

# 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  
(203) 432-1735  
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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Manuscripts and Archives  
Yale University Library  
P.O. Box 208240  
New Haven, CT 06520-8240  
(203) 432-1735  
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<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: <https://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 <https://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](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.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.      box  
f.      folder

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## Administrative Information

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### 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.

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## Conditions Governing Use

Copyright status for collection materials is unknown. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.

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## Preferred Citation

John Gassner Papers (MS 560). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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## Related Materials

Audio tapes and transcriptions of some of Gassner's Yale lectures are within the Yale University Archives, Yale Record Group 47-J, Student Examinations, Lectures, Notes and Papers: Yale Lectures.

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## 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 Spettacolo*.

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.

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## Collection Contents

### Inventory, 1950-1964

Correspondence		
b. 1, f. 1	A	1951-1963, undated
b. 1, f. 2	Ba-Bo	1956-1963, undated
b. 1, f. 3	Br-Bu	1956-1961, undated
b. 1, f. 4	C-D	1956-1964, undated
b. 1, f. 5	Canfield, F. Curtis	1956-1964
b. 1, f. 6	Cole, Carroll	1960-1963
b. 1, f. 7	Cole, Edward C.	1956-1964
b. 1, f. 8	Corig, John	1960-1963
b. 1, f. 9	E-F	1956-1963, undated
b. 1, f. 10	G-H	1956-1964
b. 1, f. 11	K-L	1958-1963, undated
b. 1, f. 12	M-N	1956-1964, undated
b. 1, f. 13	O-P	1956-1964, undated
b. 1, f. 14	S-T	1958-1964, undated
b. 1, f. 15	U-Z	1959-1963, undated
b. 1, f. 16	Miscellaneous articles and clippings A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1950-1956, undated
b. 1, f. 17	National Appraisal of the American Theater: project A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1963-1964

Yale School of Drama

## Yale School of Drama (continued)

b. 1, f. 18	Course syllabi and examinations A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1956-1957, undated
b. 1, f. 19	Critiques of student scripts A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	Undated
b. 1, f. 20	Manual of Procedure A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1963-1964

## **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