Guide to the John Gassner Papers

MS 560

compiled by Susan Brady with Eleanor Lim

May 1992

Yale University Library
P.O. Box 208240
New Haven, CT 06520-8240
mssa.assist@yale.edu
http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/
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Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Manuscripts and Archives
Yale University Library
P.O. Box 208240
New Haven, CT 06520-8240
mssa.assist@yale.edu
http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/

**CALL NUMBER:** MS 560

**CREATOR:** Gassner, John, 1903-1967

**TITLE:** John Gassner papers

**DATES:** 1950–1964

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 0.5 linear feet (1 box)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** The papers consist of correspondence, teaching files, and miscellaneous clippings relating to John Gassner’s activities as a professor of playwriting at Yale University.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0560

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**Requesting Instructions**

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0560.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html. The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

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**Administrative Information**

**Immediate Source of Acquisition**

The Yale School of Drama transferred the papers to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in the 1970s; the Beinecke Library transferred them to Manuscripts and Archives in 1990.

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**Conditions Governing Access**

The materials are open for research.
Biographical / Historical

John Gassner was born in Marajaros-Sziget, Hungary on January 30, 1903, and emigrated to the United States with his family when he was eight years old. He received an A.B. (1924) and M.A. (1925) from Columbia University, and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Gassner began his career as a book reviewer for the New York Herald-Tribune, a position he held from 1926 to 1928. From 1931 to 1944 he was play editor and chairman of the play department of the Theater guild. He adopted Emil Ludwig’s Versailles, and with Worthington Minor prepared the acting version of Stefan Zweik’s Jeremiah for the Theater Guild. With Theresa Helburn he conducted the Bureau of New Plays from 1938 to 1942, which helped to discover and give scholarships to new American playwrights.

During his career Gassner taught dramatic criticism and playwriting at colleges and universities including Hunter College, Columbia University, the University of Michigan, Queens College and the New School for Social Research. In 1956 he joined the faculty of the Yale School of Drama as the Sterling Professor of Playwriting, a position he held until his death.

Gassner was drama critic for publications including New Theatre Magazine, The Forum, Time, and Educational Theatre Journal. A prolific writer, he authored Theater at the Crossroads, Producing the Play, Form and Idea in Modern Theater, Masters of the Drama, and Directions in Modern Theater and Drama. Gassner also edited numerous play anthologies including Treasury of the Theatre and Best American Plays. He was a contributing editor of Theatre Arts and advising editor of Tulane Drama Review and Enciclopedia dello Spectacolo.

Gassner was a member of the New York Drama Critics Circle and the Outer Circle, for which he served as president. From 1957, until his resignation in 1963, Gassner was a member of the Pulitzer Prize committee. He received many honors during his career including an honorary M.A. from Yale University in 1956 and the American Educational Theater Award in 1959.

In 1926 Gassner married Mollie Kern; they had one daughter, Caroline. He died in New Haven, Connecticut, on April 3, 1967.

Scope and Contents

The John Gassner Papers consist of correspondence, teaching files, and miscellaneous clippings relating to Gassner’s activities as a professor of playwriting at Yale University.

The majority of the alphabetically arranged correspondence consists of letters from prospective, current, and former students to whom Gassner provided professional advice and direction. Numerous
correspondents requested Gassner’s critical opinion of their plays; however, none of the scripts which apparently accompanied letters is within the collection. Correspondence with F. Curtis Canfield and Edward Cole pertains to the curriculum, students, theatrical production, and administrative activities of the Yale School of Drama. Additional correspondents include professional colleagues, literary agents, and aspiring playwrights.

Course syllabi and examinations, critiques of student scripts, an outline of the National Theater Conference’s National Appraisal of the American Theater Project, and miscellaneous printed material form the remainder of the collection.
### Collection Contents

#### Inventory

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<tr>
<th>Correspondence</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. 1, f. 1 A</td>
<td>1951–1963, undated</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 2 Ba-Bo</td>
<td>1956–1963, undated</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 3 Br-Bu</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 4 C-D</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 5 Canfield, F. Curtis</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 6 Cole, Carroll</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 7 Cole, Edward C.</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 8 Corig, John</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 11 K-L</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 13 O-P</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 14 S-T</td>
<td>1958–1964, undated</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 15 U-Z</td>
<td>1959–1963, undated</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 16 Miscellaneous articles and clippings</td>
<td>1950–1956, undated</td>
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<td>b. 1, f. 17 National Appraisal of the American Theater: project</td>
<td>1963–1964</td>
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#### Yale School of Drama

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<td>1956–1957, undated</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. 1, f. 19 Critiques of student scripts</td>
<td>Undated</td>
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Selected Search Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects
Playwriting -- Study and teaching

Names
Canfield, Curtis, 1903-1986
Cole, Edward Cyrus
Gassner, John, 1903-1967

Corporate Body
Yale School of Drama