Introduction

Preston Sturges was "by far the wittiest scriptwriter the English-speaking cinema has known" (Andrew Sarris).[1] He was "probably the most spectacular manipulator of sheer humor since Mark Twain" (Manny Farber).[2] He "restored to American film a sense of social satire . . . equalled only in Chaplin's films" (André Bazin).[3] "He was Hollywood's greatest writer-director, with emphasis on the former. He created a racy, malapropriate idiom whose deceptive ease would prove inimitable" (Richard Corliss).[4]

Sturges wrote and directed twelve films. The first eight were made for Paramount Pictures between 1939 and 1944: *The Great McGinty* (1940), *Christmas in July* (1940), *The Lady Eve* (1941), *Sullivan's Travels* (1942), *The Palm Beach Story* (1942), *The Great Moment* (1944), *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1944), and *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944). In partnership with Howard Hughes, Sturges wrote and directed *The Sin of Harold Diddlebock* in 1946; it was cut by Hughes and released as *Mad Wednesday* in 1947. For Twentieth Century–Fox, Sturges wrote and directed *Unfaithfully Yours* (1948) and *The Beautiful Blonde from Bashful Bend* (1949). In Paris he wrote and directed (in French and English versions) *Les Carnets du Major Thompson* [*The French They Are a Funny Race*] (1955).

Critics and other viewers generally agree that Sturges's last two films were failures. His extremely high reputation as a writer-director thus rests on ten films. This volume collects Sturges's shooting scripts for five of those films: the first four that he made for Paramount—*The Great McGinty, Christmas in July, The Lady Eve,* and *Sullivan's Travels*—and the eighth and last, *Hail the Conquering Hero.* The selection of these five for inclusion in the present volume was determined by the availability of publication rights. The grouping, although arbitrary, nevertheless has a certain logic. It allows the reader to trace Sturges's development as a writer-director in an unbroken line through his first four films, then skips to his final film in the Paramount series—which is to many, including Sturges, his finest.

Despite the time it has taken for these five scripts to be published, they are still, of course, not enough. At a minimum, *The Palm Beach Story* (1942), *The*

Great Moment (1944), *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1944), *The Sin of Harold Diddlebock* (1946), and *Unfaithfully Yours* (1948) should also be published. Among the scripts that Sturges wrote in the 1930s for other directors, at least *The Power and the Glory* (1933), *Diamond Jim* (1935), *Easy Living* (1937), and *Remember the Night* (1940) should be made available. In addition, there are a number of interesting Sturges scripts that were never filmed, among them a version of *Roman Holiday* (1953) Sturges wrote for William Wyler that is decidedly less sweet than the filmed version.

The five scripts printed in this volume appear exactly as Sturges wrote them, photocopied from the last version of each before shooting began.[5] As studio production scripts, they follow a prescribed form—they were designed to be used not only by the director and the actors but by budget personnel, set designers, the costume department, the camera and sound crews, and so on. Among other divisions, the scripts are broken down by "sequences" that are marked "A," "B," "C," "D," "E," "F," "G," "H," "J," "K," etc. (There are no sequences designated "I," perhaps to avoid confusion with the Roman numeral.) The studio script's use of the term "sequence" is not susceptible to rigorous definition. A new sequence heading usually marks a shift in time and/or in setting, but other temporal and/or spatial shifts may take place within a sequence. Considered overall, the sequence is simply a convenient division of the script, and hence of the film-to-be, into large sections. Of the scripts in this volume, *Down Went McGinty* (*The Great McGinty*) has nine sequences, *The New Yorkers* (*Christmas in July*) six, *The Lady Eve* ten, *Sullivan's Travels* ten, and *The Little Marine* (*Hail the Conquering Hero*) five. The number of sequences in a script does not correspond to its overall number of pages or to the running time of the finished film, as the following table indicates:

	Number of pages	Number of sequences	Running time of film
Down Went McGinty	134	9	81 min.
The New Yorkers	111	6	70 min.
The Lady Eve	155	10	97 min.
Sullivan's Travels	145	10	90 min.
The Little Marine	137	5	101 min.

A studio production script contains a good deal of information besides scene-setting descriptions and dialogue. For instance, each page of a script bears the date on which it was completed or, more precisely, on which it was typed at the studio. This date is placed at the bottom left of the page in all the scripts printed below except *The Little Marine* (*Hail the Conquering Hero*), in which it is printed at the upper right of the page. *Down Went McGinty* (*The Great McGinty*), *The New Yorkers* (*Christmas in July*), and *The Lady Eve* have the same date marking on each page; the pages of *Sullivan's Travels* and *The Little Marine* (*Hail the Conquering Hero*) do not all have the same date markings. Each page of the scripts printed below is also designated by the letter of

the sequence in which it is located. The pages of Sequence A are designated "A-1," "A-2," etc. The pages of the sequences after Sequence A are marked both by the sequence in which they occur and by their place in the overall script. Thus the first page of Sequence B of *The Lady Eve* is marked "B-1 (8)," indicating that it is the first page of Sequence B and the eighth page of the script as a whole; the last page of the script is marked "K-9 (155)." (In addition, of course, each script page in this volume is paginated consecutively by numbers placed at the bottom of the page.) In the introductions to the five scripts, page references are always to the overall numbering of the script in question, thus "(page A-1)" for the first page of *The Lady Eve,* "(page 155)" for its last page, etc. It should also be noted that, for better or for worse, the terms "screenplay" and "script" are used interchangeably throughout this introduction and the individual introductions to the five scripts.

Finally, like all studio production scripts, the screenplays printed here are organized according to the successive shots of the film-to-be. These shots are numbered according to the sequence in which they occur—"A-1," "A-2," etc. (Needless to say, there is a possibility for confusion between such shot designations and the sequence page numbers. In the introductions below, references are always to page numbers unless otherwise specified.) Following the shot number, Sturges describes the subject of the shot in capital letters. At the beginning of a sequence—or of a new scene within the sequence—this description always includes the setting of the shot, which appears in underlined capital letters, presumably for the benefit of production staff members. If the setting is clear from the description of the first shot of a sequence or scene, it is not repeated in the subsequent shots of that passage. If the shot includes camera movement or character action or if a particular demeanor of actors or quality of objects, etc., is desired, that is specified in lower case below the shot designation. ("Dialogue continuities," which are transcripts of a film's dialogue taken down after a film has been shot, omit all such information, everything indeed except dialogue.)

Preserving the notation of studio production scripts makes for a somewhat cluttered page, but it has its advantages. The general reader will find them highly readable and will have immediate access to Sturges's superb dialogue. In smoothed-over, continuous scripts—those published without the original page numbers or breakdowns into shots—it is often hard to find things. For critics, teachers, and students, reproduction of an original script preserves its value as a research document, whereas an adapted script becomes an additional puzzle to be solved and thereby compounds the problems of interpretation. In any case, Sturges did not adapt or otherwise prepare his screenplays for publication in his lifetime; to attempt to do so for him would be presumptuous in the extreme.

In addition to the obvious benefits of having Sturges's screenplays in print, there are a number of delightful surprises. The scripts provide access to Sturges's work process, including notes to himself and other items that do not

appear on the screen. For instance, the second shot of *The Lady Eve* is described thus on page A-1:

> CHARLES PIKE, PROF. JONES, MUGGSY, TWO YOUNG SCIENTISTS, SEVEN INDIANS AND THE BRAZILIAN PILOT OF THE MOTOR LAUNCH—IN THE SELVA AT THE EDGE OF THE JUTAHY
>
> In other words, the bank of a tropical river.

Even Sturges's censor-dodging strategies show up occasionally in his scripts. In *Sullivan's Travels:*

> THE GIRL
> Then don't get Ritzie. And I'll tell you some other things I haven't got; I haven't got a yacht, or a pearl necklace, or a fur coat, or a country seat or even a winter seat . . . and I could use a new girdle too.
> (Protection: stockings) (page 52)

"Girdle" got by in this case, but elsewhere in his scripts many words, phrases, lines, and situations—whose censorship problems were unforeseen by Sturges or which were not so readily sacrificed by him—did not. Numerous instances of Sturges's censorship problems are discussed in the introductions to the individual scripts.

Some of Sturges's notes take us to the heart of the directing process itself and hence to relations between Sturges the writer and Sturges the director (see the frontispiece). Toward the beginning of a large group dialogue in *Hail the Conquering Hero*, Judge Dennis, Doc Bissell, and the other town fathers confront Woodrow, his mother, Libby, her aunt, and the six Marines. Sturges has duly indicated cutting back and forth between the two groups:

> C-39 THE JUDGE AND THE OTHERS . . .
> C-40 WOODROW AND HIS GROUP . . .
> C-41 THE JUDGE AND HIS GROUP . . .
> C-42 WOODROW AND HIS GROUP (pages 58–59)

Then he writes:

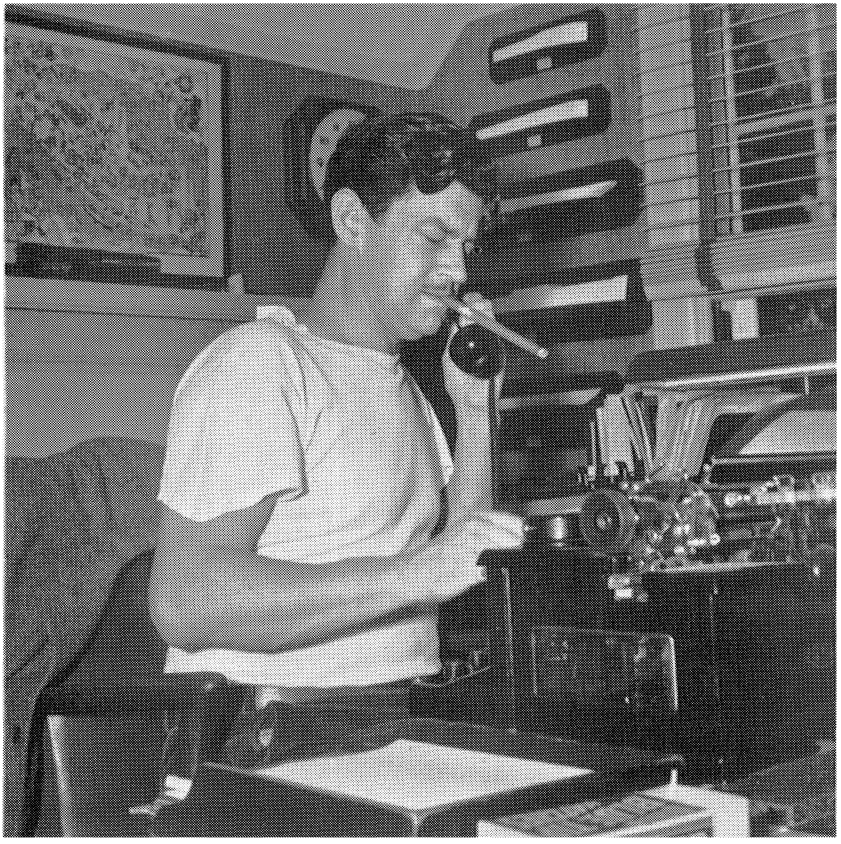
> NOTE: I am tired of cutting back and forth. The rest of this will be written as a master scene. (page 59)

Sturges does write it that way until the scene concludes, or merges into another scene, two pages later. In the filmed passage, however, he continues to cut between the two groups and among closer shots within each group.

Sturges the writer and Sturges the director have had their respective partisans. Andrew Sarris said of Sturges that "all his screenwriting efforts in the Thirties would now be of only the most esoteric concern if he had not made the decisive leap from the writer's cubicle to the director's chair."[6] Evidently responding to Sarris, Richard Corliss wrote a few years later in his book on Hollywood screenwriters: "While his direction, especially of extended dialogue scenes, shows far more control than contemporary critics were willing

to grant it, Sturges's direction would be of only the most esoteric concern today if he had not written eight or ten of Hollywood's best screenplays."[7] This opposition at first glance resembles a Kantian antinomy—each proposition appears to be necessarily true yet both cannot be true. The opposition itself, however, may be questioned, arising as it does in a dispute about the relative importance of directors and screenwriters generally. Perhaps Sturges is not a good example for such disputes—he was hardly a typical screenwriter or a typical director.

Sturges was the sole major Hollywood director who filmed only his own original screenplays. *The Great Moment* draws its facts from a published biography, but otherwise Sturges—his last two films aside—never adapted his screenplays from someone else's story, novel, or play. The exceptions of *Easy Living* and *The Lady Eve*, based on stories by Vera Caspary and Monckton



Sturges the busy screenwriter–typing, smoking, and telephoning at the same time. (He was also interested in yachts–note the hull models on the wall.)

Hoffe respectively, only prove the rule. The stories are so completely transformed by Sturges that screen credit to the "original authors" seems ludicrous. As a screenwriter, moreover, Sturges never, as far as I know, collaborated with another writer. He was sometimes assigned, especially in the 1930s, to improve or rewrite the scripts of a prior writer or writers who had departed a project. Even then Sturges preferred, as often as possible, to discard the prior work and start all over again. It is perhaps not surprising that Sturges as writer-director was not able to meet such exacting standards for much more than a decade—no one else was able to sustain them for even that long. (Billy Wilder has functioned as a successful writer-director for an astonishing five decades, but he has always collaborated with other writers and has frequently adapted novels and plays.)

Separate introductions follow for each of the screenplays collected in this volume, detailing their genesis and development. For the most part, these introductions treat Sturges's direction as, in effect, the final stage of script revision. This perspective leaves out most of what is usually defined as direction, but the fact that Sturges directed his own scripts is enormously important in itself. Negatively speaking, it means that no other person altered the script in question by adding or subtracting things, however small, by imposing a questionable pace, by selecting the wrong cast members, or by guiding them incorrectly. The most common—and bitter—complaint of Hollywood writers of all eras is that their work has been distorted by other writers and/or by the director. Sturges had the opportunity to alter his dialogue, even to omit scenes or to change the order of scenes if he chose to, during shooting or in the editing. His own brilliance and his tireless revising aside, this opportunity resulted in a final polish and perfection that few scripts have ever enjoyed. It is for these reasons that the introductions below venture frequently forward from the early versions of Sturges's screenplays, to the final versions printed here, to the actual film versions—for they constitute a single continuous process of revision.

It should be pointed out, finally, that there are many differences in dialogue, most of them minor, between the final scripts and the films, and that the majority of these are not noted in the introductions. There simply was not space to do so. (Note, however, that the passages of dialogue quoted in the introductions have been corrected to accord with the film version.) An excellent activity for prospective screenwriters, students, or anyone else interested in Sturges's work is to see one of his films with script in hand and to make notations of differences.

* * *

Mary Dempsey, who later called herself Mary Desmond, Mary d'Este, and finally Mary Desti, was born in Chicago in 1871. At some point she married

Edmund P. Biden, about whom little is known. Their son Edmund Preston Biden was born on August 29, 1898. In late 1900 or early 1901 Mary d'Este left Biden for Europe and a singing career, taking her infant son; she called him Preston because she disliked the name Edmund.

In Paris she met Isadora Duncan (the famous modern dancer), a few years younger than she, and soon moved into her studio; Preston was taken to Giverny to live with Isadora's mother. At the request of her mother, Mary returned to Chicago after a year with Isadora. On October 3, 1901, she married an old sweetheart, Solomon Sturges, a stockbroker from a Chicago banking family, who legally adopted Preston in January 1902.

One of the liberties that Solomon allowed Mary was her annual visit to Europe, up to six months a year. (When Mary wanted to extend her license to eleven months a year, the marriage was over.) Mary returned to Europe nearly every year, and she always took young Preston with her. In 1903 Mary left Preston with a family named Rousseau in Joinville-le-Pont long enough for him to regard the adults as *maman* and *papa* and their son as a brother; during this period, Preston's English almost disappeared. Once in a while, Mary would return, a beautiful lady in a cloud of perfume, arriving in a shining conveyance with presents for everyone.

In 1904 Mary spent six months with Isadora at Bayreuth under the sponsorship of Cosima Wagner. A photo from this stay shows Preston in breastplate, accompanied by Temple Duncan, Isadora's niece, whom he later called his first love. "She kept me broke for years buying her highly perfumed soap and doll-sized Singer sewing machines," he remembered.[8] The children were left at an inn with a governess while Mary and Isadora shared a peasant's villa close by. The party eventually moved on to Berlin, Hanover, Florence, and Venice and was then met by Solomon; he put Isadora on a train to Berlin and returned to Chicago with Mary and Preston.

Sturges, who never thought of Solomon as a stepfather, later remembered a night in 1907 after he and Mary had returned to Chicago following a long absence. His parents argued at length, decided to separate, and at last asked Preston to choose Paris with his mother or Chicago with his father. He chose to stay with his father, but Solomon said, "I am not your father," after which the boy cried inconsolably. He was taken to Paris despite his wishes and in the following years was enrolled at a series of schools—the Lycée Janson (Paris), 1907–11; L'École des Roches (Normandy), 1911–13; La Villa (Lausanne), 1913–14.

One of Mary's later husbands, a Turk whose father had been personal physician to the sultan, gave Mary a skin cream that she decided to market as "Le Secret du Harem." Thus was born Maison Desti, a cosmetics emporium opened in Paris with the aid of Paris Singer, sewing machine heir and father of a child by Isadora. A shop in London and then in New York followed; there was also a seashore branch in Deauville, open for one summer, which Preston managed. With the declaration of war in 1914 Mary sent Preston home, and Solo-

mon enrolled him at Irving Preparatory School, which regularly sent students on to Columbia University. But when Mary fired the head of her New York shop, Preston left school to manage it. He remained with Maison Desti until 1916, then worked as a runner for the brokerage firm F. B. Keech, and finally enrolled in pilot training in the Army Signal Corps. He learned to fly, but the war ended before he saw active service.

After the war Preston discussed possible careers with his father, but after returning briefly to F. B. Keech, he ended up once more running his mother's business in New York when she returned to Paris and Isadora. Finding management of a retail beauty shop less than a manly occupation, Preston closed the New York shop in 1920 and moved the operation to Brooklyn to run it as a manufacturing and wholesale concern. For several years he made a modest living and also saw many plays and read, among other things, H. L. Mencken's *The American Language.* In 1922 Sturges lived with Estelle De Wolfe Mudge Godfrey, whom he had wooed away from an older husband, in an apartment he designed and helped build behind the Desti plant, now at another location in Brooklyn. They married in December 1923, when Estelle's divorce was final. The business did fairly well for a while and became even more successful when Preston landed a contract to supply $1,000 worth of products a month to another company.

When Isadora returned to Russia with her husband in late 1923, Mary was stranded in Paris, her fifth marriage at an end; she returned to New York and reclaimed the business from Preston. He was appalled and argued that the business had been his responsibility since 1915, that he had made it profitable, and above all that she had given it to him. However, Mary was adamant; although the action estranged her from her son for some years, she took over the business in November 1924. Preston retained the rights to Kiss-Proof, the lipstick that he had developed, which brought him some income for another year or so. He and Estelle took an apartment on 39th Street in Manhattan and spent the warm months of the year at an unheated estate that Estelle purchased in Westchester County. Supported mainly by her trust income, the couple lived happily for about two years. Preston continued sales of his kiss-proof lipstick and worked on a series of inventions that, however ingenious, he never promoted successfully. In January 1927, when Sturges suggested they go to Paris to promote a possible new venture, Estelle stunned Preston by telling him she no longer loved him. He responded that it would be immoral for her to continue to occupy the bed of a man she did not love. This was an even greater shock, he later said, than Solomon's denial of his fatherhood twenty years earlier. Wounded deeply but apparently too proud to argue, Sturges packed his bag and left for Chicago.

Not until the first night at his father's apartment did the pain of the separation hit Preston. He sat on the floor by his father's bed all night, holding his father's hand. Solomon assured him that he would get over his loss, but as the pain grew worse, Preston seriously considered suicide. Only his witnessing

the death of a construction worker in a fall from a scaffold decided him against the idea. He left for New York immediately to find Estelle. She was not at their apartment, and for three despairing weeks he could find no trace of her. When she did appear—she had been at Solomon's apartment in Chicago but had sworn him to secrecy—she was not interested in continuing the marriage. Unable to imagine life without his most cherished companion, Preston then suggested that they stay together for a time so he could accustom himself to the idea of their being apart forever. Estelle laughed. Sturges later said that this taught him that when a woman is finished with a man, she is finished.

Preston and his mother reconciled at this time, each promising the other that nothing would come between them again. (Nothing did.) Seriously worried about him, his mother and father agreed that Mary would give Maison Desti back to Preston and that Solomon would provide $1,000 a month to refurbish it and get it back on its feet. A guaranteed $1,000 a month gave enough financial security to put Mary on the next boat to Europe and Isadora. Shortly thereafter, Isadora was killed in a car accident, which Mary witnessed.

During this time Preston began his second song-writing career. (His first song had been published when he was a schoolboy.) Ted Snyder, quite famous in his day, taught him the concept of the "wedding of the words and music." (Years later when Ted was broke, Preston opened Snyder's restaurant for him to repay his kindness.) However, no songs from this collaboration were published.

At Christmas of 1927, during a visit to his father's tailor to be measured for some new suits, Preston had an attack of acute appendicitis. He almost died before medical advice was sought, and he spent six weeks in the hospital. There he wrote an operetta based on Irvin S. Cobb's *Speaking of Operations*, Solomon bringing him books on drama to help in his writing. Most useful was Brander Matthews's *A Study of the Drama*, which emphasized audience response rather than formal values for their own sake. He soon decided that his hospital play was worthless, a product of anesthesia and drugs.

Recuperating at his father's apartment, he was also going out with a successful actress, who taunted him with his failures and his lack of money. One night, after he had assessed her failings in retaliation, she responded that she was writing a play about a bore and that he was the model. Stung, he derisively announced that if she could write a play, he could write one too and, furthermore, that his would be produced first and run longer. He went home and wrote Act III of *The Guinea Pig* that night. The play concerns a young woman novelist who has written a romantic bestseller and is hired by a New York producer to turn it into a play. She is unable, however, to write a convincing seduction scene. A young man she meets in the producer's outer office becomes her way of finding out "exactly what does a young man say to a young woman to make her surrender herself instantly." The girl, not surprisingly, eventually falls in love with the young man. The play's funniest lines, the critics later agreed, belonged not to the leads but to Sam Small, the fur dealer-turned-producer

who commissions the girl's play; Sturges had apparently based the character on the thickly accented professors he had known in Europe. Sturges convinced the Wharf Players of Provincetown to put on the play, gathered some good notices, and set out to seek a Broadway production.

Through an actor friend he got a job as assistant stage manager for a play produced by the successful director Brock Pemberton. When no one was interested in *The Guinea Pig*, Sturges produced the play himself on $2,500 donated by the hostess of a dinner party he attended. With the advice of Charles H. Abramson a low-budget production was staged, its opening timed for the return of the major critics from the Christmas holidays. Sturges was fortunate to get Alexander Carr, a well-known stage and screen actor, who brought Sam Small vividly to life. Carr also showed Sturges how to "point" his dialogue. In one scene Sturges had Small correct the girl's opinion of a third party: "No, dearie. He was a damn fool. Excuse me to contradict you." Carr turned the line around: "Excuse me to contradict you . . . but he was a damn fool."[9] (Sturges later summoned Carr from New York to play Mr. Schindel in *Christmas in July*.) The "uncertain little comedy" was praised by George S. Kaufman in the *New York Times* for having "quite a little simple and entertaining humor," and it ran sixty-four performances.

Sturges then joined a touring company of *Frankie and Johnnie* as assistant stage manager and actor. After *Frankie and Johnnie*, he was assistant stage manager for *Goin' Home* and then for a road company of *Hot Bed*, which he left in Chicago when it was closed by the police.

At his father's house Sturges wrote (in six days, as he later boasted) *Strictly Dishonorable*, a speakeasy comedy in which the sophisticated, foreign-born opera singer wins the girl from the clean-cut American boy. The most comic parts were Judge Dempsey, a chronic patron, and Patrolman Mulligan, neither of whom was a stickler for the rulebook. Sturges sent it to Pemberton, who wrote back immediately that, with work on the second and third acts, he would direct an August production. In stormy rehearsals and previews Pemberton forced Sturges to rewrite much of the play and made changes of his own in his work with the actors. Sturges acknowledges the collaboration of all concerned in the published version of the play: "A play, as produced, is rarely the work of one individual. During the rehearsal period, suggestions are accepted from everyone within shouting distance. Many of these suggestions are excellent, and all of them are used. It is impossible to list here the names of all the people responsible for *Strictly Dishonorable* as it stands; I thank them all, and spend my royalties to their good health."[10] At the time, however, Sturges resented the rewrites, feeling that Pemberton was undermining his work; often the two did not speak. The play was a great success, running 557 performances in New York alone. Sturges enjoyed the fame and the money but seems to have had a strong desire to succeed thenceforth without Pemberton's interference.

Sturges next wrote *Recapture* (1930), a comedy-drama with a tragic ending evidently based on his relationship with Estelle. An ex-husband seeks to recap-

ture the love of his ex-wife and succeeds in Act I, both have doubts in Act II, she dies in an elevator accident in Act III. The venture was opposed by Pemberton and Abramson, who now shared an apartment with Sturges. Both of them urged him to write another comedy. The play opened in January 1930, was deplored by the critics, and ran twenty-four performances. (When Noël Coward's *Private Lives* opened later, Sturges noted that it was *Recapture* with a happy ending.)

By the time *Recapture* opened, Sturges was involved in another project considered by his theater friends to be even more dubious. H. Maurice Jacquet, a friend from his songwriting days, had written an operetta that had been produced expensively and had flopped. But he had saved the scenery and costumes and wanted to try again. Sturges agreed to write a new book and lyrics and some new songs to go with the sets and costumes on hand. To escape Abramson's outrage and the skepticism of others, Sturges left New York on February 10, 1930 (the same night that *Strictly Dishonorable* opened in Chicago), for the Palm Beach home of Paris Singer.

On the train he met heiress Eleanor Post Hutton, then twenty. They were married, despite her family's opposition, on April 12, 1930. Soon after, Sturges's mother returned from Europe in ill health, which she attributed to the shock of Isadora's death in 1927, and as a result, a honeymoon trip on Sturges's yacht, *Recapture*, was postponed. Then, backed by all of Sturges's available money, the operetta, retitled *The Well of Romance*, opened in November 1930, but it failed to excite critical or popular interest and folded after eight performances. Mary Desti died in April 1931; Eleanor left for Europe in June the same year—to continue her singing lessons. Sturges had apparently dominated Eleanor, had not taken her seriously, and had been depressed at his two failures and his mother's illness.

Sturges then worked on a bedroom farce called *Unfaithfully Yours* and wrote *A Cup of Coffee*, a three-act play about a slogan-contest winner. He gained weight and wore a flowing moustache that made him look much older than he was. He patronized a number of dime-a-dance halls and eventually wrote *Child of Manhattan*, which opened March 1, 1932, about a millionaire who falls in love with a dance-hall girl. The critics found it coarse on the one hand and trite on the other; although it ran eighty-seven performances, audiences also seemed to find it distasteful. While writing the play, Sturges asked Eleanor to return and, when she did not, he sailed for Paris to tell her of his resolve to be a better husband. But she had been enjoying her independence and the attentions of many titled suitors and was cool to Sturges. He wrote Abramson from Paris, "I'm terribly in love . . . but if you could only see her, Charley, she is unbelievably beautiful and smart."[11] She declined to return but apparently renewed her commitment to the marriage. When *Child of Manhattan* failed, he borrowed money to go to Paris again, angering the producer by leaving the show when it needed work. Eleanor asked how much he would accept for a divorce; insulted, he overlooked $100,000 he figured she owed him and said,

"It will cost you one courteous request, madame, and a polite thank-you when it is all over." Back in New York, however, he discovered that he could communicate with her only through her lawyers.

Before he met Eleanor, Sturges had done two filmscript rewrites for the Paramount Astoria studio on Long Island—*The Big Pond,* a Maurice Chevalier vehicle, in 1929 and *Fast and Loose* in 1930. He received only "dialogue" credit on these films, but he earned twelve thousand dollars for less than a month's work. *Strictly Dishonorable* was filmed in 1931 and *Child of Manhattan* in 1932, both under previously negotiated contracts. On the basis of the former, Carl Laemmle of Universal Pictures offered Sturges a contract, which he accepted. Never intending to stay, he went to Hollywood in 1932 in order to repair his fortunes. He kept his Manhattan apartment and his boat but took with him his secretary, Bianca Gilchrist, the estranged wife of a songwriter friend, and two cronies who followed in his Lincoln. In fact, he stayed in Hollywood for twenty years. For Laemmle he wrote an adaptation of H. G. Wells's *The Invisible Man*—ignoring, as was to become his habit, the eight previous attempts in the studio's file. In the end his version, like the others, was not used.

He stayed on in the studio bungalow and did three weeks' complimentary work on a comedy released later as *They Just Had to Get Married* (1933). "I hope that this bread cast upon the waters will return as ham sandwiches," he remarked.[12] He then wrote *The Power and the Glory,* which bore some relation to the life of Eleanor's grandfather, C. W. Post, a self-made millionaire who had killed himself at age fifty-five for unknown reasons. From time to time Eleanor had told him stories about her grandfather's life, and although nonchronological, they had a certain cohesiveness. Sturges thought he could successfully use that nonchronological structure to tell a story on film. *The Power and the Glory* may well have been the first use of "voice-under" in film. Sturges was hailed for inventing "narratage," and the script was displayed under glass in the lobby of the New York theater in which the film opened. Narratage included the voice of Tom Garner's old secretary remembering long-past conversations while the screen depicted the players mouthing the words we hear in the secretary's voice. With its tycoon subject and its nonchronological flashback structure, *The Power and the Glory* is a striking anticipation of the theme and method of *Citizen Kane* (1941). It differs most from the later work perhaps in its lugubrious direction by William K. Howard, who flattens the potential variety of its scenes into monotony and the bold complexity of its structure into sheer anticlimax.

Sturges wrote *The Power and the Glory* on speculation, as he was accustomed to do at this period, reasoning that no playwright gets better terms. (Later he was to decry "the Hollywood disease" of being unable to write unless on salary.) Jesse L. Lasky admired the script and agreed to film it exactly as written, offering Sturges a percentage of the profits against a $17,500 advance. This arrangement frightened many producers; B. P. Schulberg of Paramount wrote in *The Hollywood Reporter* against the percentage deal, the nonrevision clause, and particularly the use of a single screenwriter. Sturges wrote

in defense of the arrangement; he also broke precedent by being present on the set during shooting. Indeed, several performers averred that they had never seen a writer before. Ostensibly serving as dialogue director, Sturges sought to learn as much about filmmaking as possible. *The Power and the Glory* was admired by critics and did well at first in the large city theaters but it was not commercially successful.

Sturges rented a house in the Hollywood hills, built a schooner, and developed a number of friendships among writers and humorists of the time. He wrote a political comedy, *The Vagrant,* in 1933, but after the failure of the much-touted *The Power and the Glory,* no studio was interested. He wrote a screenplay based on *The Green Hat* in eight weeks at MGM, but his contract was not renewed. Harry Cohn hired him on a comparable basis for Columbia and soon also fired him. He did some work on *Imitation of Life* (1934), then wrote the screenplays for *Thirty Day Princess* and *We Live Again* (1934), the latter an adaptation of Tolstoy's *Resurrection* for Rouben Mamoulian and Samuel Goldwyn. On the basis of that film, typecast for the moment as a specialist in literary adaptations, he was rehired at Universal for $1,500 a week.

Sturges wrote the script for *The Good Fairy* (1934), based on a Molnar play, for William Wyler and wrote a new screenplay for *Diamond Jim* (1935), another tycoon story, thought to be one of his best scripts. On both films Sturges was often on the set, observing and rewriting to some degree. A. Edward Sutherland, the director of *Diamond Jim,* often conferred with him on the nuances of scenes about to be shot. They fought the producer for their ending—Jim commits suicide by overeating—and won. Sturges received sole screen credit for *The Good Fairy* for the first time since *The Power and the Glory;* two prior writers received an adaptation credit on *Diamond Jim,* although Sturges had characteristically abandoned their script, and even the biography of Brady on which it was based, to begin again from scratch.

Sturges's salary was now $2,500 a week, and he had several offers. He did two rewrites for Universal, *Next Time We Love* (1935) and *Love Before Breakfast* (1935), vehicles for Margaret Sullavan and Carole Lombard respectively. Songs that he co-wrote appeared in *The Gay Deception* (1935) and *One Rainy Afternoon* (1936). Around this time Sturges also wrote a story and screenplay called *Song of Joy,* about a studio that has hired an opera singer for $19,000 a week and has to invent a picture for her in four weeks. Although Universal bought the story and screenplay, Sturges's stinging satire of producers, yes-men, writers, and directors did not appeal to his friend Sutherland or to anyone else, apparently to Sturges's genuine surprise. (See the introduction to *Sullivan's Travels* below.)

In March 1936 Sturges was hired by Paramount to write *Hotel Haywire* (1937), a vehicle for Burns and Allen that was eventually rewritten and made with other players. This led to a two-year contract with Paramount at $2,500 a week, Sturges's first regular employment by a studio, beginning September 29, 1936.

Sturges's first Paramount assignment was to Arthur Hornblow, Jr., who

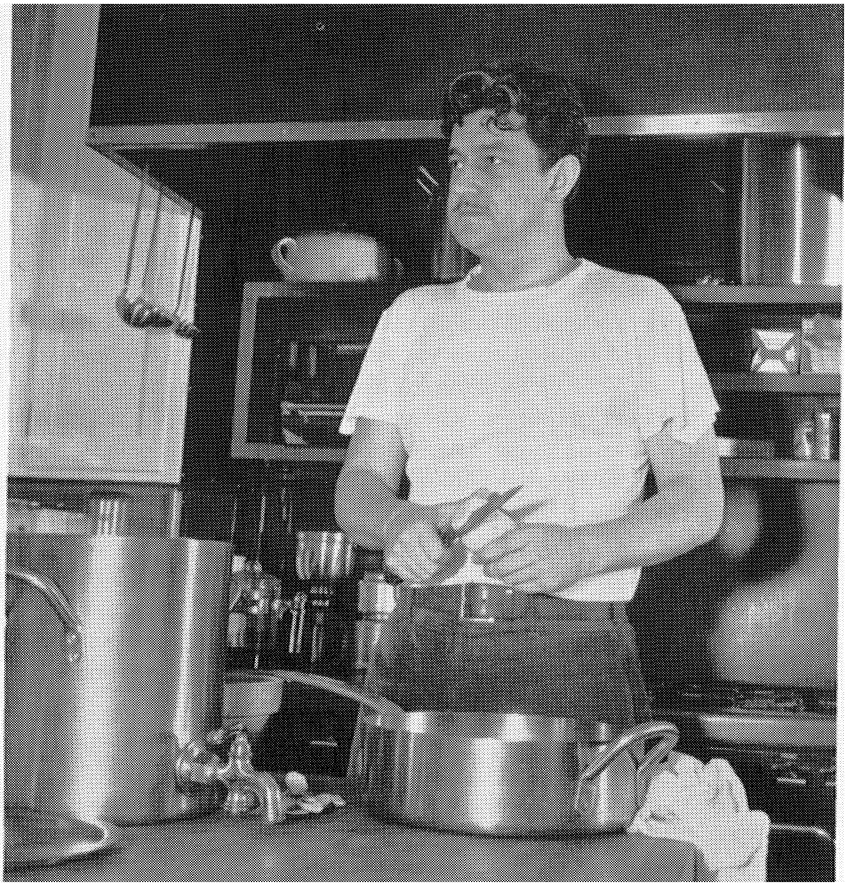
asked him to turn *Easy Living,* a Vera Caspary story owned by the studio, into a screenplay. The story concerned a poor cosmetician who impulsively steals a sable coat from one of her clients. Deception piles on deception, and she eventually loses both the man she loves and the coat itself. In Sturges's version, the coat is thrown from a high-rise by a millionaire banker (Edward Arnold) trying to teach his wife a lesson. It lands on Mary Smith (Jean Arthur), who is passing by on a bus. She tries to return the coat, but the banker insists she keep it and buys her a new hat. She loses her job but because everyone (falsely) thinks she is having an affair with the banker, she gets a luxurious hotel suite, room service, and beautiful clothes free.

Easy Living is Sturges's most explicit satire on the irrationality of the stock market, capitalism, and the lives lived under it. In one day a millionaire's son (Ray Milland) can be reduced to working in the Automat and a poor clerk can rise to living in a posh hotel. A coat that costs $58,000 is worth so little to a banker that he can throw it away, and worth so much to a clerk that she cannot grasp that it will utterly change her life. The stock market fluctuates on the unthinking words of a clerk, and fortunes are thereby made and lost. The son's silly buy-and-sell formulas for the stock market make millions, and he goes from total failure to total success in one day. A girl's notoriety makes her a walking advertisement for expensive goods; money flows toward her in expectation of a market break-through and a hotel's fortunes depend on her.

Sturges had given his father $15,000 of the proceeds of *Strictly Dishonorable* to invest—just before the crash of 1929. This was lost, as was most of Solomon's business. Perhaps as a consequence, Sturges did not invest the money he earned as a screenwriter in the thirties and as a writer-director in the forties, a decision that cost him dearly in the long run. (With the large sums he earned, Sturges built boats, opened and continually supplied capital to restaurants—first Snyder's, then The Players—bought and remodeled a house, opened and continually supplied capital for the Sturges Engineering Company, paid salaries for household staff, paid alimony and child support, and so on. By the time of World War II, he was in the 96 percent tax bracket.) *Easy Living* is Sturges's light-hearted revenge on Wall Street or, as it is called in the film, Broad Street. J. B. Ball is "the bull of Broad Street," which becomes, in one marvelous transposition, "the Ball of Bull Street."

After *Easy Living,* Sturges worked on *Port of Seven Seas* (1937), *College Swing* (1937), and *Never Say Die* (1938). *If I Were King* (1938), a film about François Villon directed by Frank Lloyd, with Ronald Colman and Basil Rathbone, engaged his interest far more than these. Sturges entirely rewrote the forty-year-old play on which the film was based, translated Villon's poetry himself, and in some cases invented his own.

Bianca Gilchrist, who was living with Sturges and supervising reconstruction of his house, left him when he seemed to have little time for her amidst an engineering company he set up to develop his inventions, a restaurant he was establishing, and other activities. During this time Sturges met Louise Tevis, who was separated from her husband, a man Sturges knew slightly. They fell in



love and were married in Reno, when her divorce was final, on November 7, 1938. In Reno Sturges worked on *Two Bad Hats* from a Monckton Hoffe story of the same name, finishing a draft on November 30, 1938; it was later revised and directed by Sturges himself as *The Lady Eve.* This project was developed for the Paramount producer Albert Lewin, with whom Sturges enjoyed working but who left Paramount in 1939. (See the introduction to *The Lady Eve* below.)

Another project for Lewin was *Beyond These Tears,* which became *The Amazing Marriage* and finally *Remember the Night* (1940). Lewin's memos helped shape the plot of this film and, to some degree, of *Eve. Remember the Night* is an unusual Sturges script—sentimental, romantic, gentle. In it a district attorney (Fred MacMurray) prosecutes a shoplifter (Barbara Stanwyck) just before Christmas. He wins a continuance over the holidays, undercutting her lawyer's lachrymose work on the jury. Feeling guilty, he arranges her bail; she is dropped at his door by mistake and he ends up taking her to his Indiana home for Christmas, where everyone likes her and he falls in love. He has told his mother