

Georgia Southern University

Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

Zach S. Henderson Library Special Collections
Oral History collection

Special Collections at Zach S. Henderson
Library (Statesboro)

February 2022

Interviews with Erskine Caldwell

Zach S. Henderson Library Special Collections

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/specolleoralhistory>



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Intellectual History Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Zach S. Henderson Library Special Collections, "Interviews with Erskine Caldwell" (2022). *Zach S. Henderson Library Special Collections Oral History collection*. 118.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/specolleoralhistory/118>

This transcript is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections at Zach S. Henderson Library (Statesboro) at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Zach S. Henderson Library Special Collections Oral History collection by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Interview Date: 10/17/1972

Person on Tape: Erskine Caldwell (EC)

NOTE:

Inaudible words or phrases are noted using a question mark enclosed in brackets. [?]

Words with questionable spellings are enclosed in parentheses with a question mark (...?).

In some cases repetitious misspoken words or phrase have been delete.

Words or phrases that are not clearly audible or understood are included when some cases.

When included they are enclosed in brackets with a question mark. [...?]

... denotes a break in thought, phrase or sentence.

EC: Thank you for that introduction, which gives me a little bit of a memory. I have done everything that you said I did, as I can recall right now. Perhaps I could have done more in the way of scholarship. I went to all the schools and colleges I could get into. However, I don't know what I accomplished in the end except I learned to use a typewriter. As I understand, this is a baseball night. The World Series is going on. If anybody hears the score, will you please let us know? Of course you know, the World Series, sometimes we call it "the World Serious." It's a damn important thing, so I don't want to miss the score, if anybody has a radio or something just stand up and holler it out, what the score is.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentleman. I come here as a writer and not as a speaker, and so I have to read what I have written. Otherwise I would have nothing to say because, as writers know, they're very poor readers, so I stumble over words and I can't pronounce them, I just spell them out on a typewriter. So I really don't know what I'm saying sometimes and maybe you'll bear with me. (Audience laughs)

I came by automobile, from Florida where we're living right now, my wife and I. It was sort of a short trip. Usually, I like to take long trips. Airplane trips, for example. And a lot of things happen in airplanes that do not happen in automobiles. For example, going across the country in an airplane, the captain is always going on to the intercom or the public address thing he has up there to tell the passengers that we're going over some nudist colonies down there, or that bang you heard was lightning striking the tail of the airplane, or why that engine over there is on fire. (Audience laughs) Things like that, that's what he's usually saying up there. Or that, instead of landing in Chicago, we're going to land in Cuba tonight. (Audience laughs.) Now, on one particular trip, the captain left the intercom on accidentally, and he thought he was just talking to the co-pilot up there in the front. They were having a conversation, and just accidentally turned on the intercom. So the captain to the co-pilot, "You know this has been a real tough day for us, and now we got another long flight ahead of us. You know what I'd like to have right now?" And the co-pilot said, "My captain, what would you like to have?" He said, "I'd like to

have a nice tall, cold beer, and a lot of loving from a good-looking blonde.” Well, the passengers were hearing all of this of course, back there. So the blonde stewardess from the rear of the plane rushed up the aisle. (Audience laughs) Rushed up the aisle to tell the captain to turn off the intercom, but everybody was hearing what was going on, what he was saying. And as this blonde stewardess was rushing up to the front, the little old lady reached out and parked her arm. and said, “Young woman. Don’t forget the cold beer.” (Audience laughs. Applause.)

You know, in this world of writing and weaving and so forth, there are many instances when you get word to be appreciated much more and much better by the person who reads this than by the person who even lectures. For example, not long ago there was another instance like this that occurred when...this happens regardless of any (?) value of course that might find on a piece of writing, but anyway, a college student who had let his grades slip too much was inducted into the Armed Services; he was drafted. Against his principles, of course, his principles...well, they were exemplified by campus picketing, by promoting protest rallies, boycotting the Coke machine, and other forms of protest. Well anyway, this student was sent to boot camp for training, after being inducted. And while he was there he would spend all of his spare time walking around on the ground looking for pieces of paper. And he’d pick up a piece of paper (a scrap of paper) and he’d read it, and he’d look at it very carefully and then he’d throw it away. And he’d say, “That’s not it.”

(Voice cuts out. Unable to make out Caldwell’s next statement.)

(Voice cuts back in midway into a new statement.)

...be a professor, be a doctor, be a lawyer. Do something else. But once you’re afflicted with this thing of being a writer, you’re stuck with it. It’s an urge. Or it’s a perverse, dictated fate that decrees that such-and-such a person is going to be a writer whether he wants to be a writer or not. You’re stuck with it. So, it may not be such a person as a natural-born writer, but if that’s the way it’s going to be, you cannot run away from it. No one can prevent you from being a storyteller. If that’s the way it’s going to be, so it’s better for you to endure your fate just like you would any affliction that you have, you have to learn to live with it. And then you stop complaining.

Well...it’s mighty (?) there, to (?) to a writer, the fact that it is a person who expects the ability to come to him easily, and with no effort on his part is going to be disappointed. If work is not immediately successful, and accepted by critics and by the public and he does not become rich, he’s going to be very disappointed. But naturally, none of this happens in the beginning, for a writer. Because words put together on a paper, one after the other, have no meaning, and no purpose unless the accumulated effect conveys more than ordinary actions, thoughts, and implications. And so it’s the final result, after months and years of effort, if the final effect does

not produce anything of any value, a readable story, then all is purposeless, worthless, and a waste of everybody's time and patience.

And so this means there is no excuse, when it comes to write fiction, unless the person is subject to the compulsion to be a storyteller, and has the talent to accomplish it. But of course this does not apply to poets. Poets are a breed apart. But anyway, the restless housewife writes. There's nothing better to do; it's not necessarily a compulsive writer. And the retired traveling salesman is not necessarily a talented storyteller, maybe because he can recall some of his lurid escapades on the road.

However, a considerable number of people are curious about what is thought to be the secret of writing and storytelling, and most of them for the time when this secret, when this magic secret is going to be revealed to them, so that they too can become writers. But there is no secret.

(Voice cuts out. Unable to make out Caldwell's next statement.)

(Voice cuts back in midway into a new statement.)

...and then from then on, it is to be as luck would have it. But even if there is no secret to be revealed, and even if luck is a writer's best friend, the world is full of people without compulsion and without talent who somehow acquire and doggedly perpetrate the desire to be a writer. This can be a harmless pastime and they get a copy of finger-painting or bug-collecting with a personal intent to have the pride of an amateur.

However, if you become desperate for professional achievement, [...] to imitation of an accomplished writer, or perhaps even [...] you will attend classes in a college and take courses in so-called "Creative Writing." (Audience laughs and applauds) But, there's only one [...] the imitation of an accomplished writer, [...] and the only piece [...] in creative writing courses is going to be realized as fiction, because the mountain of talent (?) that is possible, human experiences that are viewed as tragic, comic, or romantic implications, consequences of experience and imagination are the (?) sources of fiction and (?) creation is merely the principal use of them.

But that might be the trouble talking about these things, you become involved in generality, semantics, supplication, and it makes a good topic of debate and argument, but if we kept on like this, I would not...well, I might be called to account, but being an unlicensed professor of English, or an unlicensed professor of Creative Writing.

But also, the fact, to talk about myself, being more familiar with myself, it seems reasonable enough to talk about me for a few moments. And so speaking personally,

I do know that while never lacking in compulsion, I'm still not too sure about the talent. But I can attest to the fact that luck – now, I mean the lucky kind of luck -- has never been a handicap to any writer. Well, I started in my teens, and it happened to be a summer between classes, we'll say between schools in the state of Georgia in those days, and perhaps in the same way a person will have a craving for a candy bar, or a cow will have a craving for a lick of salt, I had a craving for a typewriter. Everybody does not have to have a typewriter of course to be a writer, but it helps. Usually somebody read what you write on a typewriter, whereas your handwriting might be illegible. Well anyway, perhaps this typewriter desire was symbolic of the desire to be a writer, but I prefer to believe it was merely being practical, and it could be pointed out that a very wise, knowing person would first of all want to complete his college education, including a course in creative writing. But I was too impatient to get out into the world where life was being lived, in order to write about what I could find. But I was not a college dropout, I was just an in-and-out student once and a while (audience laughs).

Anyway, it's pointless to write about, in a small community where you know the name of every dog in town, and it's pointless to write about in a large city, where your next-door neighbor might sue you for invasion of privacy if you said "Good morning" to him.. The trouble is you have to learn, by trial and error, how to tell a story in pensive words, and a typewriter itself is not going to show you how it is done.

Well, in my case, it was many years of trial and error. Newspaper reporting, odd jobs for survival, and so forth, before I succeeded in getting a story published in a magazine. And the fact that it happened to be a small magazine that was published by other starving writers and it paid no money, that was not important. The important thing was that it was in print. So that was my springboard, to find something in print for the first time. Well, there may be sort of cut, to reach this same goal of being in print, but I have no regret for what I did and the way I went, because I think that each individual has to find his own way and his own medium to the goal that he has got for himself. But I did find out through my experience that experience itself was... whether it was pleasant or unpleasant, was the best instructor that I could find for a course of writing that I would have taken myself. Well, after this long period of apprenticeship, looking for experience in the world, and for the past 40 years I have continued to seek experience by going and living and being and doing, wherever experience can be found.

But personal experiences themselves are not always thrilling and exciting. They only become so when you put them into an autobiography. But the doings of other people are never dull when what they do makes a story that can be told.

Well, before it is to be assumed that the act of acquiring a typewriter is a guarantee of a successful career as a writer, it should be taken into account that there are many "ifs" and "buts" about this profession. This is something that I learned very early in

life, in the non-scholastic school of economics, and in an off-campus course in sociology. This took place in the 1930s. After I had owned my first typewriter for about a year -- it had cost \$15 second-hand -- well, with this typewriter I began wandering through the southern states, taking my typewriter and small suitcase. After many months of travel and movement, I ended up in Baltimore, Maryland. And it was in Baltimore that a trusting landlady rented me a room for \$5 a week, with no payment in advance. Well, a week later, the landlady's husband came home unexpectedly. [Audience laughs and applauds] Well, he was very quick to discover that I was a non-paying ---. And he was in a great hurry to tell me that if I did not pay two week's rent by noon the next day, he was going to lock me out of my room and confiscate both my typewriter and my suitcase. Well, he told me some other things, too. That's another story.

Well, there was only one thing to do. I took the typewriter to a pawnshop and pawned it for \$10. Now I had a place to sleep, and I had my suitcase, but I had no typewriter. Well, after a long night of anguish, being parted from my typewriter for the first time, I went back to the pawnshop and pleaded with the pawnbroker to let me have the use of my typewriter—or *the* typewriter -- to write a story. He agreed, provided that I would spend as much time cleaning and polishing his stock of pistols and guns and (cracks?) as I spent typing. Well, I have no recollection now of the particular story I was trying to write in the backroom of this pawnshop in Baltimore. However, I do know that the pawnbroker was as kindhearted as the landlady had been before her husband came home unexpectedly. After almost two weeks, I had cleaned and oiled every firearm, polished every (crack?), and restrung every banjo and guitar in the pawnshop. Well, that was when the pawnbroker said, he had no way of knowing if the story I had written had any literary value, but as a handyman, I had done enough good work to earn back my typewriter and \$5 in cash. And so, of course I've had a good feeling about Baltimore ever since. (Audience laughs.)

But these “ifs” and “buts” of possessing a typewriter as a tool of writing for the so-called creative process, oh, they have symbolic and realistic consequences. It could be called the evidence of the typewriter syndrome. I found this out in Hollywood, several years after the Baltimore episode, and this also occurred in the 1930s. I had traveled by bus from New York to Los Angeles, and I carried as usual, a small suitcase, and this time a large full-sized typewriter. But I would have no ambition at that time to be a motion-picture writer, or a screenwriter in Hollywood. All I wanted to do was to have some experience. Well, in those days, and still I seek a variety of experience wherever it can be found, and I'd heard that Hollywood was quite an unusual resort for that purpose, so I went.

Well, having lived on a bus for almost 5 days and 5 nights, I was ready for a conventional bed and 24 hours of constant sleep. And I arrived in a small hotel in Hollywood and I had enough money to pay for a week's rent for a room, at the rate of \$5. Well, this hotel I had found had plenty of rooms at that rate, and I offered to

pay \$5 in advance for a room. The clerk looked at my large, full-sized typewriter, this giant-sized typewriter, shook his head and said “No.” No amount of pleading, no amount of argument could persuade this clerk to change his mind and let me have a room. He said it was the policy of the hotel in Hollywood never to rent a room to a writer, because they always went broke and never paid their bills. And even more than that, they would lower their typewriters out of the windows at night to keep them from being confiscated for nonpayment of rent. Well, I left the hotel and then when I looked back at the marquee overhead to see what the name of it was, I don’t think that Mark Twain would have liked the way that his name was being used.

Well, there was another small hotel in the next spot and it was late in the evening and about midnight, and I was getting more sleepy and groggy when I got there. When I entered this other hotel, a pleasant-mannered elderly woman with an abundance of bright blonde hair and orangey-tinted cheeks and lips said she would rent me a room for \$5 a week and that I would not even have to pay in advance. (Audience laughs) And so when I signed the hotel register, she looked at my home address and smiled even more pleasantly. She said she was from Georgia too, and was always glad to see anybody from the old home state. Well, after she had taken me to my room, she looked at my typewriter admiringly, and said she was going to give me a special rate of \$4 a week because I was a writer from Georgia.

(End of side 1.)

(Side 2 begins.)

Then as she left, she said I looked very tired and sleepy, and that she was going to put a “Do not disturb” sign on my door, so I could sleep late the next morning. Well, I locked the door, and I sat down on the bed, and lit a cigarette, and I remember nothing after that until I was awakened sometime in the darkness of the night by a loud noise. And when I opened my eyes, I saw two firemen who had knocked down the door, and were lifting me from the cigarette-fired mattress. Well, the blonde-haired woman from Georgia took me by the hand and led me down the hall to another room in the hotel. And the only thing she said to me then was, I would have to give her all the matches and cigarettes I had in my pocket. (Audience laughs) And so of course, I’ve had a good feeling about Hollywood too, ever since.

Well, once a person becomes committed to a typewriter, and wherever he may go in the world, the “ifs” and “buts” continue to be an important part of his life. And this is certain in the 1940s in China, as they had been in the previous 10 years in America, for me. But by that time, portable typewriters were being made, with the carrying case. But they still weighed as much as 25 pounds. The five or six-pound, plastic-cased portable typewriter that can be bought today, had not at that time been invented. Well, I had a modern, up-to-date, 25-pound typewriter, when I arrived in Hong Kong, in the early spring of 1941, the backdoor way to Moscow, and the Soviet Union.

And so naturally, as an American would do in Hong Kong, I bargained with the Chinese (poor?) to make me a suit of clothes, overnight. Well, the suiting cloth was authentic British woolen, and the color I selected was just about as close as you can get to a shade somewhere between Canary Yellow and Hamburger Mustard. (Audience laughs) And it was a real bargain too in those days; only \$20 American. Of course though, the bargain price may have had something to do with the tailor's overstock of this particular color. The cloth.

Well, this took place during the Japanese-Chinese war, shortly before the beginning of World War II, and civilian airline trains only operated during the hours of darkness. After several nights, I had made my way across Mother China, and had arrived somewhere in Mongolia. This is where the wartime regulation caught up with everybody, sooner or later. Aviation gasoline was scarce, and there was only one scheduled 6-passenger, single engine airplane a week from Mongolia to Russian Turkistan, over the desert. And one of the hard and bitter regulations was that no passenger could take baggage weighing more than 30 pounds. So there I was, in a Chinese military airfield somewhere in Mongolia, upper, lower, outer, inner, whichever you went, but it was Mongolia. But that did not matter, because there I was with 25 pounds of typewriter, and two suitcases weighing a combined weight of 40 pounds, and there was no argument, in any language—Mongolian, Chinese, Russian, English or anything. No argument. Thirty-five pounds had to be dumped I was told, or I could stay in Mongolia for the duration. (Audience laughs) I chose to dump. I kept the 25-pound typewriter, five pounds of shirts and socks, and of course wore the brand new, colorful Hong Kong tailored suit. Everything else was distributed to local Mongolians on a first come, first serve basis. (Audience laughs) And of course this could have been the origin of the American give-away program. (Audience laughs)

Well, when I arrived in Moscow in that spring of 1941, I stayed for six months as a newspaper and radio correspondent. I was not particularly embarrassed in the beginning. In fact, I considered that I was receiving admiring glances from the Russians who admired my Hong Kong tailored suit made of fine British woolen. Then when a Russian looked at me a second time, I was convinced he was thinking how drab his own dark clothing looked in contrast to my Canary Yellow, Hamburger Mustard coat and pants.

Well, after while though, late in the summer that year, 1941, which began to feel somewhat embarrassed by my personal appearance when I was invited to dark-suit receptions at the American and British embassies. I was very much so, being the last to arrive and the first to leave. But fortunately, fortunately, the wife of the American ambassador took pity on me, and she suggested that I might feel more at ease if I had my cocktail served to me alone, in the family parlor on the second floor of the embassy, and then had my dinner served to me on a tray in the men's smoking room. (Audience laughs) Well this was a most satisfactory face-saving

arrangement for me, as evidently it was also for the members of the Japanese diplomatic corps and military staff who also, always went to the second floor to have their sake alone, and had their dinner served to them on trays in the men's smoking room, rather than mingle with the Americans and British in those days.

Well, I was spoken to only once by a Japanese military or diplomatic man at an embassy reception and dinner during that summer and autumn before Pearl Harbor. Well, a full-bodied Japanese general in a uniform of military splendor, took me aside and very carefully felt the texture of my coat lapel, and after that, smiling very pleasantly, he asked in confidence if I were a spy on leave from Hong Kong. (Audience laughs) No, I told him I was a writer who had too many pounds to carry across the Gobi Desert, and I just came with my typewriter and the suit I was wearing, I didn't bring anything else. But I assured him that the next time I went to Hong Kong, I was going to buy a suit in a more somber color. The Japanese general bowed and shook my hand, the first and only time. And I'm sure he was convinced that I *was* a spy by profession, and that he would have offered me a job as counter-spy if I had not been wearing such a peculiar suit of clothes. And so, no doubt, I lost an interesting job to contribute to my experiences in life, but if I had chosen not to leave my clothes in Mongolia, in order to take my typewriter to Moscow—so that's what happens, I suppose, when you have to make a decision between clothes and typewriters. Well, I regret of course, now, that I did not have the opportunity to become a counter-spy for the Japanese and counter-counter spy for America at the same time.

Well, having gone to this length to talk about typewriter symbolism and typewriter addiction, and the side effects of having only one suit of clothes in a very peculiar color at that, well something must be said about the, what you call literature, in certain high-toned intellectual circles, because a writer can easily lose his franchise if he fails to give some indication or evidence of familiarity with the literary life.

Well, as for me, I have to say, in candor, that to me there is no such thing as literature. Instead, I would suggest that there's good writing and there's bad writing, and nothing else before, between, or after. And to me, you keep the good and throw out the bad. It seems to me that's a simple way to look at it. I know of no other way to compromise myself by saying that this may be good or may be bad, but I have to make a decision: this is good, this is bad. So throw out everything else. It's so easy to distinguish the good and the bad. Very easy. So it can be a mystery as to why so many people are unable to distinguish between these two extremes. As a result, they either rely upon a present critic, to make a distinction for them, or they will subscribe to a book club, (audience laughs) and then they will receive predigested baby food in a pretty red package.

But if a person decides to read a book, and there is no reason to read a book unless you seek knowledge or entertainment. And such a person is certainly capable of relying on his own judgment in selecting what would be a benefit or of interest to

him. But if a person reads only a pre-selected book, his reading is done at the dictation of somebody else, he never has the opportunity and the excitement of learning by personal experience how to tell the difference between the good and the bad. And it is this kind of blind acceptance that encourages intolerance, because the less a person knows, the less willing he is to learn, whereas the more a person learns, the more tolerant he will become.

As a sometime reader myself, I will not presume to tell anybody to read a certain book just because it was of interest to me. Likewise, I doubt very much if I would read a book merely because it was said to be of interest to somebody else. Reading is a personal matter, a very personal matter. And should be selfishly so, because reading is a prerogative of the individual, not a matter of public conformity. At least, this is the way it is in a democracy, when freedom to read prevails.

Well this freedom to read, as well as the freedom to write, in this particular decade of our century, is often a shocking thing, a deplorable situation to many people of the earlier generations, who compare the present time with the good ol' days. The customs change just as styles of clothing changes, and though while we're not looking for, perhaps an inevitable evolution of ideas and morals has been taking place and will continue to take place.

Well, recent and current generations of college students should be praised for many of their progressive ideas that we live by in America today. Campus uprisings of course are not always intellectually inspired. Organizing protest rallies and picketing the dean, boycotting the Coke machines, campaigning for sexual perversity. No matter what the aim, whether successful or unsuccessful, campus uprisings are legitimate protests against outmoded policies of the establishment, wherever it exists. Some student demands of course are not always politics, but they are evidence of a healthy educational climate, and students do have an escape hatch in reserve, when the dean tells them that if they do not like the way the college is being run, that they can pack up and leave, and then of course they can join the Marine Corps, and try to revolutionize that. (Audience laughs)

Well one of the things that college students these days do not have to protest against is censorship. Not long ago, 10 or 15 years ago perhaps, when books were being banned in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, as fast as censors could turn the pages and read. Of course they were reading what they were looking for, and this is hardly—there weren't hardly a reputable author in those days who somewhere in the United States was not being charged, and perhaps taken to court for writing what was decreed to be an obscene or pornographic novel. I had some extent with this (audience laughs) because, in those days, I was frequently before the court in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, [and] elsewhere (audience laughs). I was trying to defend my usage of the English language for the purpose of storytelling. And as a result, I was on the docket so frequently, and in so many places that I had to work double-time to write the next book to be taken to court. (Audience laughs)

But consider what happens these days. The censors have gone out of business, probably to write the kind of books they are most familiar with (audience laughs), and there's no longer anybody to solicit a bribe to take a book to court that spells out four letter words. But the young writer of today who has never been banned, who has no hope of being charged with obscenity and pornography, in this contemporary climate, this young writer will no doubt become frustrated. But there is a way out for him. He can resort to writing novels of a strictly moral nature, in words of many syllables, and this could be a sensational breakthrough. (Audience laughs) Then he might become renowned and wealthy overnight.

So any day now, we might expect to see a completion of a full cycle in American writing, and a return to novels that are interesting and exciting because of the emotional and intellectual power of the author's talent. It may be too much to expect in the immediate future, but it is possible that in time the younger writers will not only be spelling out 8 and 10 and 12-letter words, but also be basing their fiction on the framework of rousing storytelling. And if this should happen, there will be a lot of happy readers I am sure, in the days to come, and perhaps you may live to be one of those.

Well, it is sometimes wondered why there are such a large number of authors who devote themselves, not to writing pornography, but to writing exclusively what is known today as juvenile fiction, junior books. In particular, it is often wondered why your well-known author of sophisticated novels of sex and mayhem, would startle the literary world by publishing a simple-minded story for preschool children who have not yet learned to read, but whose mommies are thrilled by the colorful, full-page illustrations (audience laughs). And so as it happens, there is a good and sufficient reason for a novelist to stop in the middle of [...] work of art, and turn out some storybooks for Mommy and the little brats (audience laughs).

For example, there's the case of the well-known novelist who is told by his publisher that some of his sales of the sophisticated sex books have become disastrously small and that something drastic has to be done. Well, in his publisher's diplomatic way, it was suggested that the author's recent adult novel had offended the sensibilities of lady librarians and booksellers throughout the nation, and using a careful choice of words, and speaking ingratiatingly, this is how the publisher explained the situation to the novelist. He said, "a recent survey made by the publishing industry revealed that many librarians and booksellers from coast to coast are elderly, prudish, strait-laced, mature matrons of the old school, who are easily offended and shocked by the excessive frankness and realism of modern fiction. And so of course the publisher says, "You understand that I am being completely objective about this and would never be influenced personally by such an old-fashioned attitude. However," he says, "since these nice old ladies, in one of whom might have been your mother or mine, well, since these nice old ladies have the authority to reject books through their school and public libraries, and then

refuse to stock these books, it would be very wise and good riddance for both of us if you kept this in mind when you wrote your next novel.”

Well, as is to be expected, this novelist, while deeply upset by the obvious commercial motives of the publisher, and this is what the novelist said in return, he said, “Look here. Now I’ll have you know that I resent such an absurd suggestion, and I absolutely refuse to prostitute my art by writing dribble for a flock of old biddies.” (Audience laughs)

“Now wait a minute. Old biddies. I’ve got it. I know how to get even with them. You just wait and see.” So, inspired by his enthusiasm and boiling with resentment, this novelist goes home and dashes off a storybook for preschool children and their mommies. Well naturally, this exciting story is about a fussy old hen who has a brood of chicks. And so as his story opens, it is established immediately that the old bidy is always tormenting and pecking at the young pullets and cockerels.

And one day, there is an uprising in the chicken yard, (audience laughs) and there’s open rebellion by these young (?) against the old hen and her hen-pecking domination and harassment. So, the outcome is that every last one of these chicks fly the coop. Of course the lonely old bidy is now downhearted and contrite, but she knows it is far too late to make amends, and her sorrow is so devastating that she begins to molt, and so she makes a sorry looking sight, shedding her feathers and clucking pathetically as she scratches distantly in the barnyard.

Sympathy for the poor old bidy has now been firmly established in the tender minds of the preschool brats and their mommies (audience laughs), and so naturally, naturally, it is precisely at this psychological moment that an unexpected and startling complication arises, and this threatens the very existence of the poor old bidy. This is when the farmer comes along, with his shiny hatchet. He’s murmuring to himself that his stomach has a craving for chicken stew, with dumplings. So it is very obvious now in this story that he’s going to call this droopy old bidy.

But just in time, the farmer’s wife happens to be passing the barnyard, and she sees the molted old bidy’s neck on the chopping block. Well, what happened, the farmer’s wife tells the farmer that it would take more time than she could spare from her chores to stew a tough old hen, and besides, she tells him, a plump pullet would make a much better chicken stew with dumplings. And so, of course the farmer has learned, by many years of experience, that if he hopes to have dumplings with his chicken stew, he had better pay attention to what his wife tells him. Well, so under these circumstances, there’s only one wise course for the farmer to take. He puts the clucky old hen in a crate and ships her off to the old bidy’s home (audience laughs) and there she lives happily ever after.

Well of course, the storybook is read by all the elderly lady librarians, from one end of the country to the other, and they become so enthralled over the heart-rending symbolism of the fable that they order thousands and thousands of copies from the publisher. This makes the storybook an immediate bestseller and it earns so much money for the author, that never again does he ever have to waste his time and his talent writing sophisticated novels of sex and mayhem for adults. And so this is why, today, there are so many eminent authors writing storybooks for preschool brats and their mommies.

And I thank you. (Audience applauds)

(End)