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NAOSITE: Nagasaki university’s Academic Output SITE
In September 1947 John Howard Lawson received a subpoena to appear as a witness before the United States House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee.

In October 1947 Lawson appeared before the committee but refused to directly answer the committee’s questions about his membership in the Screen Writers Guild or the Communist Party of the United States. He refused on legal grounds based on the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

Lawson was later cited for contempt of Congress and after an unsuccessful legal struggle was convicted of that charge in June 1950 in the Sixth Federal District Court in Washington, D.C. He was fined $1,000 and sentenced to one year in prison.

Lawson was immediately arrested and placed in a Federal prison in Washington, D.C.

In the third week of June 1950 Lawson was transferred to the Federal Correctional Institution at Ashland, Kentucky, where he arrived on June 21 and where he was imprisoned until April 10, 1951.

During his ten months of imprisonment at Ashland Lawson
was permitted to write three letters a week.

The following article describes some of the letters John Howard Lawson wrote from Ashland to his wife Susan Edmond, his daughter Susan Amanda, and his son Jeffrey.¹)

On June 14, 1950, John Howard Lawson (JHL), in Federal custody in Washington, D.C., wrote a three-page letter to his wife Susan Edmond Lawson, who had been permitted to visit him some days before.²)

He still does not know to which Federal prison he will be sent.

"Most important news": he is eligible for parole in October. He suggests she ask the Authors League to collect testimonies of his good character.

Seeing her meant a lot to him, but after she left he was "sort of upset" he had not told her how he felt: "I guess I get inhibited about emotional things, maybe we both do in our own ways". When together again they "shall not let so many things...bother them".³)

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1) I have read xerox copies of these letters in the Lawson Collection (Folder 16-12-4) at Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

2) The salutation of this letter is "Darling". The salutation of each of Lawson's first three letters to his wife from Ashland is "Honey, darling", which appears in 14 letters in all, in irregular alternateness with "Dearest darling" in 33 letters, or "My honey" (once) or "My darling" (once) or "Darling dear" (once). Lawson's letters to his daughter begin "Dear Mandy" and to his son "Dear Jeff and Peggy".

All John Howard Lawson's letters to his family from prison are signed "Love, Jack" or "Love, father" or "Love, Dad", followed by "John H. Lawson 7548", the latter his prison number.

3) On this visit, Lawson and his wife were kept physically separated and
He has advised his older sister Ladle [Adelaide Gaylor] not to visit him because he may be moved before she arrives; her trip would be a “waste”.

Letters from Jeff and Peggy [his daughter-in-law] are “wonderful”. He has “got the habit of reading letters over and over each day because it gives [him] a sense of the [writers] themselves”.

His friends ought not send things to him, e.g., shirts, “as there is not the least point to it”, they cannot be used in prison. “It is a silly waste”.

On June 21, 1950, JHL wrote his first two-paged letter to his wife from Ashland, Kentucky.4) He used a pen she had given him in Washington, D.C.

The train ride from Washington was “very pleasant”.

Ashland is “all that one would want under the circumstances”. He “can look out at the green Kentucky countryside”. The prison library is “well-stocked”.

“Unhappy news”: Even with time off for good behavior, he will not be released from prison until April 9, 1951. There is no parole; his lawyers had been mistaken.

“Good news”: when she visits him they can have “a fairly long time, probably most of a day”…He wants to see her “so badly”.

He wonder if they can sell their house.

4) This letter was addressed to 9354 Burnet Avenue, San Fernando, California, then the Lawsons’ residence. Until August 28, 1950, all of Lawson’s letters to his family were addressed to this residence.

All of Lawson’s letters from prison were read by prison censors before being mailed. Prison regulations restricted the length of each letter to two pages.
He asks her to prepare to send his heavy shoes to him.\(^5\)
\[\ldots\] Tell his friends he was "never better". The "only trouble": he fears he will get will get fatter.\(^6\)

On June 22, 1950, JHL wrote to his daughter.

He is allowed to write only three letters a week. His daughter and son and daughter-in-law will have to consider his letters to his wife as also letters to them.

He wishes he could keep everybody's birthday straight; in any case, "there is hardly a wide variety of costly objects he could send "them from prison.

\[\ldots\] To have nothing to do but think is a "wonderful experience" which his daughter might try sometime, "although maybe you can be spared such ideal conditions for the experiment".

He is planning books and plays--"most of which will never get written".

He hopes she is doing well in college.

He wonders if the [pre-publication] enthusiasm about his book [\textit{The Hidden Heritage}] is keeping up. "It seems so funny to be suddenly cut off from all that after the hectic writing and editing I was doing up to two weeks ago".\(^7\)

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5) Lawson, badly injured in an automobile accident in 1928, had to wear correctional shoes; the Ashland prison doctor recommended he be permitted to wear them in prison.

6) Lawson did gain considerable weight in prison.

7) \textit{The Hidden Heritage} was published by Citadel Press, Inc., New York, in 1950, while Lawson was in prison.

When Lawson entered prison he left the manuscript of this book with Dr. Philip Foner, who completed its editing. While in prison, Lawson was not permitted to correspond with Foner, who made editorial decisions
He refers to “the everlasting problem” of what to do with their house; he sees no solution in sight unless the selling price were low.

On June 27, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

He has not received a letter from her since arriving at Ashland. He awaits mail eagerly. He worries all the time about how she is feeling. He always imagines what she is doing at a particular time.

He has permission to receive some newspapers and magazines. He has asked his sister to subscribe to the New York Times for him. He asks his wife to get him subscriptions for: the Louisville Courier-Journal, Time, Saturday Review of Literature, Theatre Arts Monthly...

He is “brushing up” on his reading: Connecticut Yankee (“wonderful”), Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Carl Sandburg’s biography of Abraham Lincoln.

He is making notes for a play.

He will be glad to get a regular job in prison. 8)

“The greatest thing about this experience is being cut off from everything”. He has only “a vague idea” of the legal proceedings going on in his case. 9)

He hopes his wife and daughter will be able to visit him soon.

without being able to consult Lawson. “There are no words that can adequately express my gratitude to him; the best tribute I can pay to Dr. Foner is to say that every change he made was exactly what I would have done myself”, Lawson says in the 1968 Introduction to the “First revised paper-bound edition” of Heritage.

8) He was given a clerical job.

9) Lawson is thinking not only of himself, not only of his own case, but that of Dalton Trumbo, who was also imprisoned at Ashland, and those of the other eight members of “The Hollywood Ten”.


On July 5, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

He has received two letters from her.

"It sounds as if you are taking this horrible thing in your stride". as he knew she would, as he is, too: "one simply has to face it".

Worst is their separation: "But at least that's a lesson, for it shows how much we need each other".

He advises her to take an airplane not a bus when she visits him; not to worry about the expenses.

He gets the New York Times regularly, one day late. He occasionally hears news broadcasts on a radio. He keeps up with current events, "certainly moving fast and furious".\(^\text{10}\)

He felt bad because he had not mentioned his son's birthday until after it had passed; he remembers only his wife's birthday.

He has received a lawyer's letter about an appeal for pardon to the President of the United States, but, because the general political situation is so uncertain, he has not answered it. He wonders how such an appeal would be phrased, what its tone would be.

On July 9, 1950, JHL wrote to his daughter.

He is counting the days until his wife's first visit to him at Ashland. It would be a mistake for his wife to stay permanently in Ashland: "It would be hopelessly dull for her".

A mistake in the manuscript of The Hidden Heritage "has been preying on my mind". He had "confused" Beaumarchais' play The Marriage of Figaro with the Mozart opera written long afterward.

Each letter he gets from his family gives him "a thrilling feeling of pride in all of you". He hopes all their trials will have "a good effect on all our characters". He is learning and developing out of this experience, but he wishes his time in prison could be shortened.

\(^\text{10}\) The Korean War had just begun on June 25th.
On July 18, 1950, JHL wrote to his son and daughter-in-law, after a visit from his wife.

He is still enjoying “the lofty after effects” of his wife’s visit. “It was just too good to be true to have her for part of two days”... The next five weeks to her next visit will pass rapidly.

He is impressed by reports of a story his son is writing about a soldier in Korea but wonders if the material can be compressed into a short story. “The canvass of events is so immense and the tragedy of any boy’s dying is so poignant and meaningful that I doubt whether the impressionistic survey of a lifetime will add up to a real theme”.

He would like to hear about his son’s trip to Mexico.

He asks about his daughter-in-law’s health. She should not worry. 11)

Sometimes it is hard for him to follow his own advice, especially in prison, but it is still “good sense”.

He hopes to get snapshots of the members of his family soon.

On July 20, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

He has not received mail for a week: “I really did not mind so much not getting the letters, because I was carried along by the lift of having seen you. It has really made all the difference in the world”.

He says his son “is moving ahead rapidly in grasp of his story material and maturity in his thinking”. His son should not go “too fast”, he will need patience, “which is probably the most important thing in writing”.

He refers to the defeat of Lester Cole’s civil suit re-argued before the State of California’s Appeals Court: “It seems to me so shocking that it ought to be possible to do something about it, in terms of

11) In his letters from prison Lawson often expresses concern about the health of his daughter-in-law Peggy, who apparently suffered from asthma.
legal and moral protest”.12)

He suggests a statement re: Magna Carta in the manuscript of The Hidden Heritage be verified “to make doubly sure”.

There have been a couple of thunderstorms every day and heavy heat.13)

He is getting into the routine of his job in prison.

On July 24, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

He is “excited and puzzled”—one of his attorneys has told her JHL is eligible for parole. He has not heard about it. He doubts that parole is possible or likely, “but every possibility has to be carefully investigated”. He cannot understand the “the failure” of his lawyers to have “accurate” information about parole.14)

He is concerned about the editing of the manuscript of The Hidden Heritage and gives specific suggestions about the use of particular materials.

He is also concerned that subscriptions to this book were too few; he requests certain friends fulfill their obligation to get more subscriptions.15)

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12) Lester Cole’s civil suit was against M.G.M. Motion Pictures Studio, whom he had sued for “breach of contract” when he was dismissed because of his refusal to directly answer questions of theHUAC. This suit was won at the trial level but reversed on appeal.

13) Thunderstorm imagery frequently appeared in Lawson’s college poetry, 1910-14.

14) Lawson’s letters from prison often express annoyance at his lawyers.

15) By July 20, 1950, about 300 subscriptions to Heritage had been obtained.
On July 26, 1950, JHL wrote to his daughter.\footnote{Prison censors had complained Lawson’s left-handed cursive writing was too difficult for them to read. Starting with this letter of July 26, JHL began to print his letters.}

He has received a statement from his attorneys that a recent law makes him eligible for parole in October. The warden at Ashland does not know about this law.

He is not sure there is much hope for parole, “but it offers something concrete that can be worked on”.

He tries to answer his daughter’s questions about books on the American theatre in the 1920s and 30s but says he does not remember titles too well. He refers her to his own book \textit{[Theory and Technique of Playwriting]} for “valuable points”.

He is now permitted to do writing in his spare time. He is taking notes and “thinking things out”.

On August 1, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

Problems about a possible parole and an application for parole are “urgent”. If paroled, he will have to report regularly to a parole officer. A parole adviser is necessary, preferably a clergyman; “there might be better suggestions” than Dalton Trumbo’s--Linus Pauling or William Fritchman. He will need the guarantee of a job: is a contract for a play or a book satisfactory? If he is paroled, should they live in San Fernando or New York?

She should be prepared to do whatever is necessary to satisfy the requirements of the parole authorities.

On August 2, 1950, JHL wrote to his son.

“The lawyers must really find out what can best be done to help convince the parole board...”

He advises his son not to change literary agents and not to give
an outline of his work to another literary agent. As for the work itself, "the use of the studio strike as an ending is fine--provided it is really integrated in the personal story not superimposed on it". He advises him "to study the climax as the root-idea of structure" [in *Theory and Technique of Playwriting*].

On August 14, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

He is delighted his wife and daughter will visit him soon.

Re: parole: "The parole adviser does not need to be a friend or even very sympathetic".17)

He needs an extra pair of reading glasses. He is so dependent on the one pair of reading glasses that he has that he is "in constant fear" of breaking them.

It would be a good idea to sell part of their property behind their house "but it looks as if prices will go up, and we want to be careful not to sell it too soon or too low".

On August 28, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.18)

He has been told of a change in the parole procedure. He will probably know the parole board's decision in his case by late September. He may be paroled by October 8.

He asks her to speed up the lawyers.

He looks forward to her next visit. "It is a great boost in morale to see you, but it is all so unnatural that there is a letdown afterward". He is sure she feels the same way.

On August 29, 1950, JHL wrote again to his wife:

He is concerned with details of "the parole business"...

17) Lawson means friendly or sympathetic to his political point of view.

18) This letter is addressed to his wife c/o Cayton, 2190 Madison Avenue, New York, as are all letters to his wife until October 17, 1950.
Being able to apply for parole has brought “a great light” into his life; he feels “somewhat more hopeful”.

He keeps thinking about all the things she is doing in New York and wishes he could be with her.

On September 3, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

He has been “fuming and fretting”. He wanted to write her “a special letter” on her birthday but could not because his three-letter quota for the week was used up. “Anyway, I thought a lot about it, and wondered what you would like if I could give you a present”.

He is “very excited” about the possibility of parole but “not banking on it”.

Rain all weekend; he has not minded at all, putting in “really intensive work” on the play he is writing.

He looks forward to her visit in two weeks.

He wonders if their daughter has read a United Nations document about equality of all peoples that makes the same point he has made; the word race as customarily used is not a scientific term and should be dropped.

On September 10, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

Their daughter has written, asking “complicated literary questions” that show “how hard and independently” she is thinking.

He is “relieved” that formal procedures relative to his application for parole are completed.

He is feeling fine.

He is working on his play, “intentionally letting it go slowly, because it is not really practical to get too deep into it when time and conditions for writing leave so much to be desired”.

He is anxious about the proofreading of The Hidden Heritage, the way it looks, its “general sales possibilities”.

The fall weather is beautiful, “bright and clear, with a touch of winter in the air”.

He hopes she is not under too much pressure in New York, where she has been making speeches on his behalf.

On September 19, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

“A grandiose thunderstorm is building up”.

The visit with his wife and children was “wonderful” but somehow he had a reaction of “feeling very depressed afterward...I have not felt it so badly before”.

Having everybody with him was “fine”, but he did not feel as if he and she had much chance to talk “intimately”. He missed that and worried about it and wondered if she felt the same way.

He would like to speak more with his son about his writing—“The contact with me on this occasion was very unproductive for him”. He looks forward to giving his son the literary support he needs—“or just interest and enthusiasm”.

He is “a little afraid” his wife is not getting enough privacy in the room she is living in.

On September 22, 1950 JHL wrote to his wife.

It is a good idea that his wife live with his son and daughter-in-law for she would be more comfortable. “Of course, it’s hard to plan for any length of time when our future arrangements are so uncertain”.

He does not expect to hear the parole board’s decision on his application for parole “until the last minute”, but “there is no more reason for guessing that than for guessing that we shall get an answer quickly”.

Rain most of the week.

He has read more than usual.

He has revised and improved some scenes of the play he is writing.

He hopes the political situation will improve: “The hysteria in Congress is so fantastic and shocking that it may bring some reaction and a strengthening of progressive ranks”.

He finds a novel The Diplomat [by James Aldridge] “very stimu-
lating”, but “it is very curious the novel is so much about ideas and so little personalized in emotional terms”.

He has read that at the University of California at Berkeley [where his daughter was a student] “they have had to cancel a number of courses because of professors dismissed” [for political reasons].

He is counting the days until her next visit.

On September 24, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

The weather has suddenly turned to almost freezing, “which is a good and hopeful reminder that time is passing...”

In case he is paroled “on short notice”, he and she cannot delay deciding if they want to live in New York. They would need a suitable place to live. He hopes his son and daughter-in-law would live with them.

A letter from his son reports their dog was in a fight with another dog. “It’s awfully funny”.

He has spent the whole week mimeographing hundreds of copies\(^{19}\) of “Barometer”, a 50-page publication written by prisoners at Ashland.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{19}\) As of September 29, 1950, Ashland had 555 prisoners.

\(^{20}\) A note in Folder 16-12-4 says: “I helped edit the magazine and also was chiefly responsible for the hard job of mimeographing it. The editor [Charles Seldman] and I were allowed to work at night at the office mimeograph machine (which was in my charge) to get the magazine published”. “Barometer”, Vol. IX, No. 3, July-August-September 1950, does not include Lawson’s name in its list of editorial staff members.

In one section of “Barometer” Lawson’s name is mentioned; “Trumbo & Lawson in the writin’ an’ readin’ business...Trumbo writes and Lawson reads...hope you’re enjoying your vacation, Jack”. “Population Echoes”, p. 32.

In another section of “Barometer” Lawson’s name is not included in a short list of “inmates of Jewish faith in this Institution” for whom “this
On September 28, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

He is worried she is “wearing herself out trying to do too much at once” in New York on his behalf. “The trouble with New York is that one wastes so much time trying to connect with people”.

He wrote her a letter the day before but it was “so flat and devitalized” he tore it up.

He worries about burdening her with additional tasks about parole and the preparation of The Hidden Heritage, “but one gets to revolving these things in one’s mind when one is unable to do anything about them”.

He feels his lawyers could be doing more. His parole case is due for decision, “right now”, and he is “right” in saying “changes in the parole plan should be made immediately regardless of the uncertain date of a decision and the unlikelihood of its being favorable”.

He did not tell anyone in prison about his birthday [September 25] and decided to ignore it.

His “main and constant” worry is whether his publisher, Citadel Press, will use “imagination and initiative” in promoting his book. “It will be ignored in most quarters and will...not sell itself, but it can be sold...”21)

On September 28, 1950, JHL also wrote to his son.22)

Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) had a special significance”. “Come to Church”, p. 24.

21) Lawson was correct that The Hidden Heritage would be ignored, e.g., until I told him about it in the mid-1970s at a meeting of the Kyushu American Literature Society, even an historian of American radical movements, Robert Rosenstone, had not heard of this book; ironically, Rosenstone had known Lawson personally.

22) This letter is addressed to 140 Walworth Avenue, White Plains, New
He thanks his son for remembering his birthday and asks him to write JHL's older sister not to send him a present, it is against the rules.

He wishes his son and daughter-in-law could live with his wife. He is pleased the Liberty Book Club is publishing a new edition of Dalton Trumbo's anti-war novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*. He wonders what the Club is doing to help his *Heritage*.

He agrees the "fantastic bill" passed by Congress "ought to unite the fight for Constitutional rights".23) He adds: "It also ought to be clear to people that the process of thought control which we warned against...has now reached the point at which President Truman finds it necessary to acknowledge it".24)

He goes on: "...the danger is that people are still so divided and confused, and those who depend on any real fight by the [Truman] administration will be deceived".

He continues: "The red scare seems to paralyze so many potentially decent liberals. Somehow the whole danger must be brought home to the American people so that they understand it".

On October 3, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

He hopes her search for an apartment is successful; it seems "a bit doubtful" he will be there to occupy it.

He hopes she visits him on the weekend of October 14. If she drives to Kentucky, "it ought to be a beautiful trip", especially if she does not rush too much; she should take two days "instead of trying to make it at one time".

He is glad that in promoting his new book she has sent informa-

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23) The "fantastic bill" was the McCarran Internal Security Act.

24) The McCarran Act was passed by Congress over Truman's veto.
tional material to educators; "and it really ought to go to various other special groups". Effort should be made to get prominent people to write reviews of it.

He wants an advance copy of the book.

"Here I go again, piling on problems that I want you to attend to. It's really not fair".

He received a letter from Alan, now in France, saying a trip taken across the United States with Jeff has enabled them to get to know each other and has taught them so much.25)

On October 6, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

He is sorry she has been put to "everlasting trouble" about his parole. As he has written her before, he probably sounds "more demanding" than he is, because he has nothing to do in his spare time but "sit and fret" about parole and his new book.26)

He thinks his attorney too easy-going about completing paper work necessary for his parole application.

"Infinitely more important" is her next visit.

On October 8, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

He has not received a letter from his daughter since she returned to college for the new school year; he does not have her address, either.
He hopes his wife will be able to visit him on the 14th.
This weekend he is "quietly reading and mostly sleeping".
The political usefulness of his new book at "this crucial time"

25) Alan was Lawson's first child, born of his first marriage to Kathryn Drain Lawson. Alan apparently wrote to JHL but not to Susan Edmond Lawson.

26) As they frequently have in previously described letters, the subjects of parole and his new book predominate in all of Lawson's remaining prison letters to his family. Hereinafter these subjects will be minimized.
depends on its historical message "embodying" the ideas that "fascist forces" are trying to suppress.

He cautions that his son be careful in submitting work to publishers too quickly. As she will remember, he himself has had "fairly bad experiences in being in too much of a hurry to submit incomplete material. It creates a wall of prejudice--due to small weaknesses which can be remedied or unclear things which can be clarified".

On October 17, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife after her and his son’s weekend visit to him.\(^\text{27)}\)

He has gone through the "usual period of depression" after seeing her. The visit was "wonderfully helpful" but it was also "an unreal and unnatural experience" that does not give any one any "real release" of feelings.

He was glad to speak to his son about his writing but after they left he was troubled by his "failure" to be helpful and by his sense of being "too selfishly concentrated" on his own difficulties.

The attorney handling his parole application is "lax".

On October 20, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

He had "a short polite interview" with the parole board.

His son Alan is living at the Hotel de Nantes, 33 Blvd de Montparnasse, Paris. "What is especially interesting is Alan's report that the students he meets know all about our case and are most concerned about it".

He is glad Jeff feels their talk about his writing was helpful.

He has read "a horrible novel", The Big Snow.\(^\text{28)}\) "It's really so corrupt and inhuman that it makes you wonder whether the author is

\(^\text{27)}\) This letter and all following letters herein summarized were addressed to 11 Cranberry Street, Brooklyn, New York.

\(^\text{28)}\) By Henry Morton Robinson, author of The Cardinal.
a person or a ghoul”.

On October 25, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.

His requests of her “ought to ease up from now on”.
He should know about parole in about two weeks.
He feels fine.

He follows the political situation carefully. “It is interesting that [President Truman] proposed a peace plan at the United Nations. It shows how strong the feeling about the war danger is, and may lead to some real steps toward peace”.

He confesses a play by [James] Gow and [Arnaud] D’Usseau, [Deep Are the Roots], “does not sound too good”.

On October 30, 1950, JHL wrote to his son.

He is making notes for the play he intends to do29) if he is not paroled, and is “fairly well adjusted to that expectation”.

He is full of ideas and “bursting” to get them on paper. “Probably the long period of quiet and inaction is good in this respect”, but prison is not the place to write with any “real vitality and freedom”.

He thinks his son’s walks around the “exciting” harbor area are “very stimulating and fruitful”.

He regrets the Gow and D’Usseau play closed so quickly. He finds “curious” the first scene, “an exposition which seemed to separate the love story from the whole situation in the historic village”. He suspects this exposition scene was “invented” late in the writing to give it “an emotional push” not really in the action.

He is getting anxious about their next visit. “It is probably best to make your plans without considering the decision on parole”.

29) On September 25, 1950, Lawson had submitted to the prison’s educational director the manuscript of the first part of the play he was working on, In Praise of Learning. On March 19, 1951, he submitted the manuscript of the rest of the play.
He refers to "the affair" planned for his new book.

On November 1, 1950, JHL wrote to his wife.30)

The reception party planned for the publication of his new book sounds "fine".31) [Actress] Stella Adler will be "a bit on the lush side" for such a serious book, but he thinks it a good idea that at the reception she will read from his chapters on Shakespeare.32)

He wonders if Stella Adler can "lure" [director] Harold Clurman to the reception.

He wonders how his wife liked Shaw's Arms and the Man. "It is one of his weaker plays, and I doubt if it has much sensible meaning in...this crucial time".

The weather is "bright and clear and warm".
Everything is "fine", but he wants to see her badly.

November 5, 1950.

He has received "a nice letter" from their daughter telling about her college life: "She is doing a lot of hard work and thinking".

He is "not particularly interested" in the Screen Writers Guild elections. His dues to the Dramatists Guild should be paid.

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30) This letter and all the following letters summarized hereinafter are to Susan Edmond Lawson, so only the date of writing will be given.

31) This reception took place on Sunday, November 12, 1950, at the residence of novelist Millard Lampell and his wife in New York City.

32) On November 6, Stella Adler sent a note to Susan Edmond Lawson saying she would try to attend the reception but she could not undertake to read anything there because it would involve her committing herself, which she could not do at the moment, because she was rehearsing out of town. Mrs. Lawson considered this note a refusal of the invitation. JHL Collection Folder 16/1/3.
He saw a movie "Rachel and the Stranger": "It really made me angry...so atrociously bad, morally and artistically, not omitting the most horrible treatment of an Indian fight". He remembers how Waldo Salt "bragged" to him about having written this film and about its content. "Few things in Hollywood have struck me as being so actively unpleasant".

November 8, 1950.

He has received a copy of The Hidden Heritage. He is "deeply grateful" to historian Dr. Phillip Foner for "the skillful and devoted work he has done" editing the manuscript of the book. She should stress this at the reception.

He has some complaints, e.g., "The book was promised and advertised as 640 pages with illustrations. I suspect the business head of the firm of having got it down to 570 pages without illustrations".

He is "shocked" that certain legal steps now being taken toward his parole should steps now been done "months ago".

He wishes he could see her. "It's been too long".

"Maybe the parole will arrive".

November 10, 1950.

He feels it essential she wait in New York until they hear about the decision on his parole. "If it is denied, you would have to take charge of plans to ask for reconsideration". If it is denied, "I am strongly convinced you should take six weeks in California, so as to be with the kids for Christmas".

In view of inflation, he questions the wisdom of selling their "pasture".

He hopes that film producer Zoltan Korda will send her some money.33)

33) Lawson had written a blackmarket film script for Cry the Beloved Country.
He is glad his life insurance policy with Occidental [Life Insurance] is paid.

He hopes Peggy's health is improving.

"I am sorry we have to go through all this uncertainty and suspense".

November 13, 1950.

Parole is denied. Start working immediately for reconsideration. "We must talk over the whole problem". He is far from hopeful.

"There must be many people of prominence who are surprised by such a decision and would be willing to speak in our favor".\(^{34}\)

"It seems to me of great importance to make an issue of it as a matter of principle".

He is "crazy to know" about the reception for his book. He hopes its publishers are "really pushing on the matter of foreign translation".

He can't wait to hear about a movie that Jeff and Peggy are writing.

November 21, 1950.

Her visit was "a wonderful help, especially good this time" and he felt "greatly improved".

He is glad she is staying in the East; he will not need to wait until January to see her again.

He cannot understand the reasoning behind some of the editing of The Hidden Heritage, particularly omissions that would have made the last part of the book "more dramatic".

His son Alan's wife Paule has begun to translate Theory and Technique of Playwriting into French.

He asks his wife to send Alan ten copies of Theory and Technique and ten copies of Heritage; their publishers can pack and ship the books and charge the costs against his royalties.

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34) See letter of November 24.
November 24, 1950.

One of his attorneys wants to appeal for presidential clemency. He thinks it "a great mistake" to give such an appeal too much attention because "it distracts activity from the essential political and moral issue—the blanket exclusion of all the defendants from the parole to which they would normally be entitled".

He urges one of his attorneys visit him as soon as possible.
He had "a really swell" Thanksgiving Day dinner.
Several inches of "very beautiful" snow.
He needs one or two reams of typing paper, "a fairly good quality, as heavy paper is easier to write on in long hand".

November 28, 1950.

He is glad she is “getting on so well in the great storm”. In Kentucky, too, he is “more or less up to [his] neck in snow”. He has been comfortable; the dormitory is warm; he has "really enjoyed it".

It is “really a waste of time” to “expend major effort” on the appeal for presidential clemency.

Someone has requested permission to reprint Success Story in an anthology; it is “definitely desirable”.35)

Jeff has written that the Italian publishers of Theory and Technique have sent some money; she should tell his literary agents Brandt and Brandt to send it to her.

Alan, still in Paris, has bought “a little Renault automobile”; Alan figures this is an investment; when he leaves France he can sell the car for almost as much as he paid for it—“which may or may not be true”.

“The international situation seems to be approaching a dangerous climax”.

“It is an exciting and terrible period in history”.

35) Lawson wrote Success Story in 1928 under the title Death in an Office; it was produced in 1932 in New York.
November 30, 1950.

He sends her a permit to enclose in her Christmas package to him. There is not much point in her sending him books; “I would advise candy or nuts, or both”.

He has had “a very refreshing visit” from [Civil Rights Congress attorney] Martin Popper; he was “pleased and relieved” because he gave Popper “a better understanding” of his viewpoint on the parole business.

Efforts should be made to get The Nation and The New Republic to review Heritage.

He does not know how much money he will get for permission to include Success Story in an anthology. Probably only a nominal amount. “I don’t much care. I have given plays in the past to anthologies for nothing, and don’t mind doing that. But if a small payment is usual, we might as well have it”.

She should not spend a lot of money to repair their Chrysler. Let their daughter, who is using it, put it in dead storage. “The main thing is simply to keep it until we can turn it in for a new car”.

He still expects some money from Zoltan Korda.

He does not wonder she is having nightmares, “the way things are going nowadays”.

There are “hopeful factors” in the situation.

December 5, 1950.

His attorney’s letters about parole are “vague”; he wonders if the attorney has given “any thought to the matter at all”.

His prison job has kept him busy, “which is most welcome, as it makes the time pass faster and more happily... The time flows along miraculously, in any case” and her next visit to him is only three weeks off.

He is working on his new play but “can’t tell whether it is going to amount to anything or not”.

The sum of $25 for the anthologizing of Success Story is so small
it does not matter whether it is paid or not. He is pleased to have the play reprinted.

December 15, 1950.

He compliments her on “doing ten times as much work [on his parole case] as anybody would have a right to expect”.

Even if the committee organizing the effort to get presidential clemency for him were headed by Thomas Jefferson, he would still doubt its usefulness.

December 28, 1950.

Her visit was “even better and more essential” than earlier ones—“maybe because we are getting used to the peculiar conditions of these visits”. Her visit means more than he can tell and it will sustain him through the month.

He has read a review of *Heritage*, “...quite uncritical”. The reviewer “has a real grasp of the meaning and puts it simply and in a way that ought to attract buyers”.

He saw *Roseanna McCoy*, “a remarkably good” movie about a Kentucky feud, “done with enough honesty and feeling for characters to be really moving”.

January 3, 1951.

He received a sad letter from her, “so I hasten to try to cheer you up”, even though his letter will arrive when, he hopes, she is much happier. When she does not feel good, he gets anxious to do something to make her feel better.

It is a “relief” to have the holidays gone.

He looks forward to April [the time of his release from prison]. He has no expectations of parole, but activity for it should continue.

January 8, 1951.
He does not need his 1950 income tax forms; he had too little income to require his filing an income tax return.\textsuperscript{36)

Jeff has written a new story, which Jeff calls "mysterious and spooky". "I guess that's the way he feels, and who can blame him?"

He has completed insurance papers; "I am a little worried about my weight, especially since they weighed me with clothes and heavy shoes. I noted that on the form".

January 12, 1951.

Alan, in Belgium for a holiday, writes that a young man studying with him is "the guy who carried me on his shoulders at the Pennsylvania Station last June".\textsuperscript{37)

January 16, 1951.

He hopes Zoltan Korda will be in the United States about the time of his discharge from prison in April. "There ought to be a fairly good chance of my doing another picture with him, which would certainly come in mighty handy...The money situation will be cleared up".

He has "plunged" into the last act of his new play.

January 18, 1951.

He is "especially excited" she will meet Korda soon. "If he feels strongly that it should be kept quiet, that's alright. The situation may warrant it".\textsuperscript{38)

\textsuperscript{36) The income tax law may have then as now required the filing of a tax return regardless of the amount of income.}

\textsuperscript{37) Lawson is referring to a gathering of his supporters before he was taken into federal custody.}

\textsuperscript{38) Lawson's having done the screenplay for \textit{Cry the Beloved Country} was
He is “delighted” the film has turned out well and is “crazy” to see it.

He is “not anxious” to get the total amount of money [owed him by Korda] and would be “glad” to have some of the payment deferred, for income tax reasons and for something in reserve.

January 21, 1951.

He is “kind of astonished” she has decided to remain in New York, but she should do whatever she feels best. One advantage: they will be closer—“which does make some difference”—and she can visit him at least once more before his release from prison. He wants her to be as comfortable and happy as possible.

He is “amazed” how “swiftly” time is passing.

He wishes their daughter would not worry so much about earning a living “although that is natural enough under our circumstances”. She should finish college. “But that, like everything else, is something she must work out for herself”.

January 26, 1951.

He expects her to visit him the following weekend.

He fears Zoltan Korda’s serious back illness is getting worse.

He has heard of a favorable review of The Hidden Heritage in the Manchester Guardian Weekly, which “means that they are paying some attention to it over there, in contrast to the silence in the American press”.

February 4, 1951.

Because of a winter storm (“People who know these parts say that there has never been a winter like it”) he doubted she would be able to visit him. He was “anxiously” listening to radio reports about the storm and travel conditions.

not public knowledge.
John Howard Lawson's letters from prison

He advises her to sell some government bonds so they will have "adequate funds".

He received a "swell" letter from Jeff, who says stories take so much time to write, "which is an old complaint of writers".

"As usual" there is no letter from his daughter, to whom he has written several times. He guesses all is well.

February 11, 1951.

He hopes she is feeling better after her cold and taking good care of herself. He is "terribly relieved" she did not try to visit him when she was sick.

He has a cold too, "but maybe that's just because I was thinking so much about your and how you are feeling".

He has been denied parole again, "which is hardly surprising". He wants to know what plans there are to keep the issue "alive".

Because of the delay in her getting bonds out of their safety deposit box, he hopes she has borrowed some cash.

He hopes to see her this coming weekend.

The weather is changing--"a sign that spring is just around the corner and April will soon be here".

February 20, 1951.

Her visit was "an enormous help". He admits to the usual letdown, "perhaps a little worse"; the day after she left he felt "kind of miserable", but he is back to normal. "After all, we only have this seven weeks" until his release from prison.

He is writing at sundown: "There is a beautiful warm sunset outside the window".

He is trying to finish his play; there are a lot of unresolved problems. He wants to bring it "as near completion" as he can so he can show it to people and get some idea of production. "I always have had the trouble of showing plays before they are really ready and thus giving an unsatisfactory impression, and I shall probably do the same
thing again this time”.

His sister has sent one of her paintings to a “big exhibition at a housing project on Long Island”.39)

February 23, 1951.

He was glad to get a letter from her: “these several days without letters from you after you leave, which of course there is no way of avoiding, are sort of trying”.

April 12th is “fine” for a homecoming welcome party; “then maybe you and I could go into retirement and get a good rest”.

He has read there is “definite talk of another investigation of Hollywood”.40) He imagines the excitement caused by that talk, but he doubts the committee “could ever duplicate the publicity of the first hearing,” but the members of the committee “are going to take further steps in the field of books, theatre, etc”.

A “cute” letter from their daughter tells about her big arguments about “whether jazz is really art and whether it has elements of Negro folk music”. He says “wild discussions” have gone on for years and the question is “belated”, but he supposes young people “dig up all these ancient problems again and again”.

Their daughter says she finds it “difficult to get something profitable out of college, an institution that has little profitable to offer”. In a history course that sounds interesting to him she will research the period of the war with Mexico in 1848.

He is looking forward eagerly to seeing all his friends.

February 26, 1951.

39) Lawson’s sister Adelaide was a painter as was her husband Wood Gaylor.

40) This investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee began after Lawson’s discharge from prison.
He is "most interested" that a performance of a new play *Nat Turner* was good. He knows the leading actor, "a fine actor", but is "surprised they can put on such a vital performance down there". He is interested in the theatre "down there" because "it may be the place where my play will find a home"..."in view of present pressures, it may be difficult [to produce the play] even if people are crazy about the play itself". It is a very good idea for her to develop "all the interest or curiosity that she can" about his play.

His weight has not gone up as much as he thought it had; "I don't know where I got the idea that it was only about 180" when he entered prison. He will have to lose weight.

He and Jeff are exchanging opinions about a biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald containing fascinating material about the 1920s but failing to bring out the most significant aspects of Fitzgerald's life or work.

March 2, 1951.

His shoulder bothers him. He is being given "excellent" heat treatments and medicine "supposed to clear it up very quickly". He was worrying about her, "although that is obviously silly", but that may account for his feeling not so good.

There are only five weeks to go to the day of his release, "certainly more cause for rejoicing than worrying about little aches and pains".

The [political] situation does not look so good. "It seems fantastic that they [the House Un-American Activities Committee] should start all the scandal and hysteria all over again, but these are fantastic times and of course we know it was inevitable as a follow-up to our [the Hollywood Ten] cases".

He misses her so much he keeps imagining what she is doing at a given time. "But it's not very profitable and I try to break myself of the habit".

His new play still preoccupies him. There is something "very remarkable" in it, as is often the case with his plays. "The difficulty lies in the poetic quality at which I aim, which tends all too often to
get mystical and unclear”.

March 6, 1951.

He “sort of regrets” writing her “a down-hearted” letter [on March 2].

He is glad she had a good weekend in the country.

The approaching Hollywood investigation is “awful” for Gale [Sondergaard]. He feels “awfully sorry” for other people who “suddenly get dragged into the mess”.

He hopes something can be done to make people realize what this means for books, theatre, radio and “all forms of free expression”.

This investigation is “obviously intended to introduce the long delayed drive for total control of the arts”, and this must be understood “if anything effective is to be done about it”.

His writing on Rubens was removed from The Hidden Heritage long before its publication, but was “exceedingly interesting and really placed him in historical perspective”.

March 8, 1951.

He tells her not to worry about her letters being dull; he wants to know as much as possible about what she is doing and feeling; her letters are always “exciting”.

He is still getting treatments for his shoulder ailment.

It is “astonishing” the newspapers pay so little attention to the new Hollywood investigation. One thing is “striking”–the apparent purpose is to impose similar rigid controls over theatre, radio and publishing.

“If Lillian Hellman and Arthur Miller don’t see what this means to their field, and if they don’t try to make the Authors League see it, they are making a great mistake”.41)

41) Lillian Hellman and Arthur Miller were subpoenaed to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in May 1952.
A friend’s offer to let the Lawsons use a house in New England in April or May sounds “awfully good”.

He finds it “terribly difficult” to visualize being out of prison.

On March 12, 1951.

He is still getting heat treatments for his shoulder ailment.

Time is passing.

Jeff and Peggy wrote him about their new little dog, but he “cannot believe it could be as cute as Flip [their former dog].

He cautions her to take good care of her sinus condition “and not let it get you down again”.

Everyday brings him new reports of “the fantastic development” of the Hollywood investigation, but he cannot find any evidence of “any real defense or counterattack...the thing is so flagrant that much could and should be done”.

Plans should be made for him to meet with Zoltan Korda in April.

March 16, 1951.

He hopes she has recovered from influenza and is taking care of herself...“you always refuse to admit it when you are sick”.

Susan Amanda has had the flu too; she went to the university hospital, where she did not have to pay for treatment.

His shoulder trouble “hangs on in a mild form”.

There are only three weeks to go to his release from prison.

He has read about “the women’s play”. He is interested in the historical material. He hopes the play is “not so general and conventional that it fails to give an emotional feeling of things”.

He does not know how they will see all the people who say they want to see him the moment he is released. “But we’ll manage”.

March 20, 1951.

He is angry: Mandy often causes her parents to worry about her health because of “her failure to give ordinary information”. He can-
not believe Mandy failed to notify her mother she was in the hospital. "It is really a fault in her character and she is insensitive to other people's feelings and she just must do something about it".

He is bothered his wife has not fully recovered from influenza.

He is concerned about their automobile insurance, his driver's license and various other documents.

He is glad the price of real estate is high in San Fernando Valley. "Maybe we should really sell the place".

He would like to read the script of "the women's review".

March 23, 1951.

He is relieved she feels better; he hopes she is taking care of herself, "following the doctor's orders".

He is looking forward to eating chicken and rice.

He feels "sort of confused" by the prospect of being in the world again. She will have to help him get "orientated" to the conditions of life "to which I have become unaccustomed". It is "a little staggering" to think of all the obligations he has. He hopes he does not get under "as much pressure as in the old days". He feels, as he knows she does, he has to fulfill his obligations, "because people expect it of me and depend on me".

He wonders if their automobile insurance has arrived.

He does not think the government bonds they own fluctuate on the market—"But I may be wrong".

Only two more weeks to go...

"There is now a warm lively March wind that seems fine and the birds are beginning to appear".

March 27, 1951.

He has not received mail from her for two days: "I guess I have gotten to be a little more of a worrier than I used to be, but it's a foolish habit".

The day of his release is drawing near: "I really don't mind the
wear and tear of waiting too much".

He is reading news stories about the Hollywood investigation "with great excitement". He is sure he can be "extremely useful" and will be read to do anything he can, "especially with this difficult situation involving so many of our friends".

He is "crazy" to read stories Jeff recently completed.

March 30, 1951.

This will be his last letter to his wife from prison "unless some weighty matter comes up".

He counts the days.

He is worried about her health; the flu hangs on for a long time. He’s glad she got the car insurance.
He’s glad she can keep the apartment in Brooklyn through April.
He expects Zoltan Korda to get in touch with him after his release.
He thinks their daughter is having a hard time making up the school work she lost while she was in the hospital. "It can't be easy, the way she puzzles and frets over her work".

He looks forward to seeing her on Sunday.

He hopes to meet some critics of his new book: "I shall probably have a good time and learn a lot by taking [them] on". He has missed "reasonable criticism" that would help him with the second volume.

He cannot wait for this week, his last in prison, to get done with.

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