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The Williams College Senior Class Book of 1914 predicted John Howard Lawson's "Probable Future Occupation" as journalism. As soon as he graduated from Williams in June 1914 he got a job as "cable editor" with Reuters Ltd. (His father was then Reuters' General Manager in the United States.) On the outbreak of war in Europe in August 1914 Lawson was actively in charge of Reuters' New York office while his father was in London. Lawson resigned from Reuters after about a year and a half, he has said, "under the mistaken impression that a quick success as a playwright was awaiting" him. This "curious delusion," as he has called it, was the result of his receiving from the partners George M. Cohan and Sam M. Harris a small payment for an option on an unidentified play. The partners gave him helpful advice, he has said, and an effort was made to whip his "embryonic" play into shape. "But it wouldn't whip!" After that he sold a number of options on other plays (also as yet unidentified), and in 1916, the year he joined the Authors League of America, he had two "disastrous out-of-town tryouts"—

1) *Who's Who in America*. Vol. 32 1962-1963. Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co. 1963. p. 1809. Lawson's experience as a "cable editor" may have given him the idea expressed in *The International* by David Fitch, the son of a financier Simeon Silas Fitch, that he David did not want to be "entangled in a lot of ticker tape..."

2) Letter from Simeon Lawson to Sir Roderick Jones, then Managing Director, Reuters Ltd. July 21, 1921.

Standards and Servant-Master-Lover. The following summaries of these two unpublished plays are the first to be published.

Standards, the first play of John Howard Lawson to be professionally produced\(^4\), is a serious three-act episodic drama with comic overtones. In this intendedly realistic play the 20-year-old playwright employs elements of romance, but he eschews the inversions and archaism of his earlier "Hindoo" dramas and in his dialogue uses middle-class and working-class colloquialism. The locale is an "Eastern city" in the United States. The settings are a library (in a house), a parlor, a restaurant, and a "den of crime." The main characters, all "type" characters, are a dramatist, a lawyer, a millionaire a minister of the gospel, a social worker, a cabaret dancer, a criminal, a prostitute, (not clearly identified as such) and a girl of the slums. The events of the drama are "continuous," taking place in the actual time taken by the action on the stage.

The play begins in the "paling light of a fall sunset." The dramatist ("The lines of his figure, long and lanky, are silhouetted against the sunset light" in his library as he says: "There is nothing more beautiful than a crimson sunset gilding the grey outline of a city") says to the lawyer that he has formed a great many theories about people and life. The lawyer replies: "... the world is mad with theories... theories are like Turkish baths: they are bracing for a short time: It's demoralizing to live in them." (Some of the "theories" that they mention without discussing are: socialism, woman suffrage, psychic research, Bernard Shaw, Christian Science, Hindoo magic, sun worship, and the "doctrine of the superman."

\(^4\) It was produced by George Mooser for about three weeks in Albany, Syracuse and perhaps Utica, New York. (Lawson wrote it during his senior year in college.)
The lawyer says:

We appoint commissions and we talk... but nobody does anything. Here we stand, face to face, modern civilization against white slavery—there's a practical problem—what do we do? Nothing! White slavery grows and blooms and spits in our face—... A healthy caveman wouldn't tolerate white slavery; he'd say it was unhealthy: he'd cut it out and find a healthy substitute.

The dramatist and the lawyer decide to investigate that night some types of theories, "standards." (The dramatist says that he knows New York well: "I've wandered about in queer places.") As they step outside the dramatist's mansion to "delve into hearts," to "probe thoughts," they encounter a hungry homeless girl who asks them for help, then faints. They carry the girl inside, put her on a couch near a warm fire, give her something to eat, and, leaving her to sleep, they go on their quest for standards.

In the second act, the dramatist and the lawyer present to several people the case of this unfortunate girl of the slums "with her tragedy, her problem and her helplessness": She fell in love, "got in trouble," and lost her job as a servant. Her baby died, and she wandered in the streets of the city alone, cold, hungry, wretched.

In his "dark parlor" (he does not turn on his electric lights), the minister of the gospel, a minister of the "old time religion," says that the girl of the slums has done "wrong" and that her suffering is "God's punishment." She needs to "repent." She needs a "religious awakening, faith in God." ⁵)

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5) The minister's daughter, appropriately named Grace, suggests that the people that the minister wants to raise to "higher standards..our standards", may have standards of their own, "different standards from ours."
The dramatist, "enraged," responds:

All you can do is think, talk, reason. Ministers...good men that sit in pulpits and talk cant about religion and repentance, men without blood in their hearts or pity in their eyes — wasters of words — no wonder people have stopped going to church, no wonder people have gotten tired of your endless theories and fooleries and talk, talk, talk...What does she care for your nonsense about religion and repentance?

(The professional social worker visiting the minister asserts that the case of the girl should be investigated thoroughly: the girl may be an impostor, she may have led an "immoral" life, she may be intending a fraud.)

The next episode begins in the millionaire's "dark red" study. In front of a large map three international financiers discuss a "brilliant piece of business": Certain oil lands are the finest in South America. These three businessmen must have them. To get them, they need a concession. The present government of the (unspecified) country refuses to give them one. So the financiers will help overthrow the government by financing a rebellion whose leaders will, in power, grant them the concession.

When the dramatist and the lawyer enter and ask them "What's to be done?" about the girl of the slums, the millionaire says that the girl is a weakling who lacks strength and stability. She is a menace to society. "She's not fitted for the battle of life." There is no use giving her a chance, because she would not know what to do with it. People like her are helpless. They are useless and

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6) One of the unsolved problems of this play is that the social worker is correct in his evaluation of the girl.

7) Lawson had discussed the theme of imperialism in college essays, and he introduces a scene very similar to this one in *The International*.

8) The millionaire represents "Social Darwinism."
inefficient. They ought to die. (To this the dramatist offers only a soft aside: he asked them for bread and they gave him a stone.)

The third episode of the second act takes place in a Broadway restaurant ("French name, American cooking, Yiddish waiters") where, listening to the music of an “invisible orchestra” and to the “raucous” singing of a woman visible only on occasion and catching “glimpses” of tango dancers in the background, the dramatist and the lawyer agree that the minister and the millionaire had talked “just bunk, plain bunk.”

They turn their attention to the tango dancers who join them. They repeat their story about the girl of the slums to the cabaret dancer. She says that it is a girl’s “own fault when she has a hard time.” As for the girl of the slums, she has “too much scruples” and “too little brains,” and she is “too serious about life.” The cabaret dancer says that that there is a lot of fun in life “if you know how to get it.” She says: “Pleasure is my standard.” She would rather be happy than good, rather be painted than colorless. “There is no such thing as morals,” she says. She advocates “doing what you like and getting away with it.” The cabaret dancer makes a practical suggestion about the plight of the girl or the shms:

Advertise it in the newspapers: hire a press agent — sob stories — all that sort of thing: then — Put her on the stage — Paint her eyebrows so's to make her look pathetic, an' she won't have to act.

The final episode of the second act takes place in a “den of crime” (the light is “vague and flickering”) in the backroom of a Bowery saloon. The dramatist and the lawyer bring the case of the girl of the slums to the attention of several disreputable people. One Gentleman Jim, a thief, says that crime is a business just like any
other business, and he tells the two "plutes" that the first law of life is self-preservation. A prostitute named Fat Fanny makes a practical suggestion: Let the girl find a rich man and blackmail him for money.

The third act begins when the dramatist and the lawyer return to the mansion. The girl (her name is Sadie, the name of the teen-age heroine of Processional) is sleeping on the couch. Awakened, she says that she has been "tossed around in the world like a play-thing." Her boy, born in a "windy alley," did not have a chance. "It's a sin," she says to these well-to-do men, "to have empty sofas to lie on an' empty chairs to sit in when half the world is standing' up with its feet achin'." The dramatist feels guilty. He decides to write a "witty, satirical, original, human" play about the girl, whom he visualizes as the "emblem of poverty, Society's Outcast, standing on the edge of perdition."

Soon a Figure comes through the window. He is a burglar of "gigantic build." His hair is unkempt; he is unshaven. He seems a "huge animal." Yet in his "fierce ruggedness" there is a "certain dignity." The girl identifies the Figure as her accomplice in a plan to rob the house. (She had improvised her hard luck story as she went along.) The Figure says nothing, the first person that night, the dramatist notes, who has not had anything to say, who has not expressed any theory. The lawyer describes the Figure: "He's the Caveman: the caveman, the monster butting his shoulder against

9) The Figure (his name is John) is Lawson's prototype of the anarchistic Dynamite Jim in Processional who carries Sadie Cohen into a cave to have sexual relations with her. (In Loud Speaker a young journalist named John who calls himself a burglar enters a politician's house through a window with the intention of stealing the [politician's private papers].)
civilization. At this, the Figure cries out “Fools!” and with the girl escapes through the window. The dramatist and the lawyer, companions of a “queer evening,” agree that the girl was a “real actress,” and the curtain descends.

The ending of *Standards* not only turns about the main theme of the play but also it turns a somewhat serious (in intent, Shavian-like) drama in the direction of comedy, even farce. Nevertheless, Allardyce Nicoll says that despite its flaws in structure and lack of resolution of its central problem, *Standards* might easily be considered the strongest of the sentimental social dramas of its period in its criticism of a do-nothing ministry and an interventionist imperialism.

*Servant-Master-Lover* (written in 1915), the second play of John Howard Lawson’s to be produced, is definitely a comedy and a farce (with overtones of the grotesque). An advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* calls it a “Whimsical Mystery Comedy in 3 Acts.” The social commentary explicit in *Standards* is barely suggested in *Servant-Master-Lover* (by a worker who in Ireland was a “gentleman,” a “professor and a rebel,” planning revolution, which in the U. S. A. “went down like a piece of lead”), but the *Times* advertisement refers to the play as the “story of an outcast—a whimsical Cinderella of

10) Lawson’s Figure, the Caveman, 1914, predates Eugene O’Neill’s *Yank*, an inarticulate “20th century Neanderthal Man,” in *The Hairy Ape*, 1922.
11) In *Processional* when there is a certain discussion of political ideas an old woman named Maggie (“earth mother”) cries out “Fools’.” and moves away.
13) It was produced by Oliver Morasco for a short time in Los Angeles in July 1916. (Alternate titles which Lawson rejected were: *The Laughing Lip, Three Men and Herself*, and *Cinders*.)
the slums.” The locale is an “Eastern city” in the United States. The settings are a warehouse, a boudoir in a villa, and a police station. The main characters, all “type” characters, are a “stage-Italian” detective, a “stage-Irishman” policeman, a businessman and his daughter, a girl of the slums, a Woman in Blue, and a novelist in four disguises. The action takes place between Friday night and Monday morning.

The play begins in a warehouse: Flashlights flicker, “the boxes and packages make queer dim shadows and dark corners, shading off towards obscurity...” The warehouse owner and his daughter and the stage-Italian detective and the stage-Irishman policemen are setting a trap for a gang of criminals who have sent a threatening letter.

They discover and capture Cinders — so named “’cause I fire up pretty easy” — a ragged 17-year-old girl with curly red hair, an Irish brogue, and a “pretty and peculiar laugh.” They suspect Cinders of being a member of the gang, and they demand that she give them answers to their questions. Cinders says: “It’s only the laugh o’ me lip I’m givin’ you.” All she knows is “dreams an’ fancies,” and she pleads to the businessman’s daughter to help her.

In the course of her plea, Cinders sets up the situation that the play develops: “No girl has lived until... three kinds of men have come to her... out of Fairyland.” A Servant will serve her who will be clever, humble and wise: “’Tis pretty things he’ll say and gentle things he’ll do.” A Master will be strong: “An’ he’ll grab me, so’s it hurts terrible.” A Lover: “His touch will be electricity, his eyes will burn.” A Tall Masked Man suddenly appears and carries Cinders off.

The second act curtain rises the next morning on a “scene of
strange and fairy-like beauty”: rosy draperies, shimmering curtains, bizarre decorations, books of unusual sizes and shapes, a queer lamp—a boudoir in which the furniture is a “bit tattered,” the curtains “torn and faded in spots,” suggesting “disease and antiquity.” The total impression is to be one of “grotesqueness, charm, unreality.”

Next to the silver-canopied bed in which Cinders is sleeping (when she wakes up, she at first thinks that she is dead), the Woman in Blue, a “typical New England matron,” sits knitting. The Woman in Blue, a “respectable God-fearing woman,” treats Cinders as if she were a lady. Cinders makes the best of her captivity (she realizes that she has been kidnapped by mistake) and eats caviar, but rejects champagne in favor of milk.

Then a secret panel in the wall opens. Into the boudoir steps a Servant, dressed in blue and gold, wearing a powdered wig. Cinders orders the Servant around as if she were a princess: she makes him kiss her foot. She feels a “queer puzzlement.” She says: “White magic seems to a turned me into somethin’ more nigh a peacock than a jailbird.” The Servant informs her that the castle that she is in is named Fairyland. (In the background can be heard the singing of choir boys in a nearby valley.)

Late that afternoon, when the sunset is red, Cinders shocks the puritanical Woman in Blue by her “heathenish” talk, talking “so free” about love, about “hearts beatin’ romance an’ pitter-patterin’ with the desire of love.” Cinders wants to be kissed. She says that she

15) Lawson caricaturizes “typical” New England matrons in Roger Bloomer and Nirvana.
16) In Loud Speaker Clare, a politician’s daughter, talking about Romeo and Juliet, says: “... they were in love, I mean really, truly—that doesn’t happen nowadays.” To this, Johnnie, a newspaperman, answers: “Only in Fairyland.”
would rather be a cavewoman than a doll.

Then [through the panel enters a man wearing a black cloak. He has jet-black long straight hair. His deep husky voice has the tone of “irresistible command.” He is the Master. He is fierce, strong, brutal, and he admits that he would enjoy trampling on Cinders. (“I say what I mean,” he says.) Cinders struggles, brandishing an “antique sword,” but in the moonlight the Master “dominates” her.

Later that night a young man appears to Cinders. He is blond and clean-shaven. He wears a green flannel shirt. He has the manner of a hero of romance. He is the Lover. His voice, “soft and low and tender,” woos Cinders. When they kiss, she discovers that the Lover was also the Master. (He was also the Servant and the Tall Masked Man.) Cinders feels ashamed. She says to the Lover: “There’s a serpent where your heart ought to be.” She jumps out of the window and escapes from Fairyland.

In the third act, the final actions take place in a police station as the police try to make sense out of the kidnapping. They discuss a testament which disposes of property to the businessman’s daughter and to her second cousin, whom she has not met, a fellow who under pseudonyms writes “bad” romantic novels. (One of these is entitled *The Prince of Darkness.*) This testament provides that if the cousins marry each other the romantic novelist will get considerable property; if they do not, he will get unconditional title to a villa, “Fairyland.”

The writer and Cinders enter. He had not known his cousin, so kidnapped Cinders by mistake. Now he and Cinders are married. She cannot testify against him in court. He reveals that he is the

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17) Lawson again uses this serpent-in-the-heart image in *The International.*
author of the novel that gave Cinders her theory of love. Cinders is happy with having "committed bigamy an' married the whole three of him." This is the last line of the play.

H. C. Warnack\(^{18}\) comments that *Servant-Master-Lover* has only a "fragile idea." He objects (beside the point) that the plot has "very little of the plausible." He states that the young playwright has sandwiched his ideas clumsily between a first act which means nothing at all and a third act which is both awkward and stupid.

While John Howard Lawson at 22 years of age in 1916 was trying to establish himself as a professional playwright in the commercial theater, the war in Europe was going on.

At his father’s dinner table Lawson heard much debate among the guests about America’s entry into the war. While his father opposed such folly, he felt nevertheless that America would soon become involved and he urged his son to volunteer rather than wait to be drafted.\(^{19}\)

Lawson himself felt no sympathy with the war and "avoided being drafted into the infantry"\(^{20}\) by joining the volunteer ambulance service of the American Red Cross. His service in the ambulance service is summarized as follows:

Volunteered in A. R. C. and sailed on June 16, 1917, from New York to Bordeaux; volunteer amb. driver Norton-Harjes Serv. on French Front July-Nov 1917; Verdun Campaign, capture of Hill 304 with French Div.25 in Aug; on Italian Front Nov 1917-Nov 1918; during winter and spring of 1918 at Monte Grappa; Lieut. A.R.C. Aug 1918; returned

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18) L. A. *Times*, *ibid*.
20) Lawson used these words in a public lecture that I attended at the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles, April 9, 1964.
to New York. and disch. May 3, 1919. 21)

In the Norton-Harjes Volunteer Ambulance Service Lawson served with John Dos Passos (whom he had met on board ship to France), Robert Hillyer, E. E. Cummings, Ernest Hemingway, and numerous other young men who later became well-known writers. Their work in the ambulance service was "at all times unpleasant, exhausting, dangerous, requiring a high degree of individual initiative and responsibility." 22)

Lawson's only published writing dealing directly with his experiences in the ambulance service is a letter written to his father, extracts of which were published in the New York Post: 23)

We have been having a vigorous time for the last fortnight (he writes, having had his first experience under fire in the) highly successful French offensive on the west of Verdun which has centered upon the famous hills of Morte d'Homme and Hill 304, both of which have been recaptured in the present success.

Of course there has been much danger—much more than usually goes with the ambulance service. We have been under gun-fire continuously since we arrived... Our ambulance route ran in sight of both these famous hills, through woods where a large amount of artillery was placed, and booming continually, in order to pave the way for the infantry attacks...

But... none of the firing is half as terrifying as one expects. ...an enemy shell can go off and explode right

23) October 6, 1917. p. 3. A copy of this story was given to me by the former Williams classmate of Lawson's who prefers to be anonymous. In a letter to me (January 2, 1964) Lawson says about the publication: "I was very disturbed that he [his father] gave it to the Post... as it gave a sort of war-like impression I had not wanted to give."
near you without affecting your nerves in the least.
... There is also gas, of which we have had a great deal...
Many times I have sat in the door of my dugout doing my
playwriting without the slightest nervousness. Being able
to do this has sometimes surprised me, and I am quite
unable to explain the psychology of it. The only trying
thing in the whole work for me has been the actual running
of a car full of badly wounded men. For it seems impossi­
ble to arrange the stretchers in a way to avoid shaking
and bumping fearfully. To hear this continual and inevita­
ble bumping of people with serious wounds is an unpleasant
strain on the driver.

He concludes: "I have explored some of the front trenches..., and
I even passed the front trench into one of the observation trenches
which jut out like fingers toward the German lines."

Malcolm Cowley has called the volunteer ambulance service a
college-extension course for a generation of American writers. About
this experience in war in Europe Lawson has said:

This European experience was the root and beginning of
the cultural development of my generation. It initiated the
passionate and troubled exploration of social reality which
has led in so many directions24).

An impression of John Howard Lawson during this period is
suggested by the restless character Ed Schuyler based on Lawson25)
in the "Richard Ellsworth Savage" sections of John Dos Passos' novel
1919 (1932). Discounting for fiction (and for intentional "factual

24) Mary Sanders Walden, op. cit., p. 3. (His college essays on politics
and his play Standards suggest that Lawson’s own “exploration of
social reality” was initiated earlier than this European experience.)
25) Lawson confirmed this in a personal interview in April 1964. (The
name Schuyler suggests a New York Dutch background, possibly a
Dos Passos pun re: Lawson’s upbringing in Yonkers, originally a
Dutch settlement.)
mistakes": Schuyler attended boarding school in Switzerland, but Lawson did not), we learn that in Paris in 1917—18 Schuyler lived in lodgings above Henry’s Bar (later made famous in writings by Hemingway and others). He spoke French well—at least the best French in his ambulance section. He practiced his Italian speaking with Italian officers about Nietzsche. When drinking, he sometimes stood on chairs and recited, e.g., the Erlkonig. He sometimes sang, e.g., “Aupres de ma blonde.” He sometimes made humorously serious speeches (short ones) critical of the conduct of the war and of the operations of the Red Cross. He thought the ancient Romans had known the “art of life.” He wanted to get a “foreign correspondent job that would take him out East: he had to see Persia and Afghanistan.”

In Rome, Dos Passos writes,

Ed had been living the life of Riley; he had an apartment on the Spanish stairs... He’d gotten fat. But now he was in trouble. The husband of an Italian woman he was running around with was threatening to challenge him to a duel and he was afraid there’d be a row and he’d lose his job with the Red Cross... Anyway he was sick of Italy and the Red Cross and wanted to go home. The only thing was that they were going to have a revolution in Italy and he’d like to stay and see it... “It’s not every day you get a chance to see a show like this.”

1919 describes a brief scuffle in the foyer of a theater between Ed Schuyler and the Italian woman’s husband. Afterwards, Ed says: “... a guy never seems to be able to have any fun without making other people miserable...” Richard Ellsworth Savage, the

26) Several characters in some of Lawson’s later dramas express the desire to see or to escape to exotic places.
27) In Loud Speaker the reporter Johnnie Dunne says much the same thing.
fictional *alter ego* of John Dos Passos, comments: "Ed gets in trouble everywhere... He's got a special knack." (In 1919, however, it is Richard Ellsworth Savage who gets into trouble with Red Cross authorities.)

John Howard Lawson was shocked by the war, which did away with his collegiate notions of the likelihood of "more spiritual expressions of disagreement" ("Zest for Argument," *Williams Literary Monthly*, January 1912)," and he was disillusioned with a society that "could lie endlessly about its purpose." 28) After the war he returned to Europe for two years, living chiefly in Paris.

He thought that he might want to live permanently in Europe because this was where the excitement in the arts was, and this was where artists were appreciated. 29)

John Dos Passos suggests 30) the influence of Paris on Lawson and him and others:

The war had taught us Paris. We were hardly out of uniform before we were hearing the music of Stravinsky, looking at the paintings of Picasso and Juan Gris, standing in line for opening nights of Diaghilev's Ballet Russe. *Ulysses* had just been printed... Performances like "Noces" and "Sacre du Printemps" or Cocteau's "Mariés de la Tour Eiffel" were giving us a fresh notion of what might go on the stage. We saw photographs of productions by Meyerhold and Piscator. In the motion pictures we were enormously stimulated by Eisenstein's "Cruiser Potemkin."

Lawson has told me about this period in Paris that he was "very impressed" by Cocteau's *Parade* (1917), by *Plus Ca Change* (1917), a

28) Lawson said this at a meeting of the American Studies Association of Southern California, San Fernando Valley State College, Northridge, April 8, 1961. He lectured on "The Theater of the Thirties."
Montmartre satirical revue about a time-machine which he and Dos Passos went to see several times, being "much taken" by its spirit of Commedia d'el Arte, and by Lenormand's *Les Ratés* (1918), whose rapid action and short scenes strengthened his own tendency in playwriting toward episodic dramatic structure.

In the autumn of 1917, propped up against a haystack in a little French town near Hill 304, perhaps smoking the pipe that John Dos Passos has described as "a pipe of unexampled stench.," John Howard Lawson began to write *Roger Bloomer*, the play that when produced on Broadway in 1923 brought him to the attention of the theatrical world. (At the same haystack at the same time John Dos Passos began to write *One Man's Initiation—1917* (1920).)

In the autumn of in Rome, 1918, John Howard Lawson married Kathryn Drain (her professional name) began her career as a dancer, turned to acting and then to scenic designing. She was technical director for the Theatre Guild for about five years in the late 1920's and early 1930's.

31) In 1919 John Dos Passos describes Ed Schuyler getting a similar job through the help of a high-ranking Red Cross officer who is a friend of Ed's father.
had one son named Alan (b. 1919)\(^{33}\). They were divorced in 1923\(^{34}\).

In 1920 Lawson made his first "literary contact" with motion pictures: he sold (for $5000.00, according to Jay Williams in \textit{Stage Left.} 1972) an unproduced play (apparently a light comedy) \textit{The Spice of Life} to Paramount Pictures Corporation, which never filmed it\(^{35}\). In the early 1920's he sold options to some plays (as yet unidentified): "Six or seven times he received the customary $500.00 advance on plays that were never produced\(^{36}\)."

Lawson returned to the United States in the fall of 1921. (In Europe he had already finished the first version of \textit{Processional} set in a steel strike in Pennsylvania, later changed to a coal mine strike in West Virginia.) At this time, his father, who had retired from Reuters in 1920, tried to get him as a Reuters correspondent in Europe but could not.

His father gave him and his sister each a sum of money to invest in something that would bring them an income. Lawson chose an apartment house in Greenwich Village. Through several real estate investments he received enough money to support his artistic freedom\(^{37}\).

\(^{33}\) Alan is a reversal of \textit{Nala} the hero of Lawson's \textit{A Hindoo Love Drama of} 1914, but was it intentional?

\(^{34}\) In a letter to me (undated, January 1964), Adelaide Lawson Gaylor says that they were divorced because they were "temperamentally unfit." In a letter to me (January 20, 1964) Kate Drain Lawson says: "Since it is many years since we were divorced I do not feel that I have the right to pass on... any personal information about this very fine and creative man."


\(^{37}\) Mary Sanders Walden, \textit{ibid}. This apartment house was located on Patchen place.
On the night of October 23, 1922, while John Howard Lawson was preparing *Roger Bloomer* for its Broadway production in March 1923, his brother Wendell Holmes Lawson, a chemical engineer and prosperous importer of chemicals in Montreal, Quebec, committed suicide by poisoning himself with cyanide sodium. Wendell Holmes Lawson left letters (addressed to them at 402 W. 40th Street, New York, and dated October 23, 1922) to his father Simeon Lawson and to his sister Adelaide Jaffery Lawson:

My cherished old papa:
I have made a false start and why not start anew? Why be in your sight a care and soreful reminder, maybe for years, With my own knowledge of what I have lost? Be a philosopher, dearest father. Mayhap we soon shall meet with another loved one. Take it with Grace; at least I have been a pure boy; I deserve another chance and I know I shall have it. Lovingly, Wendell.

Dearest sister:
I leave you, as you will be happier thus. You have been a wonderful sister to me. I realize it much too late. I am happy I am going to see our wonderful mother and someday you and father. May you have a long and happy life. Devotedly, Wendell.

The day before he committed suicide, Wendell Holmes Lawson had sent a telegram to his sister: “Will be home tomorrow.” The New York *Times* (ibid) interviewed Adelaide Lawson and reported:

38) *New York Times*. October 24, 1922. p. 3. (See also the Montreal *Gazette*. October 23, 1922. p. 1.) Wendell Holmes Lawson had been in business in Montreal for two years. He died in the Royal Victoria Hospital, to which he was driven at his own request in a taxicab. Doctors tried for 45 minutes to save his life. Prescriptions found in his pocket were for medicine for a person suffering from stomach trouble.

39) He also left to his father a deed, dated and witnessed October 23rd, to all his property, stock in Montreal and New York, and cash in the Bank of Hamilton, Montreal. Montreal *Gazette*, ibid.
Whether he really meant to return alive or whether he had suicide in his mind and was sending a grim hint of the impending arrival of his body, she did not know.

In a letter to me (December 16, 1963) Adelaide Lawson Gaylor says that her brother Wendell was "temperamental," but she "did not know why he should have wanted to kill himself." I have not discussed this unfortunate event with John Howard Lawson, who at that time was a little over 28 years old.

When he was a little under 30 years old, according to John Dos Passos (in a letter to me, May 18, 1963), John Howard Lawson was injured in an automobile accident which left him lame in one leg. "Though naturally he found it a nuisance," Dos Passos writes, "I don't think it had any influence on his thinking one way or another."[40]

On December 2, 1924, when the Theatre Guild laid the cornerstone of the new Theatre Guild Theatre on 52nd Street, Lawson, along with multimillionaire international financier Otto H. Kahn and producer Theresa Helburn, was a member, of the Honorary Reception Committee. In 1925, along with John Dos Passos, Michael Gold, and Genevieve Taggard, Lawson was a member of the National Executive Committee of the short-lived Proletarian Artists and Writers League.

In August 1925, John Howard Lawson married Susan Edmond, whom he had met in New York at the home of mutual friends that she had come from Texas to visit. They have had two children,

[40] In *Roger Bloomer*, finished when Lawson was about 28 years old, there is the following conversation: Eugene. I knew a kid...used to talk like you. Roger. What... what about him? Eugene. Oh, he went bad... wild... Roger. Wild? Eugene. Pst!... smashed up in a motor (car) with some women.
a son named Jeffrey (b. 1927) and a daughter named Susan Amanda (b. 1930). Almost 40 years later in a letter to me (January 2, 1964), Lawson writes: "... my marriage is ideal," and he states that all three of his children are "wonderful."

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Lawson's personal and literary history aside, the first publication of these summaries of Standards and Servant-Master-Lover may suggest the necessity of slightly adjusting current historical opinion about the kind and degree of influence of European expressionism on Lawson as a playwright and on Roger Bloomer in particular.

Gerald Rabkin enumerates seven characteristics of European expressionism which he finds in Roger Bloomer (1923), the "first native expressionistic play":

1. "Type characters" — In Standards and Servant-Master-Lover Lawson uses type characters, e.g., a stage-Irishman policeman, a cabaret dancer, a girl of the slums, et. al.

2. "Abstract characters who represent aspects of character or the personification of social or psychological types" — In Standards, there is a financier representing Social Darwinism and in Servant-Master-Lover a Woman in Blue representing Puritanism.

3. "Telegraphic dialogue" — In Standards:

Ministers... good men that sit in pulpits and talk cant about religion and repentance... men without blood in their hearts or pity in their eyes... wasters of words...

This is not precisely telegraphic dialogue, but it is headed in that direction.

4. "Telescopic characterization, whereby people who play similar

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roles in the protagonist's life are often made up to appear identical" There is no precise evidence of this in these two plays, but the structure of Standards is similar to that of Roger Bloomer in that its protagonist the dramatist and the lawyer confront a series of social enemies who play similar roles in their lives, and they are counterparts of each other.

5. "Anti-naturalism and the soliloquy and the aside" — In Standards there is no anti-naturalism, but the dialogue tends toward soliloquy in that characters hardly relate to each other, but they make short speeches expressing "standards" of life. An aside is used once. Servant-Master-Lover, a fantasy, is anti-naturalistic, one character being Masked Man, Servant, Master, Lover.

6. "Kaleidoscopic dramaturgy, whereby scenes are conceived cinematically" — There is no evidence of this in these plays, but both have dramatic (non-dramatic?) structures of short scenes which fade in and fade out.

7. "Decor, which, through its sparseness and distortion, enhances... the nightmare quality of the entire effect" — See the description (p.69) of the grotesque decor of Servant-Master-Lover's Fairyland boudoir.

Even before his Parisian experience of European expressionism, John Howard Lawson was employing similar methods of presentation. He was influenced by expressionism not so much because it was a revelation but more because it was a confirmation of what he was already doing.