Gene Lees Ad Libitum &

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Anatomy of an Ambush

The University of Nebraska Press has just released a paperback edition of my 1990 biography of Lerner and Loewe. With all the troubles that beset our culture today, the situation would be bleaker by far were it not for the various university presses — Oxford, Yale, Nebraska, California, and North Texas University, which is bringing out an excellent biography of the guitarist Lenny Breau. Even the renowned Whitney Balliett, author of some of the most exquisite prose in jazz history, has placed *New York Voices,* his latest book of essays from the *New Yorker*, with the University Press of Mississippi. These university presses are the torch carriers of our culture, because the major commercial houses, now entirely devoured by multinational corporations, just don't care. They are interested only in sales. The university presses are hard-pressed financially, but I root for their survival.

An agent had a deal with St. Martin's Press for a biography of Lerner and Loewe. Would I be interested? she asked. Yes, for a number of reasons, one of the most important being that this would be the first time a biography of a lyricist had been written by someone who was also a lyricist, and knew a little something about the craft. Most writings about lyricists and lyrics make me cringe, as they do my friend Alan Bergman.

If you asked scholars of the Broadway theater to list the best musicals in its history, two, I think, would emerge at the top, possibly tied: the Lerner and Loewe *My Fair Lady* and Frank Loesser's tour de force *Guys and Dolls*. I would add two more to the list: Stephen Sondheim's *Company* and another Frank Loesser show that is unfortunately overlooked: *The Most Happy Fella.* Loesser, it should be noted, wrote the book, lyrics, and music to *The Most Happy Fella*. As far as I know, no one else ever equaled that feat.

Actress Nancy Olson, Alan Jay Lerner's wife at the time he was writing *My Fair Lady*, told me, "Alan was a poet. I don't think his ego would let him face the fact that he was not really a book writer." When I pointed out that the book for that show was excellent, she said that he had George Bernard Shaw's subtext, and Moss Hart, who directed the show, to guide him.

Lerner emerges as the dominant figure of the partnership, because he worked at creating his own fable. Frederick, or Fritz, Loewe was an unblushing liar who eschewed publicity as sedulously as Lerner courted it. Lerner embellished his own story; Fritz invented his. His claim that he had studied in Berlin with Busoni is almost certainly false, since Busoni was not in Berlin when Fritz was. Fritz claimed a prizefighting background. He said he had fought Tony Canzoneri in 1924, six months before the latter won the featherweight championship of the world. But Canzoneri didn't take that title until 1928.

Fritz was married only once. With the success of *My Fair Lady*, he dumped his wife, who married guitarist Tal Farlow. I wanted to interview her for my book but Tal wouldn't let me. He said she was blind and never wanted to hear Fritz Loewe's name. Lerner was married eight times and slipped in affairs between and during those relationships. I interviewed most of Lerner's wives. Two told me they were still in love with him. One I didn't interview was his French wife, Micheline, whom I'd met once at a Holmby Hills party populated by precisely those Hollywood solipsists I find eminently uninteresting. She was at a dinner table with my wife, me, Helmut Dantine, and a couple more. She was blonde, still young, and extraordinarily pretty. She was, I learned in my research, the youngest person ever admitted to the bar in France. When my biography came out, Micheline Lerner — a Corsican, and a member of the Bonaparte family — phoned me and expressed disappointment that I hadn't interviewed her, although she generally approved of the book. Why? She asked. "Because I couldn't find you, and I had a deadline," I told her. She and I have become friends.

Alan Jay Lerner had several fixations that turn up in his musicals. One of them was that of the hero redeeming the whore, a not uncommon fantasy in adolescents. Alan never outgrew it. His father, Joseph Lerner, was one of the owners of the Lerner women's wear chain of stores. A flagrant philanderer himself, he taught Alan that when a sexual relationship was not good, it was *always* the woman's fault.

Lerner had a fear of death that led him to tread into areas

of the supernatural, as in the musical *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever*. It turns up too in an earlier show, *Love Life*, written with Kurt Weill, not one of his more successful collaborations. A fantasy, it pursues a husband and wife through 157 years of marriage. It was a flop, but it did produce the songs *Here I'll Stay with You* and *Green-up Time*.

But his predominant fixation was with two men sharing one woman, whose underlying meaning is obvious. This *idée fixe* turns up over and over and over in Lerner shows, *Brigadoon* being an exception. In the movie *An American in Paris*, for which Lerner wrote the screenplay, the girl played by Leslie Caron is balling two men, the music-hall performer played by Georges Guetary, and the aspiring American painter played by Gene Kelly. Gene told me the script had to be toned down, to get it past the censors. The girl became the protégée of Guetary, who had protected her during the Occupation, rather than his mistress.

So too in *On a Clear Day*, which managed to combine all of Lerner's fixations: the Aristocrat-and-Fallen-Woman, represented by the psychic little Brooklyn girl who gets involved with a psychiatrist, with whom she has an affair while pursuing another in another century in England; and his desperate need to believe that there is a life after death, which is an element in *Brigadoon*, a Scottish village that comes back to life for one day every hundred years.

Lerner began work on *Clear Day* with Richard Rodgers but couldn't get along with him; no one I have ever met liked Rodgers. Lerner broke with him, and got Burton Lane, who told me that he threw out all the lyrics Lerner had written for Rodgers' melodies except one, to which he put new music: the very clever *Come Back to Me*. To take so complex a lyric and give it music that is not only natural but swings was no small feat. I have always felt that Burton Lane was an under-rated composer, but the reason may be that people didn't like him — although that didn't impede Richard Rodgers. The book to the stage musical with Barbara Harris and the script for the movie with Barbra Streisand were both by Lerner, and he was able to indulge himself to the full.

Lane and Lerner collaborated again on songs for the Fred Astaire film *Royal Wedding*, including the exquisite *Too Late Now* and the very clever *How Could You Believe Me When I Said I Love When You Know I've Been a Liar All My Life.*

Then there's *Camelot*, in which Guinevere is playing slap-and-tickle with both King Arthur and Lancelot. This show presented structural problems that were never resolved, despite the late-stage intercession and assistance of Moss Hart. The show limped through to some sort of success with Richard Burton, but it was not and is not and never can be a great piece of theater because it starts on a high and ends on a low, the pathetic plea to remember, after the kingdom is gone, that there once was a place called Camelot. Oddly enough, this is one of the few films that my late friend and great mentor Joshua Logan directed that he actually liked.

And then we have *My Fair Lady*. Even this entails the two-men-one-girl theme. The two men are the linguistic scholars Henry Higgins and his friend Pickering, who in essence rape the soul of a flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, on a heartless bet that Higgins can recast her speech sufficiently to pass her off as a great lady. Again, let us note, it is the girl from the gutter raised to a height by a wealthy and aristocratic man. If she's *not* a whore, she's the next best thing. The play on which it is based is of course *Pygmalion*, a classic example of George Bernard Shaw's using the drama as a forum for polemic, a practice later taken up by Arthur Miller. I have a distaste for the use of art as obvious propaganda, and Shaw's plays have grown dusty with time. I would love to see any trace of *feeling* for the human dilemma, rather than Shaw's lofty asexual disdain, evident in so much of his work. I think the ending Lerner and Moss Hart gave the show, that slight uplift of mood, is satisfying in a way *Pygmalion*'s never was, and the Lerner and Loewe songs lend it emotional body that *Pygmalion* lacks. How brilliantly Lerner captures Higgins in *Why Can't a Woman*, and a poor girl's yearnings in *Wouldn't It Be Loverly*. *My Fair Lady* is a far better show than *Pygmalion.*

The 1958 *Gigi* again flirts with one of Lerner's fetishes. Gigi is being raised to be a courtesan. The man who falls in love with her saves her from the fate worse than death — another redemption of the strumpet (albeit a tart-in-training) by the rich hero. *My Fair Lady* too embodies the fantasy of the Noble Man raising the waif to a higher social level.

An insight into Fritz Loewe's character came to me from André Previn, who orchestrated the score of *Gigi*. André asked Fritz if he could alter the harmony at one point in a song. Fritz asked him if he would ask if he could alter Beethoven's harmony. Fritz did not consider himself a songwriter. He defined himself as a "dramatic composer" and he got it right. That's exactly what he was, and a good one.

Lerner worked with other composers. Fritz Loewe had no successes with other lyricists, and I'm not sure he ever even made the effort. With the money he had accumulated, he simply retired to Palm Springs, California, with his bevy of bimbos, and spent the rest of his life in indolent hedonism.

Lerner kept trying. But he never again reached the peak he had achieved with Fritz Loewe in *My Fair Lady*. His fifth wife, Karen Gundersen Lerner, told me: "It drove him crazy. We were lying in bed one night, watching the eleven o'clock news. There was a report that Neil Simon had his tenth or

eleventh hit. Alan cried."

Burton Lane said to me categorically, "Fritz Loewe, whom I got to know and like, *despised* Alan."André Previn (with whom Alan wrote *Coco*, a show André disliked as overblown) refuted this, and said that Fritz "was very different from Alan, but I think Alan really adored him. I heard Alan pay great compliments to a great many songwriters, but he reserved the final encomium always for Fritz. He said he was the best songwriter he had ever known." That doesn't mean he liked him personally or that Fritz reciprocated.

I wrote that book in the summer and winter of 1990. St. Martin's Press gave it the title *Inventing Champagne*, derived from the song *The Night They Invented Champagne*. I objected, but lost the argument. *Inventing Champagne* could be a treatise on the wine industry of the Napa Valley. The British publisher of the book gave it the sensible, if pedestrian, title *The Musical Worlds of Lerner and Loewe*, and at my request removed from the chapter headings little circles which, St. Martin's told me, represented champagne bubbles.

The company did almost nothing in the way of publicity. They arranged one telephone interview with an obscure radio station in upstate New York, and that was it. And then the book got its one review, a review of great viciousness in the *Los Angeles Times*, by someone named Stefan Kanfer, of whom few journalists I know had ever heard. The temporary book editor was Kenneth Turan, a former sports writer from the *Washington Post* who has since become the *Times* movie critic. I couldn't fathom the agenda from which Kanfer was writing, though later I developed a pretty good idea about it. One of the keys to it was his condescension toward jazz.

Kanfer recounts the opening of *My Fair Lady* at the Mark Hellinger theater on March 15, 1956, then says Gene Lees writes:

"'Lerner and Loewe were now the royalty of the theater.' That is a fair summary of the collaborators' professional status and the prose style of *Inventing Champagne*: Lees, author of books about Oscar Peterson and a number of jazz singers, seems far more comfortable with the ambiance of smoky nightclubs than in the autumnal atmosphere of Shubert Alley." He summarizes the lives of Lerner and Loewe, deriving all his information from my book, then says, "The rich score of *Camelot* brought them renewed attention, but the production was in fact a slovenly and hazardous [sic; I think he means haphazard; his grip on diction is never secure] affair. In the end, nobody seems to know what it was trying to say or be. Especially Lees.

"'The story,' Lees informs us, 'is about two men who love each other having an emotional and continuing physical relationship with the same woman, which after a time becomes obvious as a homosexual fantasy.' (This interpretation would come as a surprise to Lerner and Loewe, to say nothing of Thomas Malory, who started the whole thing by writing *Le Morte d'Arthur* in the fifteenth century.)"

And it is here that Kanfer demonstrates his numbing ignorance. Malory did *not* start "the whole thing." We'll get back to that. But the passage contains an anomaly, something I couldn't explain, and perhaps in consequence of my newspaper days, I am bothered by questions I can't resolve. And we'll get back to that too.

As one encyclopedia put it, Malory (whose birth and death dates are not certain, though 1471 is probably the latter) "is generally held to have been the author of the first great English prose epic, *Le Morte d'Arthur.*" But whatever Malory might have thought of my observations is irrelevant, since Lerner did not base *Camelot* on that. He based it on T.H. White's novel *The Once and Future King*, an imaginative variant on the legend, and a humorous one, which is a very different matter. And even White's opinion would be irrelevant: it is not the source of the material that matters in this context, it is what Lerner did with it. And Kanfer apparently knows nothing of the Arthurian myth.

In writing about *Camelot*, I did my usual: asked for guidance from an expert. And my expert in this case was the secretary general of McGill University, with a background of study in medieval French and English literature. Her name is Dr. Victoria Lees, and the name is not a coincidence: she's my kid sister. She took her AB at the University of California at Berkeley, her Master of Philosophy at the University of London during her residence in England, and her doctorate at McGill. If paper covers rock and rock breaks scissors, I think Mr. Kanfer would — and Kenneth Turan with him — find themselves more than a little outclassed by my sister. I reminded her recently of those days when I was researching the book, and she wrote back:

"For 450 years, the only text we had of the *Morte Darthur* was the edition William Caxton printed in 1485 in London. Only two copies of that edition are extant and only one of them is complete (now held by the Pierpont Library). The other copy, interestingly enough, was once purchased by Earl Spencer and remained in the Spencer library at Althorp, Lady Diana's home, until 1892.

"In 1934 a truly momentous discovery was made. In the Fellow's Library of Winchester College, a manuscript was found. Even though it lacked several initial pages, a common fate of old manuscripts, the person who found it recognized it for the treasure it was — our one and only manuscript copy of the *Morte Darthur*. We know that this manuscript copy is

neither Malory's own nor the one Caxton used, but it would be difficult to understate the importance of this find to the scholarship of medieval literature.

"We know that Caxton not only drastically abridged the *Morte* (the printed version of the manuscript copy is 1260 pages long) but he also amended it heavily, in part to attempt to draw the eight tales it contains into one cohesive whole. The scholar who edited what is now known as the Winchester Manuscript was so adamant that Malory never intended one long work that he entitled his edition *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* and scholars have been arguing ever since about whether he was right.

"The only clue to authorship in Caxton's edition was a paragraph at the end of the book that indicates that the author was 'Thomas Maleore', that he was a knight, that he completed his work in the ninth year of the reign of Edward IV (1469-1470), and that he was in prison.

"The Winchester Manuscript, however, includes a little more information and research has since unearthed a fair bit about the author, including the fact that he was Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revell, member of an old Warwickshire family, and that he lived a lawless and violent life. For some time American scholars in particular argued that the author was *another* Thomas Malory, not the one who robbed churches, attempted murder, rustled cattle, was accused of carrying off and raping another man's wife not once but twice, and more than once explicitly was exempted from royal pardons. British scholars, perhaps being a little more world-weary, never bought that argument and it is now pretty well settled that the noble tales of knightly honor were indeed written by a rather bad boy.

"Malory's times were themselves violent and lawless — war overseas (the Hundred Years War) and at home (the War of the Roses). He was born the year of the Battle of Agincourt; Caxton's edition appeared the year of the Battle of Bosworth that ended the War of the Roses and established the Tudors on the throne.

"Malory did not create the tales out of his own head. We know this because, first of all, he *tells* us so several times — he refers over and over to 'the Freynshe booke'. Caxton also says that the *Morte* was 'taken oute of certeyn bookes of Frensshe and reduced into Englysshe'. Furthermore, we have found many of the sources Malory used, both English and French. Some passages are indeed translated word for word. We don't have the actual manuscripts he used, but we have the texts of other manuscript copies, and scholars can now, in fact, sometimes correct copyists' error in the extant French versions by looking at Malory and working back.

"No one knows how Malory got his hands on the manuscripts he used. Some of the French source manuscripts he adapted are simply *enormous*, and the texts he himself wrote must have been very long too — you have to wonder how he could even lay everything out in his jail cell. Did he write everything during one of his many imprisonments, or did he take the opportunity of a new jail stint to get back to the task? No one knows.

"Why is it called 'Le Morte Darthur? That is what Caxton called it. Malory refers to *The Deth of Arthur or The Morte Arthur.* It may be an abbreviation of *Le Livre La Morte d'Arthur*, just as the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal is called 'Le Reine Elizabeth'."

My sister is referring to the bothersome detail that death, *mort* in French, is feminine, but the work has been called *Le Morte Darthur,"* though "le" is masculine. She continued:

"For a long time the only version of Malory we had was the Caxton edition. A famous scholar, Eugène Vinaver, spent years preparing an edition of that text, and then, just before it went to press, a schoolmaster opened an old chest and discovered the *manuscript* edition that predated Caxton's. Poor old Vinaver — his life work down the drain. The story is that he went to the boys' school and said, 'I am Eugène Vinaver and I must have that manuscript.' He went back to the drawing board and prepared the manuscript for publication, along with extensive notes on just where the two versions differed. That became *the* scholarly edition, and the one I used for my master's thesis."

Vicky sent me as well a preface to *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, edited by Eugène Vinaver, Oxford 1967. It begins with this paragraph:

"Sir Thomas Malory's Arthur romances are a remarkable example of literary revival. 'Loved deeply, darkly understood' by English readers of today, they are in all essentials the product and the consummation of a movement initiated by early French writers. They transform the legacy of one nation into a cherished possession of another and by the same token effect the transition from the medieval to a type of fiction able to carry its message to the modern world."

So much for Malory starting "the whole thing" and for Mr. Kanfer's Athurian scholarship.

But his ignorance is not the only thing about that bit of writing that bothered me. Why his hostility to me? And whence the smug contempt for jazz, jazz singers, and Oscar Peterson? Why did he not cite any of my other writings? Why did he not mention that before I became editor of *Down Beat*, I was a reporter and foreign correspondent and music and drama critic of *The Louisville Times*, with my writing on classical music getting me a John Ogden Reid Fellowship? (I have never, by the way, written a book about a jazz

singer.) Given his ignorance of my career — and anyone in his position could have looked me up in *Contemporary Authors*; that's rudimentary journalism — how is it that he even *knows about* the Peterson book? There would seem to be no connection between my Peterson biography and the Lerner and Loewe book. But I think there is.

When I was researching the Peterson book, I got a phone call from someone on the staff of *Time*. He explained that *Time* archives the research material that go into stories. He said he had read the material on Peterson, office memos and the like, dating from the time they did a story on him. Would I like photocopies of it? As good as his word, he sent it to me.

I have never respected *Time*, not only because of founder Henry Luce's constant meddling in U.S. foreign policy and the world's affairs but for the inaccuracy of much of its coverage. The magazine was notorious for demanding from its correspondents massive amounts of material, rewritten and condensed repeatedly. I can recall no story that I ever covered (or for that matter any of my friends ever covered) where *Time* got it right.

But the material in their archives on Peterson was latent with racism and certainly with ignorance of music. The files were marked "For Use Only On Company Projects."

The first memo, dated August 4, 1951, is from one Peg Rorison to one John Mecklin. It is slugged "Re: OSCAR PETERSON, Negro Canadian Pianist." It is embarrassing, and astounding. Rorison wrote: "What kind of music does he play? Not boogie-woogie, no one does in Canada, it's not a style that would develop further." I have no idea what that sentence means; but in any case, Oscar had recorded a series of blazing boogie-woogie records, which became hits in Canada for RCA Victor. Rorison says, "He's been likened to Art Tatum, Teddy Wilson, Al Garner [sic], George Shearing." She says, "I didn't know much about jazz in Canada, think it's mostly visiting American musicians. In fact, it's interesting that Peterson could develop in such an insulated clime."

There's a delicious addendum to Rorison's memo: "Peterson got O.K. from govt., but there's a law in Can. that citizens must have police records from 'all the provinces', & Peterson got all in except Ottawa's. Holding Birdland for an additional week."

She thought Ottawa was a province, not the capitol city of the country. And there was not and is no such law in Canada: the American immigration authorities demanded such clearance, and in any case you didn't get it from "all the provinces", you got it from the Mounties. Montreal was a major stop on the circuit of the big bands, and the city had a thriving jazz movement of its own.

There's more. It's all appalling. And five weeks later, another *Time* researcher, Jim Pitt, filed another memo, describing a dinner interview at the Hyde Park Restaurant, 998 Madison Avenue in New York. Dig this:

"An affable, intelligent conversationalist, Peterson talks and dresses — custom tailored gray tropical worsted suit, French silk tie, heavy gold cuff links — with the confident, but not ostentatious air of a man who not only has arrived but expects to stay around quite a while. He exudes the same kind of healthy enthusiasm toward his music that he does toward his eating and he eats in a big way, topping off large portions of Vichyssoise, creamed chicken livers, a baked potato, salad and four hot rolls with a huge slab of apple pie a la mode washed down with milk. His milk drinking and his keen eyesight — he is a careful and interested observer of everything going on around him — are two characteristics he does not have in common with his idol and inspiration, blind, beer-drinking Art Tatum, with whom he is often compared."

Do you need to have that analyzed? I thought not.

Even as I was writing the chapter incorporating these memos, I knew that *somebody* at *Time* would be annoyed. The book surely would not receive a favorable review in *Time*, and perhaps it would receive no review at all. I didn't care. Journalism was making much of its duty to expose controversial material, such as the Pentagon Papers released to the *New York Times* by Daniel Ellsberg.

While the Peterson book was passing through the processing by which books find their way to the public, I was asked to write the Lerner and Loewe biography. I called my contact at *Time* and asked if he could get me the magazine's file on them. He said he thought it was unlikely that he could score for me again. But not too long after that, I received the traditional unmarked envelope, much of the material dealing with the ordeal of Lerner and Loewe in working on *Camelot*. The show opened at the O'Keefe Theater in Toronto, then went to Boston, and *Time* put a crew to work on it.

In those days *Time* rarely if ever gave bylines to writers, but I learned from the office memos that one of the team was Joyce Haber. The writer in charge was Henry Anatole Grunwald. Born in Vienna, he later was appointed ambassador to Austria by Ronald Reagan.The magazine sent correspondents to interview Lerner's colleagues from the *Hasty Pudding* shows, including Benjamin Welles.

Benjamin Welles, whom I also interviewed, the son of Sumner Welles, under-secretary of state under Roosevelt from 1937 until 1943, wrote a biography of his father, in which he dealt with the fact that his father was a homosexual alcoholic whose habit of making passes at anyone from railway stewards to college boys proved such an embarrassment to the administration that he was finally forced from

office, partly because of pressure from William C. Bullitt. The conventional press printed a cover-up story on the resignation, but *Confidential* magazine, the forerunner of the *National Enquirer,* told the true story. I looked it up recently. It was a good solid piece of reporting, and fair.

The late John Springer was Richard Burton's publicist during the period of *Camelot*. He told me, "Joyce Haber was getting all the dirt possible, and she loved to get the dirt."

The *Time* cover story, published November 14, 1960, perfectly illustrated a newspaper aphorism of the time: *Time* rewrites and rewrites and rewrites until it gets it wrong. "Lerner smokes," it duly noted, "and has a habit of twirling the ignited cigarette in his fingers like the active end of a turbo-prop," which is a wondrous example of straining for an analogy if ever I saw one. It did not note that he bit his fingernails down to the point where his hands hurt, nor did it discover what everyone around him knew: that he was a serious amphetamine addict. Nor the fact that his marriage to Micheline was breaking up, nor that he and Fritz Loewe were also on the verge of rupture.

As journalism the *Time* story was nowhere near as good as *Confidential*'s piece on Sumner Welles.

Joyce Haber left *Time* to become a gossip columnist at the *Los Angeles Times.*

Joshua Logan would again work with Lerner. He was signed on to direct the movie version of *Paint Your Wagon*. The project turned out to be a heart-ache for Josh. The film was based on the Lerner and Loewe 1951 stage musical of the same name, which was pretty bad to begin with. Paddy Chayevsky wrote the "adaptation" and shared credit with Lerner for the screenplay, which is humorless, heavy-handed, shapeless, and made only the worse by the awkward cut and excessive length of the final print.

Lerner was friends with Robert Evans, the president of Paramount Pictures, and with the late Charles Bluhdorn, chairman of the board of Gulf and Western, which owned the film company. He made a deal to produce *Paint Your Wagon* and *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever*. As I pointed out in my book, the making of *Paint Your Wagon* provides an instructive illustration of the way vast sums of money can be wasted on the decision of just one executive, the stockholders be damned. Lerner spent $20 million on the film, an immense sum in the late 1960s, though it might not seem so in our age of $200 million and more. It was in fact the most expensive movie musical ever made up to that point.

The story, in Chayevsky's adaptation, centers on two men in a mining town who are "married" to the same girl: Clint Eastwood, Lee Marvin, and Jean Seberg. Chayefsky's dialogue is filled with inner inconsistencies and clumsy anachronisms. One of the characters says he is "hooked on" gold, though the date of the story is 1849. "Hooked on" started as a jazz musicians' expression to mean addicted.

Two hundred horses were needed for a week's shooting; Lerner held them on standby for four months. Lerner's wife *du jour*, Karen, told me, "There was incredible waste and lack of attention to the project . . . . and it was done on a massive scale. And of course Alan always did love big things. He loved extravaganzas. He loved big showmanship.

"Charlie Bluhdorn . . . had a Learjet at his disposal, and gave it to Alan and me. So we flew back and forth to Los Angeles every other weekend . . . ."

Josh Logan's daughter Harrigan, then in her teen years, was on the set much of the time. She recalls that Lerner once sent the Learjet to Los Angeles to pick up his son's tricycle. She said that Lee Marvin, to whom she became close, hated Lerner and decried his cruelty.

And all the while, Max Jacobson, the notorious Dr. Feelgood whose vitamin shots were laced with amphetamines, was on standby to feed Alan's habit. Lerner wore white cotton gloves to try to control his nervous habit of biting his fingernails to the quick.

The film, as it was released, was not Josh Logan's cut, it was Lerner's, and Josh was always ashamed that his name was even associated with the picture, which he doesn't even mention in his autobiography. But Josh, not Lerner, got the blame for this ghastly porridge. Vincent Canby, then the film critic of the *New York Times*, commented on the "rather peculiar psychological implications" of the *ménage à trois*, and *The Villager*'s reviewer, apparently not as disturbed by references to homosexuality as Stefan Kanfer, commented on the underlying homosexuality of the story.

So there we have it again: Lerner's fixation on two men with the same girl, in this case Jean Seberg. Petite, elfin, pretty, and emotionally fragile, an Iowa girl, she was cast at the age of seventeen as *Saint Joan* in Otto Preminger's formidable flop. Her next film, *Bonjour Tristesse*, was a modest success, but her third, Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless*, made her a star. She made many movies after that, a lot of them in France, where she became something of an idol.

In 1962, she married Romain Gary, the Polish-born French novelist (*The Roots of Heaven* and about thirty more), flier, and diplomat. He was also co-writer of the script for *The Longest Day*. It was not a happy marriage.

Seberg became increasingly active in left-wing politics, including lending support to the Black Panthers. Her behavior came to the attention of F.B.I. director J. Edgar Hoover, who kept huge files on American citizens whether they were

criminals or not, although he did not have the electronic facilities available to George W. Bush. Hoover was disturbed because of Seberg's influence, particularly in Europe, and in 1970, he issued instructions that she be "neutralized". Seberg was seven months pregnant at the time.

Joyce Haber was the new member of that lethal profession, the female gossip columnist, her precursors including the three horrors Hedda Hopper, Louella Parsons, and Dorothy Kilgallen. When Lerner, Bluhdorn, and Evans — above all Lerner — made a mess of *Paint Your Wagon* — they tried to shift the blame to Joshua Logan, and one of the means was to plant an item about Josh's purported mishandling of the project. At one point, Lerner was talking about firing him and approached Richard Brooks about taking over direction of the picture. Brooks refused. Richard Schickel, in a biography of Eastwood, wrote:

"Very early in production Lerner called Clint in to tell him that he was thinking of replacing Logan. Clint was dismayed. 'Replace him?' he remembers saying. 'He's only shot a couple of days' worth of stuff.'

"'Well, he just doesn't understand the thing.'

"'Let me ask you something, Alan. You guys worked together, and he's prepared this thing for a year. How come now you're deciding he's not the guy for this picture?'

"Lerner's answer was not entirely satisfactory; Clint thinks that, at least in part, the producer was shifting the blame for his own failures to the director. He simply was not knowledgeable enough or secure enough in himself to organize this curiously misshapen project or to give Logan the support he desperately needed."

The camera director on the project, the brilliantly poetic Bill Fraker, thought highly of Josh, and so did other participants in the project.

Let me make my prejudice clear here. I worked for a year on a Broadway musical with Josh Logan, which for various reasons never went on the boards, to Josh's infinite heartbreak, and certainly to mine. I wrote the book and the lyrics under his guidance, always learning more about theater and film and directing and acting, about his time at the Moscow Art Theater with Stanislavsky, about his work with Marlon Brando and so many other magnificent talents, discussing acting going back to the theories of Denis Diderot, all of which I absorbed passionately. If I'd had ten years at the major drama schools, I could not have learned as much as I did in that year with Josh. We often met for breakfast, spent the day together, and were still talking after dinner. I learned that the peak emotional moments in a musical come in the songs, the book providing the continuity in which they are set, and the songs should come at the ends of the scenes. Josh taught me how to pace the scenes, ideally alternating the lyrical with the brighter and funny ones. He emphasized the value of having a secondary plot, if possible assigning the stronger comedy moments to it: it permits the principles to leave the stage long enough to rest or change costume. I came to realize that songs have three powerful functions in a musical, declamation (Lerner's *Why Can't a Woman*), self-revelation, which is soliloquy (*I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face*), or collective expression by the ensemble.

He said, "And we need duets," to which I replied, "Josh, I hate duets."

"I don't care what you hate. Audiences *love* duets! Write me some." I think I wrote three of them, and came to realize how effective they can be.

I asked him why musicals were two-act shows with the first about twice the length of the second. He said, "They're really three act shows, with the first intermission removed."

And he told me so much about his work on *South Pacific*, which is shortly to be revived in New York. He gave me a manuscript copy of Maxwell Anderson treatise *The Essence of Tragedy*; years later his daughter Harrigan, knowing of the affection in which Josh and I held each other, gave me a copy of the printed edition. That and John Van Druten's *Playwright at Work* are the two most lucid pieces of writing on dramaturgy I have ever encountered.

Some time before my work with Josh, I was assigned by *High Fidelity* magazine to review the musical *I Do I Do,* based on the Jan de Hertog play *The Four Poster,* a two-character tale of the life of a couple from youth to old age. The musical starred Mary Martin and Robert Preston. I didn't care for it. When a piece of writing goes into print, it undergoes a change. Somehow the tone is never what you expected. And when I read it, I hated my review. It indulged in two of the cheapest of tricks in criticism: the attitude of superiority to the subject and a sarcasm whose only purpose is to make the reviewer look clever. It is endemic to New York reviewing. There was a line in my review that made me squirm. Mary Martin was 53 when she did that show. I made the point that whereas you can, with makeup, age a young actress, you cannot "youthen an old actress." Seeing it in print, it hit me that somewhere in New York City, there was a real life lady named Mary Martin who just might read that. I was so disgusted that I quit writing criticism.

Later, when Josh taught me you need a secondary plot in a musical to get your principles off-stage, I realized that for Preston and Martin to sustain an entire musical by themselves was an achievement in stamina, if nothing else. When he and I were working, I was frequently in his apartment in

the River House at East 52nd and First Avenue that he loved because he could see all the bridges of the East River. His friend Mary Martin, whom he had directed as Nellie Forbush in *South Pacific*, a show he also produced and co-wrote, and in other plays, lived across 52nd Street, their balconies facing each other. I *never* went to see him without fearing that I would enter his living room and find her there and he would introduce us and she would remember that review. It was a small inward nightmare.

During the making of *Paint Your Wagon*, Joyce Haber dutifully printed the slams on Josh generated by Alan Lerner.

The FBI has long maintained COINTELPRO to plant false or distorted information in all-to-cooperative news media. The Bureau planted a fake letter with Joyce Haber's editor at the *Los Angeles Times*, who passed it on to her. Haber's column of May 19, 1970, carried a blind item about a white actress pregnant by a Black Panther. It left little doubt that the actress was Seberg. She was so traumatized that she gave birth prematurely and lost the baby. She called a press conference and held up her dead white baby for all to see. Score 1 for Joyce Haber. Seberg and Romain Gary were divorced; she moved back to Paris, where she suffered depressions so severe that she was hospitalized several times. In September 1979, she disappeared. She was found in the back seat of her car in a Paris suburb. She had been dead for eleven days from a huge overdose of barbiturates. Score 2 for Joyce Haber. Suffering depression over Seberg's suicide, and, I would think the loss of that baby, victim of the collusion of the FBI, Joyce Haber, and the *Los Angeles Times,* Romain Gary died in Paris of a self-inflected gunshot wound on December 2, 1980. Score 3 for Haber. Score 4, if you include Josh Logan, who never made another movie.

Seberg was buried in the Montparnasse cemetery in Paris, the last resting place of many famous French figures, including Edith Piaf. Her funeral was attended by, among others, Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.

After Stefan Kanfer, with the complicity of Kenneth Turan, trashed my book, I did some checking. Of course! Kanfer had worked for *Time* magazine. I checked further. It wasn't easy: it was as if he were a ghost in *Time*'s corporate memory.

He joined *Time* in 1966 as TV critic and a writer for the show-business section. The next year Kanfer became the magazine's movie critic. In 1972, he took a leave of absence to write a history of the blacklist in radio, TV, and film. He returned to the magazine in 1973 as the anchor of its essay section. A February 1988 bio showed that he had served as senior writer, and at that time was senior editor at *Time*, primarily responsible for the book section. Now, my biography of Oscar Peterson was published exactly in that period. It came out in March, 1988; but book editors get advance copies of books, sometimes two months or so in advance. Two months after it came out, Kanfer took "early retirement." Why? And why was that bio compiled and why did he so soon leave the magazine? And he was the book editor? I'll *bet* he remembered my book. I can find no evidence that he was *ever* a reporter, a compiler of factual information. He seems to be one of that class of people in which all too many critics fall: they are what I call opinionaters. And he, like Kenneth Turan, is a practitioner of a dark art I find alas not rare in critics: authoritative ignorance.

Perhaps his resentment of me echoed my mention that Henry Anatole Grunwald personally headed the team that covered the making of *Camelot*. Grunwald started his career at *Time* as a copy boy and rose to become its editor. After his death on February 26, 2005, at the age of 82, Kanfer wrote a radiant encomium to the man. Clearly Grunwald was one of his heroes, and that may have been a contributing reason for his attack on my book. Whatever the reason, Kanfer clearly had an agenda so blinding that he could write that nonsense about Malory and the Arthurian legends.

When the review appeared, I called Kenneth Turan, then new at the *Los Angeles Times,* as I have noted, and its temporary book editor. I told him Kanfer didn't know what he was talking about. With a sneering hauteur and that old newspaper stayund-by-yerr-mayun loyalty, he said, "Oh I think he knows what he's talking about." He told me to write a letter to the paper. I detailed my objections to Kanfer's review. Turan cut away all the pertinent information and printed a version of my letter truncated to make me look like a fool. *And* even this eviscerated version of the letter was printed only in the *Los Angeles Times*, not in all the newspapers such as the *Minneapolis Tribune* in which Kanfer's piece appeared through the L.A. *Times* syndication.

I had come to hate writing criticism even before the Mary Martin incident. I had no taste for holding power over other people's lives and livelihoods and careers, a scruple not shared by Joyce Haber, may she turn in her grave, or Stefan Kanfer. He clearly relishes his capacity for cruelty and smug sarcasm, which he continues to practice in recent and undistinguished, and apparently largely unnoticed, writings. He ambushed my Lerner and Loewe biography, and killed it. For fifteen years you haven't been able to get it.

Now it has risen like Lazarus, thanks to one of the university presses.