushes, curved bridges, the sheen of a small lake. Diminishing into the distance, the garden lies misty and vague like a dream under the moon.

Tommy enters the moonlit space. His trousers taper off into shaggy hair about the ankles, and his feet are hooves. He carries an antique reed pipe.

He is Pan the vagabond seeking the shadow of Beauty over the rim of night, Beauty swifter than the ghosts of dead birds. He has never caught Beauty, but he has found fun and fury. He is drunk with the waxing of the moon. Pan, the wanderer at garden gates, laughs; Pan in the forest stumbling upon stoves and miraculous gardens. Follow him. He will show Priscilla odd things. Madness and dreams—and him.

Priscilla, not sure he is Pan, asks if his pipe does magic. To bewitch Priscilla until her head spins like a top, Tommy adjusts the reed pipe to his mouth, selfconsciously, and blows peculiarly pathetic little toots. Priscilla’s laughter encourages him.

"Ah, you jeer. You think you are safe because my pipe does not remind you of Wagner. But my pipe is as mad as my heart." He pipes quaintly and sings: "From the valley of the Moon/I’m a beggar at your door/From the land where night is noon/Do you wish to hear some more?" In the valley of the moon the lions have web feet, "And the cows sing hymns in tune."

Priscilla hates this song.

Priscilla is not enchanted. But Tommy toots triumphant blasts and into the lighted circle stumbles his aunt Mrs Sheffield.

7) In A New England Fantasy Tommy at one point calls himself Pan but carries instead of a reed pipe a saxophone.
She is quite dazed. She smiles fatuously. She likes being enchanted. She's wanted to let herself go. She accepts a cigarette quite easily. She tells her dream: Youth. She was born mature and she's been too strong-minded to ever let herself get below forty. 8)

Mrs Sheffield asks a non-sensible question: "Why is this a Japanese garden?" Tommy says the garden is useless, just arbitrary, and has nothing to do with the story. He thought of the garden, wished, and it was there. 9)

Mrs Sheffield tries to laugh but only giggles. She's too rusty to laugh. Mrs Sheffield thinks Priscilla's laugh is thin, Priscilla's laugh is getting ill, which is tragic. Mrs Sheffield says, and then bursts into a peel of gaiety, and experiments with various types of laughter, in various keys.

Tommy explains: "There they laugh at all tragedy and cry at comedy."

Tommy tells Priscilla:

"I shall show you Madness. Pan has come to you from blue distances. Historically, from ancient Greece by way of Ireland. In a general way I have fallen to you from the moon. I have risen from my emerald sea-palace. Pan. Who is Joy. Pan has come to show you the wisdom of your folly and the folly of your wisdom." (As she does several times in this scene, Mrs Sheffield interrupts: "There you go getting metaphysical again"). Pan is strong. He'll call her friends to dance before him. He'll show her the mad wish. He'll show her the fireplace desire that each one holds in his secret heart. He'll show her "piously like a Sunday school teacher."

Tommy blows a brief note on his flute and Alonzo enters the circle of moonlight.

8) The number 40 may have numerological significance because Lawson uses it in almost every one of his plays.

9) This idea is an early example in the American theatre of "theatre of the absurd" theatricalism. Here, it seems Lawson's selfreflexive joke about his way of writing this play. In A New England Fantasy a similar situation relates to Tommy Weed's conception of himself as a magician—a conception Lawson himself might have shared. Lawson's last play was Parlor Magic (1963–64).
In Tommy’s power. Alonzo takes a huge piece of paper and a pad and brass inkstand and ink and a huge scarlet plumed pen. At the command: “Fulfill your wish”, Alonzo breathlessly says: “At last.” Dawn, warm...beauty, duty...no, rooty, sooty, tooty...no, no...ah, cutey.

Mrs Sheffield reveals a secret: she always feels romantic when she coqks. So Tommy has her cook shrimps and eels and rubber heels—anything that rhymes.

Out of the shadows comes a harsh voice and Tommy’s uncle Sheffield, Sr. enters the circle of light.

He is transformed from a gentleman into a pirate. He swaggers. His voice is violent. He wants to drink and swear. His temper is a blast furnace. He wants to command passionately. He wants to whip little children. He wants to be a gorilla.

Alonzo spoils his poem by rhyming Priscilla with gorilla.

Out of the greyness appears a regular bar, a dim light playing on its rows of bottles and its brass railing.

Tommy says Senior has a colonel’s soul: “Colonel, what’ll you have?” They both have whiskey, Tommy toasting his uncle: “May you be drunken always, drunk with love or mirth or moonlight—and if these fail—with this!” Senior drinks all in one gulp. He says: “I’m not a vicious man. I’m a decent fellow, but I’m strong, inclined to violence. I have a pirate nature. I feel at home wearing a large purple cloak.”

10) The first time John Howard Lawson wrote with a feathered pen was on November 30, 1905, when at eleven years old he wrote a letter to Florence Young, his former teacher at the Halsted School in Yonkers, New York: “I am blotting a little because I am writing with a feather pen and I never wrote with one before.”

11) Tommy directs Alonzo to a “silver desk down that aisle of trees that was made for poets.”

12) In the 1920 draft of Roger Bloomer Roger sees and likes a large purple opera cloak. Lawson must have seen cloaks of this kind when he attended operas in New York as a young boy.
Tommy says purple cloaks grow on trees in fairyland, and from a tree he pulls a purple shadow, which in the moonlight becomes a purple cloak. At this, Senior says if he’d met Tommy (Pan) earlier he might’ve really lived, but for fifty years he’s been a fossil; inside, he’s always known it.

The bartender now turns out to be Tommy’s other cousin Reginald.

“What’s yours?” Senior wonders how his son fell to this. “Fall?” asks Reginald. “This is an ideal.” There is no higher purpose than tending bar. It’s a sacred trust. Reginald’s two ideas are to be a bartender or to enter a monastery.

Reginald leaves the bar, which then disappears, angering Senior, who has a drink on top of it. Reginald tells what he desires most in the world.

It started when he was a little boy. Some little boys like to do everything they shouldn’t. He liked anything forbidden. When he was fourteen, he drank a lot of wood alcohol that made him sick. The doctor said he’d be weak all his life—and that he couldn’t ever eat cabbage again. It’s a long empty life without cabbage, and Reginald cries for the two things he shouldn’t have—alcohol and cabbage. He likes the idea of a monastery because there are so many more things you shouldn’t do in a monastery than anywhere else.

Tommy toots on his flute four times. To him, Reginald’s soul is as clear as water: Reginald’s secret desire is for temptation. Tommy finds a good temptation for him: the Sheffields’ maid Olga, dressed neatly in a maid’s uniform, comes forward with a wild movement and raises her hands above her head in a wild gesture.

She talks about woods and trees and wild things. Nobody ever lets her outdoors. Shut her up in houses to wash dishes. She can sing lullabies to the moon. What she wants most is a velvet skin like a tiger’s.

Tommy thinks Olga should be dressed like a temptation, however, so he puts her into diaphonous silk, which makes Reginald wish she’d be so kind as to tempt him. But Tommy directs Olga to a cushioned perfumed boudoir at the end of the aisle of trees, and Reginald goes to eat cabbage being cooked by his mother. 13)

13) The intent of the emphasis on cabbage here seems to be humor, a middle-class audience probably being expected to laugh at a supposedly working class food.
JOHN HOWARD LAWSON'S *THE MAD MOON* (1917)—
A SECOND VERSION

From behind the bars of the gate to the Japanese garden comes the soft voice of a friend of the Sheffields, Isabel Pernee, who too has a wish. Tommy tells this "Spanish lady of the Holy books" (Isabel reads books about missionaries and has expressed a weak wish to be a missionary herself) to whisper her wish.

Isabel wants to get out. She is a bird in a cage. (But to be a lady in a conventional village is worse.) Tommy sings: "Creature with wings/With bars about/I conjure you with conjurings/Come out, come out." As the garden gate opens slowly, Isabella goes to Tommy, romantically. "My hero, I whom none have understood and who crave understanding, you have understood." Tommy says everybody's stifled—some with pillows, some with churches.  

Isabella has not always been stifled. She has danced mad dances, has drunk mad wine. She has felt the heat of kisses in the dawn. Long ago in Spain men called her devil woman, Dama Diablo. She has sins to remember. The Devil in her died, but the Woman in her remained. She became ill, like a lily when it droops. She was dying slowly. When a woman is sick, she thinks of virtue. She came to New England where everyone is good. She grew well. When a woman is well, she thinks of love.

Isabella approaches Tommy tenderly, but he withdraws. Priscilla advances: "How dare she!" Isabella dares more.

"You freed me," Isabella says to Tommy, "because your love for me was strong enough to break all bars." Tommy, always afraid of tempestuous women, cautions: "Even in Fairyland you expect people to observe a certain customary modesty." Isabella asks how she can be modest when her heart is flaming in her throat and every word she speaks is burning.

Isabella shall weep if Tommy is not kind to her. Priscilla advises Tommy against being kind to Isabella, for his own sake. Tommy says his interest in Isabella is simply to reveal her character. He suggests he enchant Isabella into stone, and she momentarily becomes immobile, like a statue, but soon returns to her violent manner with redoubled intensity.

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14) In *The Spice of Life* (copyrighted 1919 but begun in 1916 under the title *The Butterfly Lady*) Mary Jefferson also says she is being stifled.
15) In the first version of *The Mad Moon* this phrase reads "like a skeleton."
Tommy toots his pipe and the garden gate closes in front of him. He is more at ease: “Saved. I knew I’d find some use for this Japanese garden.”

He is Pan the King of lovers. Theoretically. But practically only serious-minded people are always in love. Venus was serious-minded. So was Cleopatra. “Between ourselves Venus used to bore me—worse than a moony school girl—when I was in Greece.”

Now Tommy is in Japan. He plays “typical Oriental music” on his curiously versatile flute. “I go to repose myself in a dream pagoda,” he says, and bows and folds his arms in “quite an Oriental fashion,” and as an invisible Chinese drum beats he turns and disappears.

Isabella is angry until Senior swaggers in, in his purple cloak, then as she taps her foot her anger changes to coquettishness. She adores Senior’s strength. Senior responds.

“Among my secret passions, you have held a place of prominence. If Isabella wishes to faint she may do so with perfect confidence in him. She says she is fainting and sinks down. As Senior supports her, she asks him to feel her heart. Is she pale? He says she’s unusually red. He wishes to pat her hair. To be free with her. To carry her in his arms. To take her over coral seas. They’ll stop for meals at sunny Southern island paradises.

A wild laugh gives Isabella and Senior a start.

Mrs Sheffield now joins them in the circle of moonlight. She is shaking with wild laughter. (Like a hyena, according to Isabella.) Mrs Sheffield has just learned her husband is as big a fool as she always thought he was.

Isabella agrees Senior was rather silly. Priscilla thinks married people have no right to be in dreams together.

Reginald now enters this circle. The bowl in his hand is filled with cabbages that he eats with a large ladle. Senior would like to make a banquet now and “swill wine.”

A soft light now suffuses the dark center stage. Under the light, a table with a white cloth cover and shining cutlery, bowls, and bottles of peculiar shapes

16) Venus was not Grecian but Roman.
and colors. The table is surrounded by six throne-like chairs.

Alonzo enters, reading a huge sheet of paper: he's just finished writing a stirring poem. (This poem is not read.)

Olga enters, clad in a gorgeous diaphonous costume with many jewels. She softly announces her arrival to Reginald, who, seeing her reflection in a large silver ladle, is enchanted—by the best temptation he ever had. He is tempted to elope. For Mrs Sheffield, an eloping husband is a joke, but an eloping son touches a mother's heart.

Tommy watches everyone eating and says:

"Your imaginations are in your stomachs." They dream of food. He is sick of them all. He's dreamed them inside out and he finds them hollow. He wearies of them. He wishes to be alone and laugh in his heart. He wishes them all to fade away.

At their protest. Tommy says: "I am he who is gayer and wiser. I am stronger. You refuse to get out of a dream which is my own? which I invented? executed?" Their refusals become weaker and more helpless, as Tommy triumphs over them, the obstinate but weak, the stupid and weak.18

Tommy then calls Priscilla, whom he has gone through a lot of trouble to amuse.

The others are nothing. They are the dust of dreams. A great deal of dust and very little of dreams. Without Priscilla it is empty. Her hair is the crown of dreams. He desires to caress it. Her heart is the essence of dreams. He desires to hold it.19

Priscilla / he says / has lived all her life in an armchair with a high back and very stiff arms. But he, Pan, is strong. He calls her across the threshold of the fireplace. He calls her to his garden of fire and flowers, the edges of it flung wide, the paths of it greater than the Milky Way.

17) Pirandello, later, expanded a similar kind of theatrical idea.
18) Tommy's whole speech and others that follow suggest Lawson found some of Nietzsche's similar ideas congenial to him.
19) The (unfortunate?) next to last line of Gentlewoman (1934) is spoken by labor journalist Rudy Flannigan as he says goodbye to gentlewoman Gwyn Ballantine: "I'll go away carrying your brain and your heart."
When Priscilla says this does not sound safe, Tommy says there is only one safe thing in the universe: "Death is safe." He offers her life. Come with him and laugh. She has seen only a tenth part of a hundredth part of a thousandth part of the oddities, the queer things, he could show her in his garden. His garden is the world.

Come with him and laugh. "Fear and care and prudence are dead, but you and I are alive." They'll go together wherever the wind leads them, without a future, without a reason, without a cent. The only real gold is the gold of her hair, the only silver the silver of the moon. "I give you carelessness and chance and kisses."

This offer does not thrill Priscilla:

"Pan, you cannot deceive me. You cannot tempt me. Because I know you." She understands him. She sees through him. He's turned other people inside out very cleverly. But he thought he was keeping himself a "divine enigma." But she knows his strength and his weakness—through woman's intuition.

Tommy is blighted. Lost. Everything's spoiled. His dream is in ruins. As the shadows get darker and the Japanese garden fades to ashes, Tommy resigns himself to Fate.

His dream is going to pieces because Priscilla understands him. "Nobody ever saw through me before." It will kill him. Pan is finished. Priscilla is all he lived for. He will die—in the next five minutes. Common sense was killing him. If Priscilla understands him, she probably thinks he's a very pitiful thing.

Priscilla says: "Don't make me cry."

Everything he told her was true/Tommy continues/. He is Pan the Unconquerable. Now Priscilla can see the reverse side. "In a world so full of jokes, it would be strange if some of them were not on me," Tommy says. After all is said and done, he is a wanderer. He is Pan, ashiver in the blighted moonlight.

He is pitiful/he says for he goes from door to door, and they chase him with brooms. They wish to grind Pan in a machine and turn him into sausage. They wish to put his music in vaudeville. They desire to educate him for the ministry.
He is friendless and alone /he says/. Silly women, puritan women—they understand him. That's why he needs Priscilla. "I cannot tempt you with my strength, I tempt you with my weakness." He is dying; without her, he is lost. He is homeless in the thunderstorm.

The stage is now quite dark. There is a sighing of wind. There is thunder. The red light fades to a violet shadow on Tommy, who is sunk to the ground. There is a white light on Priscilla, who looks into the darkness for Tommy in vain. She takes a lighted candle and walks resolutely into the darkness.

The candlelight reveals Tommy lying at the foot of the stove. "There are menacing shadows all around." Priscilla leans over him and speaks tremulously: "I've come to you, Pan. Don't be sick." Tommy raises one limp toot. Priscilla speaks "in a motherly way." She has come back into Tommy's dream. She wants to stay in it. She is happy.

Tommy says it's unfortunate he put a storm in the dream—it's going to make things very wet. Priscilla doesn't care. Storms don't matter. They are together, no matter how black it is. She'll follow this dream wherever it leads. She wants to be with him always. She'll make tea for him, darn his socks for him, and crinkle her nose for him.

There is a portent of storm. A gust of wind blows out the candle. The stage is drowned in the roar of wind and rain. Blackness. The curtain descends on Act II of this version of The Mad Moon.

The action of Act III of this second version of The Mad Moon takes place again in the living room of the Sheffield house. The stage is dark. There is the racket of wind and rain. Rain swishes violently against the window panes, and water splatters down the chimney on the blackening fire.

Mrs Sheffield comes downstairs with a lamp whose light reveals Tommy and Priscilla near the fireplace, he on his knees, she leaning over him. Both are oblivious to their surroundings.

In her horror, Mrs Sheffield "almost dissolves" and covers her eyes. Sacriligious! (Priscilla releases Tommy but smiles without contrition.) Mrs Sheffield says Priscilla has the air of a madwoman. Tommy, with a flourish, says that's substantially the case; Priscilla affirms she is mad, gives a brief wild laugh, and says she likes it. Mrs Sheffield looks ill and
staggers.

As Tommy supports her, Mrs Sheffield says “Don’t touch me, Magician!” and looks wildly from Tommy to Priscilla (who seriously confirm their love) and slumps into a chair, covers her eyes, and starts to mumble a prayer: “In God’s name…”

Tommy and Priscilla are uncomfortable, not having expected opposition “so forceful.” The stage directions say: “If Mrs Sheffield should continue praying, she would be complete mistress of the situation and the play would be over.” But she is not wise enough to do this. She rises, nervous but not undignified. She shall telephone for help.

Tommy fears Priscilla will vanish.

She’s a Goddess. Goddesses have a nasty trick of disappearing. She’s likely to dissolve into a rose-colored flame and rise through the air. When a Goddess kisses a mortal, it either kills him like a thunderbolt or it makes him live forever. She has given him immortality.

But /Tommy adds/ they may still be dreaming. He then sadly says: “I am not Pan.” Pan is gone with his pipe. He Tommy is human, very human, at her feet. The dream melted too quickly, like a piece of sea-foam turning into a monster.

When Tommy wonders if Priscilla is sure she’s thoroughly mad, she says she’s ready to go with him that night to the rim of the sky or to the caves of the mad moon.

Priscilla wonders if Tommy has stopped wanting her. He says he wants her so much he has done something he never did before—think about the future, which he now sees in the light of a terrifying sanity.

Priscilla sees the future beckoning them slyly to chase rainbows, but Tommy notes wherever there’s a rainbow there’s a storm.

Tommy reminds Priscilla she’s always been protected, she’s leaving lots of valuable things—friends, duties. He’ll work for her like a slave, but he’s never proved what he can do. He’s something of a tramp, very much of a fool.

20) When Lawson was seven years old, his mother after a long illness in bed died and was cremated.
Priscilla is ready to follow Tommy in rags on all the roads of the world. She will be his mirror and his shadow. Tommy asks her to marry him that night. Then they’ll find a farmhouse. They’ll say they’re tired lovers who come from the moon, who don’t know their way around the world, and they’ll beg a lodging for the night.

Priscilla wonders why people can’t marry just by saying “The Lord Is My Shepherd” or “Kismet” or “Amen.” Tommy points out they must stand up before a regular, fat, near-sighted minister and listen to all sorts of things. The only way to marry. Priscilla says: “Why bother?” and Tommy, overwhelmed, says they must marry without delay: when a woman is sane she’s very sane, but when she’s mad she’s a tempest.

Priscilla reproaches Tommy: he has gone sane. Tommy says he must think because now he has responsibilities.

Alonzo and Senior enter dripping wet and miserable. When Alonzo backs off the carpet he is dripping on with care, Priscilla laughs, and Alonzo says she’s laughing in a wild way. Mrs Sheffield whispers Priscilla has acquired a malady of the brain from Tommy. (Tommy warns it spreads and says his aunt is already infected and will at any moment start to dance Oriental ballets.)

Priscilla takes pride in her condition.

She’s as mad as a rabbit. She’s foolish. She has a right to be a fool. She’s earned her moment of madness by going to bed early for eighteen years, by slapping men who kissed her at a dance, by pouring tea for old ladies, by common sense and stupidity.

Her moment of madness came on her like a storm. Inside her heart, secretly, she was waiting for it, for the time when she would dare. “I dare to laugh.” She dares to tell them they are stupid and they bore her and they give her a pain in her spine.22)

“Each of you is the other’s jailer. You watch each other day and night with chilly eyes.” But they can’t jail her. She is free. She can climb telephone poles and light bonfires. She can follow her free heart with a man because

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21) They say this is the worst storm since August 1912.
22) In Nirvana Priscilla falls from a high place and incurs an injury of the spine.
she loves him. "I am free. I am myself. I'm no longer a thing. I'm a woman."

Alonzo mutters impossible. In a mood of sincere tragedy, Mrs Sheffield could almost laugh. Senior says these things don't happen.23) A flicker of moonlight appears redly through the window. Tommy says the moon is hanging like an orange on the rim of the sky. He and Priscilla had a pleasant trip to the moon and now they are about to start on another trip.

Alonzo says: "God guide us all." Senior says Tommy and Priscilla must be stopped. Mrs Sheffield says Tommy is insane, violent and unsafe.24) Tommy says by law he is sane and tame and safe. Like every other citizen, like every man who is tame and safe, he is free to marry whom he will.

For Alonzo the time has come for rage. He will make his law and lock up Tommy, who is a beast who steals women. Alonzo insists on speaking with Priscilla alone.

Alonzo says he in his quiet way is a thinker. His affection makes him see lucidly. He wants Priscilla to concentrate her mind upon a violin. He is not a musician but he is reliably informed a violin is a remarkably delicate instrument. A properly bred woman like Priscilla is like a violin.25) A violin is marvelously, delicately strung, and so is she. In the proper environment, she makes reasonably good music, but she easily gets out of tune.

A decent woman is as fragile as a violin. She can't play herself. She's got to fit with the rest of the music, and when she's smashed she can never be repaired. "This evening you are out of tune, delicately, peculiarly. For Good's sake, get back in the orchestra!"

23) Tommy says the Moment always happens when little boys run away to sea and old men elope with schoolmarm, when Alonzo's moment comes he'll write poetry. (Lawson probably took Senior's line: "These things don't happen" from Brack's last act statement in Hedda Gabler.)

24) Here Mrs Sheffield offers to "cook some nice medicine" to quiet Priscilla's nerves. Priscilla says she too has read the same book about winning the confidence of the insane by gentleness.

25) Priscilla thinks she's more like a fife and drum.
Priscilla notes Alonzo has forgotten one thing: Tommy is a musician and knows a great deal about violins. Priscilla must go away while the moon is still up. She must be married before the moon goes down.

Reginald, alone with Olga the maid, cautions her not to be so forward. A man might imagine she was tempting him. She can remain in the family’s service only if she doesn’t tempt him.

The Sheffields debate what to do about Tommy since “moral suasion” has failed. They cannot report Priscilla’s engagement to Tommy to her mother because it would kill her. They fear Tommy and Priscilla will go away even without a marriage license.

Reginald warns his father against Isabella, who perhaps wishes every man to make love to her, secretly. Perhaps Isabella has a past. Reginald admits he was tempted by her.

Isabella enters, wondering what terrible thing has come over Priscilla. Senior notes women are not always reliable. Isabella agrees—women are weak creatures, prone to sin. Even she. She sighs.

Mrs Sheffield, who has already taken Priscilla upstairs, returns. Her nerves are weaker than she thought, she can’t bear the strain of being with Priscilla.

Reginald recalls Tommy from the library to appeal to his better self, to Tommy’s “primitive sense of decency.” A girl like Priscilla cannot attach herself to an outcast from society. Tommy’s a vagabond. Is he going to place a girl that’s used to luxury in a hut? Is Priscilla going to support him by taking in laundry?

Tommy now assumes a business-like and unromantic manner.

The others like facts. He will give them some. Priscilla will not live in a hut. She won’t take in washing. She will live in an apartment on the Riverside Drive furnished with rare taste. She’ll travel. If she wishes, she’ll have a country house in China or Siberia.

He had told them he was penniless, but he didn’t say there weren’t any ways of his earning money. He threw away his money because it was useless to him, then. Now, he’s found a use for money.

26) Senior says: “After all, she is Spanish.”
He's been offered a position writing nonsense rhymes to advertise a certain toothpaste. He will accept this offer and he will get paid $200 a week for his rhymes. (His rhymes are bad, but the toothpaste is good—tastes like crushed violets and lemon peel.)

But now Priscilla, trembling, in a low voice, makes an announcement. She can't go away with Tommy. Her heart has changed. She doesn't know why she believed she was sacrificing herself for a wild adventure. She was mad for a moment, and it was beautiful, but—. Priscilla goes upstairs.

Tommy clenches his hands in a supreme effort to control himself, puts one hand to his head as if to faint, collapses in a heap in a chair. Alonzo: "God be praised."

Alonzo now thinks he understands Tommy better. He's learned somehow through Priscilla. And since Tommy indicates he's in a position to acquire an excellent, honest livelihood, Alonzo assures him the Sheffields will discontinue the idea of placing him in an asylum. Tommy exits abruptly.

Priscilla descends the stairs and asks Alonzo to marry her anytime he likes, if he still wants to. Alonzo admits he's not a Don Juan. He's a matter-of-fact man. But he is fond of Priscilla. His feeling is very deep and very romantic—"passionate," if he may decently say so—but he can't describe it clearly. All in all, he loves her.

Priscilla quite understands. She trusts Alonzo. She won't pretend she has an overwhelming passion for him, but they can be sane together. They can be comrades and make a home. Is that enough for Alonzo? For Alonzo, it is enough. Priscilla now feels safe. She goes back upstairs "her hands folded in the manner of a nun."

Tommy returns, downcast, but his equilibrium regained. He shakes Alonzo's hand and asks to see Priscilla.

Reginald asks Tommy if he means to press his absurd suit on Priscilla. Tommy now feels his dogged seriousness has put him at a disadvantage. Tiredly, without enthusiasm, he resumes his flippant manner: "My absurd suit needs pressing but not upon Priscilla." As usual, the stage directions say, "flippancy proves itself a deadly weapon." Alonzo and Reginald are horrified.

Reginald says Tommy started it all, it's all his fault. Tommy thinks that's going too far. Nicaragua is an unhealthy place, revolutions and fevers.
Can they blame that on him? He’s never been to Nicaragua, and in fact he
doesn’t give a damn for any part of South America.  

Tommy asks to see Priscilla. His reasons are private, unnecessary,
absurd. Priscilla may change her mind, because (Saturday’s spouse, Sunday’s
saint ) human beings are full of change.  

Tommy will show them how deliriously, beautifully mad he can be by
singing a serenade to Priscilla until she appears. During the whole time
Tommy sings the “mad song” that follows, the Sheffields, one by one, two
by two, interrupt him, more or less violently, trying to stop him. Without
success. He sings to the end.  

The world’s a serious place. It’s full of decorum and grace. Whenever you
smile It’s considered the style To smile on the front of your face. It’s a
regular rule. And they’ll say you’re a fool If you smile at the back of your
cranium. They’ll say you are mad And they’ll put you (too bad) Inside an
asylum insanium.

But the moon! The moon is the mother of Laughterness, Dwelling of Dafter-
ness, Shrine of all fools, Without worries or rules. They sing and dance and
dally In every silver valley. They play at hide and seek From peak to golden
peak. And every moonlit minute Is the middle of next week.

27) In “Current Events” (Williams Literary Monthly, December 1912) Lawson
wrote on “Panama Canal Tolls.” In “Current Events” (Williams Literary
Monthly, March 1913) he discussed “Disturbances in Mexico.” In Standards
(1916) he criticizes imperialists seeking to exploit South America for oil.

28) At his graduation ceremonies at Williams College (June 24, 1914)Class
Poet John Howard Lawson recited his Class Poem: “We stand today upon the
brink of change...” In The Spice of Life heroine Mary Jefferson says: “Life
changes and moves and shifts.” In one of Lawson’s last plays People and
Citizens: A Fable for Americans (c. 1960, unpublished and unproduced) black
law professor Oliver Evans says: “We must see how/ statements by certain
Supreme Court Justices/ apply in human situations, in change and growth.”
(An 18th century Tory cynic says: “The man is infatuated with change.”)

29) The same “mad song” appears in the version of The Mad Moon previously
described.
The world is a solemn old sphere. It is dull when you've been here a year.
To eat peas and pork With a knife and a fork Is a tiresome habit, it's clear.
But if you should eat With the toes of your feet A pot of fresh paste or a piece of a pillow
They'll say he is gone And they'll hang you at dawn From a tree of conventional willow. 30)

But the moon! Each man is as mad as a hatter is. That's all the matter is.
Why if anyone chose He'd take tea with his nose. Of course it might spatter--no matter.
On the moon one soon grows To play flutes with his toes Or to smile at the back of his cranium Or imbibe purple ink (It's a health-giving drink) Or eat salad all made of geranium.

But the moon!
...

At last Priscilla appears and says she's promised to marry Alonzo.
Tommy wishes her the joy of birds and the carelessness of moonlight and hopes she'll forget him easily and quickly. Priscilla says she can't do that, but she can live for the right, for duty and honor. Their flight was funny and wonderful, but it was a sin. "Sacrifice is the essence of life."

Tommy responds:

She's sacrificing herself to a little tin god of convention when she could be burning her (pagan) soul to silver ashes on the altar of the stars. Money or walls cannot separate lovers, but when they're divided by ideas, it's hopeless. He will walk the world with the memory of magic eyes. And he has a lingering-certainty Priscilla will change her mind. "A million mad tomorrows are waiting."

Tommy opens the outside door. "The orange yellow disc of the descending moon, large and brilliant, shines straight down the path between the hedges outside." Tommy's figure is outlined against the shining globe. He moves down the path. He is despondent. But he starts to whistle the tune of his mad song. "The retreating figure melts into the molten gold of the moon and is lost."

30) In A New England Fantasy (1924) Tommy Weed is symbolically hung on a tall tree (not a willow.)
Everyone on the stage is motionless and speechless. Then Alonzo says: "The madness has gone."

Priscilla, lost in thought, hardly hears Alonzo suggest a date for their wedding. She can still choose—a sensible life or a million mad tomorrows. She laughs hysterically.

Priscilla looks undecidedly at the door Alonzo goes through and also at the door Tommy went through. She runs wildly to the front door, almost opens it, stops. She walks primly to Alonzo's door' her hands folded as if in prayer. She turns to Tommy's door with a wild gesture of freedom. A look of unrestrained abandon comes into her eyes. She smiles wildly.

With a gay, mad little laugh, Priscilla says: "I might." 31)

The curtain descends on The Mad Moon.

An Afternote:

John Howard Lawson's rationale for The Mad Moon is probably expressed in The Spice of Life, also written in 1916, copyrighted October 22, 1919. In one version of this play, its main character Mary Jefferson says:

Life is like a play. In fact, life is better than a play. Plays are generally all in one key. Life changes and moves and shifts. My life is like a lot of plays mixed together, changing according to mood and fancy. One minute it's farce. Then melodrama, romance.

In another version of The Spice of Life, Mary Jefferson puts it this way:

I once almost eloped with a dramatist. Not a successful one. His plays were different, wonderful, clever, a little bit odd. Producers called them fantastic and silly. But they weren't that. They were full of variety. The dramatist said life was like a lot of plays mixed together, farces and problem plays and frothy comedies, and that is what his plays were like. As for unity, plays stopped having unity twenty years ago. Plays now go forwards or backwards. Artistic unity is unfashionable. Besides there is no artistic unity in life. Life changes and shifts and moves and changes.

John Howard Lawson later became the most trenchant critic of his own early work in the commercial theatre. In Theory and Technique of Playwriting

31) Thunder Morning (1953) ends as a lower middle-class businessman thinks about joining the proletariat: the final speech of the play is his: "Could be!"
he censures similar plays whose action is illustrative and not functional, illustrative rather than progressive, because "contradiction between cause and effect is not dramatized as it strikes the conscious wills of the characters and drives them to revise and intensify their decisions." In *Theory and Technique* Lawson rejects similar plays in which characters are governed by whim or fate, rather than by conscious will; plays in which psychic generalizations are substituted for specific acts of will; plays in which action tends to follow a pattern of repetition. In *Theory and Technique* Lawson rejects the mode of thought which in drama accepts emotional drift as a substitute for rational causation; which in drama shows a "series of situations in which the immediacy of sensation, the fleeting feeling of frustration or anger or desire takes precedence over the testing and carrying out of decisions. Lawson approvingly quotes John Gassner: "A play lives by its logic and reality. Conceptual confusion is the disease that halts its pace, dulls its edge, and disturbs its balance." Lawson adds that this "disease" is a "nervous disorder growing out of the playwright's maladjustment to his environment."