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A MARXIST IN HOLLYWOOD: THE SCREENWRITING CAREER OF MICHAEL WILSON (1914–1978)

Larry Ceplair

Michael Wilson was perhaps the most accomplished screenwriter of his generation, lauded by his fellow writers and many of Hollywood's greatest directors. He brought to his writing a brilliant mind, his Marxist ideas, and an unsurpassed skill in script construction. His work also received the recognition of his peers, who awarded his work both in the United States and the United Kingdom. Among his best scripts were A Place in the Sun, Five Fingers, The Bridge on the River Kwai*, and* Lawrence of Arabia. *His most notable achievement, however, was the story and script he created for* Salt of the Earth. *This article examines Wilson's background and writing theories, and describes how he approached a select number of the script assignments he worked on.*

Michael Wilson may well have been the most talented screenwriter of his generation. He was also, in my estimation, the most intellectually brilliant Marxist thinker and the one Hollywood Communist who made a significant intellectual effort to meld Marxism and screen writing. He invested himself deeply in the scripts he wrote and strongly defended his work. Perhaps, as a result, very few, if any, screenwriters have compiled a comparable record of success (*A Place in the Sun* to *Planet of the Apes*) in a comparable span of time (1951–1967). There is certainly no doubt about the movie industry's regard for his scripts. Over the course of an 11-year period, while he was blacklisted, his scripts earned five Academy Award nominations (winning for *A Place in the Sun* and *The Bridge on the River Kwai*) and four Writers Guild nominations (winning for *A Place in the Sun* and *Friendly Persuasion*). In addition, two of his scripts won British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) awards (*Kwai* and *Lawrence of*

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Arabia) and one British Screen Writers Guild award (*Lawrence*). He also, during that time, wrote the script for the most persecuted, and now perhaps overly celebrated, film in United States history, *Salt of the Earth*. Director Fred Zinnemann once said: 'I admired him for many years as one of the finest screenwriters in Hollywood.'[1]

And yet, even in the under-appreciated habitat where Hollywood screenwriters dwell (and film historians delve), Wilson has not achieved the recognition his genius merited. That oversight cannot be blamed solely on the blacklist, albeit Wilson was the last of the great writers so proscribed to achieve a screen credit. Even on the blacklist, he was in great demand. Only Dalton Trumbo received more offers. It is an ongoing puzzle, hence this article.

Wilson was born in McAlester, Oklahoma, on July 1, 1914, to a Catholic father and Baptist mother. His father, Frank, was 'totally uneducated,' extremely intelligent, very successful in business, and a very heavy drinker.[2] The family lived in Oklahoma City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Berkeley. While he was in high school, he began to dislike 'the philistine' or 'Babbitt-like life' lived by his father: 'This was a world I wanted to shun. But I had no idea what to replace it with.'[3] He matriculated at the University of California (Berkeley), where he majored in philosophy and minored in English. During his undergraduate years, he was, in his word, a 'dilettante.' It was only during his first year in graduate school that he came to know student radicals and began to 'become radicalized.' In a 1937 paper he wrote for one of his classes, he declared his intention to write social-realistic novels about the 'struggles of modern man.'[4] The following year, he wrote a one-page prospectus for a novel, which he intended as 'a panorama of the minority groups in the far West' and an examination of the 'seething pot of political and cultural traditions' that resulted from the various migrations into the western United States.[5] But, he later recalled: 'I was out of my depth. I really didn't know these impoverished Mexican workers and had no way really to know them well because I spoke no Spanish. I was really trying to do something of social significance … to write something truly about the working class of social significance; and it was just beyond me. I had neither the talent nor the experience to cope with it.'[6] He began reading the works of Marx and Engels, spent a year in Europe (1937–1938), and tried, unsuccessfully, to enlist in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. Though the Spanish Civil War winding down, and no more recruits were being accepted, he felt 'very, very guilty' and cowardly about not going to Spain.[7]

When he returned to Berkeley he joined the Communist Party and was assigned to organize the Berkeley campus branch of the Party. He also did some organizing work for the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union. His future wife, Zelma, remembered seeing him teaching a class on Marxism: 'He was absolutely incredible … He was a positively gorgeous-looking guy, and all these wonderful ideas were coming out of him.' Even then, he was a heavy drinker.[8]

Three aspects of his pre-Hollywood life are important to note. First, he was, in his words, fixated on war. From early boyhood, he made up war games and played with toy soldiers. And yet, he was 'something of a pacifist' and 'didn't believe in war as such.'[9] Second, he wanted to become a writer of material that communicated 'some social good.' Third, he sought a way to integrate his 'ideological commitment' to Marxism and his writing.[10]

While he was in graduate school, Wilson achieved some success as a writer. Five of his short stories were published, but none of his poems. At some point in 1939, his screenwriter brother-in-law, Paul Jarrico, convinced him to come to Hollywood. Wilson recalled: 'My reactions were those of a literary snob. I looked down my nose at movies, even though I liked going to them.' He thought that film was 'a secondary art form, and that a good novelist or short story writer demeaned himself if he became a Hollywood hack.' Jarrico, however, convinced Wilson that screenwriting should be seen merely as a remunerative craft that would support his novel writing.[11]

Wilson was typical of Communist screenwriters in Hollywood in one respect: he did not seek to revolutionize movies; he simply wanted to, in his words, 'shed some light on the nature of the world we live in.'[12]But he did not intend to 'meekly deliver what the philistine ordered.' Rather he intended to find a way to hold himself 'accountable to the peoples of the world.'[13] He told an interviewer: 'If the aim is primarily to change people, the film artist or creator is better off simply depicting honestly the way things are rather than beating people over the head with his own point of view in a propagandistic way.'[14] He remained true to those words during his career, and he wrote only one didactic script—*Salt of the Earth*.

Wilson on screenwriting

In a discussion paper he wrote, in 1942, for the Hollywood Communist Party's writers clinic, Wilson insisted that the two most basic theses of 'the Marxist aesthetic' are that human character is not static, and human characteristics are not innate and unchanging. And yet, though it follows from these theses that the Marxist writer must develop carefully the changes in his or her characters, most Marxist writers 'confuse *development* in character with *transformation* and *metamorphosis* of character. They seem to believe that 'mere development' of character is not enough — that for a story to be intriguing, a character must undergo a complete *qualitative* change.' He was, he continued, 'getting a little weary of conversion pictures.' The best scripts were those in which the main characters changed in small, qualitative ways, as the result of a series of realistic conflicts.[15]

Wilson also firmly believed that content should be the main concern of the Marxist writer. In a series of papers he wrote in 1953 for the Hollywood branch of the Party, Wilson argued that content determines form, is prior to and should dictate the method of telling the story. He defined content as 'the truth, the reality that the writer intends to communicate with this story,' and he defined reality to be the 'basic class struggle.'[16] However, fitting together his concept of development with his belief in the 'basic class struggle' proved difficult for Wilson. He was never able, he later said, to reconcile the requirements of his job as a Hollywood screenwriter with his Marxist thinking.[17] In fact, though he wrote several class-struggle scripts, only one (*Salt*), reached the screen. His best pre-blacklist scripts concerned intra-family struggles.

Wilson's concept of the dialectic also influenced his approach to screenwriting, particularly his concern with movement and unity. He defined movement as 'the

evolution of, or tension between, events,' and he tried to express each event 'in terms of some conflict' and to integrate each conflict into the world of the story he was writing.[18] He always began each of his screenplays with one 'artistic axiom' in mind: a good motion picture story must have a unity of structure, theme, and action, and it must 'move continuously from scene to scene without a break or interlude.'[19]

Structure and continuity were Wilson's particular strengths as a screenwriter. When his scripts were revised, scenes might have been removed and dialogue may have been rewritten, but the structure and continuity were rarely altered.

First (pre-war) screenplays

When Wilson arrived in Hollywood, he did not know how to write a movie script, so he began attending as many movies as he could. He also continued to write short stories. One of those stories caught the attention of the agent Paul Kohner, who got Wilson a job at Columbia Pictures. He was paid $100 a week, for five weeks' work on what he later called 'a dog,' a script on which 16 previous writers had worked. The movie, titled *The Men in Her Life*, was released in 1941, and Wilson received a co-credit,[20] but he was not retained on Columbia's writing staff. His next job was with Harry Sherman, the producer of the Hopalong Cassidy western series, which had begun production in 1935. It was an unusual match. (Wilson was one of three blacklisted people who began their careers writing low-budget westerns. Connie Lee Bennett and Stanley Roberts were the other two.) Though it was formula writing—Sherman was producing five to six episodes a year—Wilson recalled: 'I felt even in a formula western I had a great deal to learn about motion picture writing and perfecting some craftsmanship to begin with. But furthermore I felt even the Hopalong Cassidy formula lent itself to real and honest situations.'[21]

During 1942, Wilson wrote or co-wrote four Cassidy westerns. The plot of the first, *Border Patrol* (June 1943), was based on his own idea about an unscrupulous mine owner who lured Mexican workers into Texas and reduced them to peonage. Wilson's script conformed to the basic Hopalong formula—good guys, after a few mishaps, capturing bad guys—but he introduced a new element: a woman provided significant assistance to the good guys. The reviewer for *Hollywood Reporter* noted that this episode contained 'much that is new in the Western picture formula,' but did not provide details, while the *Daily Variety* reviewer deemed the screenplay 'excellent.'[22] Wilson's next script, *Colt Comrades* (June 1943), based on another writer's story, depicted a conflict between small ranchers and a monopolistic rancher over water rights. Here, Wilson does make a point particular to his ideology: the small ranchers must organize and stick together if they hope to succeed. His final script, *Forty Thieves* (June 1944), was also based on another writer's story; it concerned a rigged municipal election.[23] The reviewers for the trades made no comments on the social content of the last three.

At some point during 1942, Wilson wrote a treatment for another western story, based on Mary O'Hara's novel, *My Friend Flicka*, about a boy, a filly, his angry father, and his understanding mother. Wilson's treatment is especially good on the

intra-family tensions and how they are resolved.[24] When the movie was made and released the following year, Wilson did not receive a credit. Thoroughly dissatisfied with the formulaic westerns he was being assigned, beginning to feel he was wasting his time in Hollywood, and knowing he was probably going to be drafted, he enlisted in the Marine Corps. This was not an unusual move among Hollywood Communists of his generation. Most wanted to help defeat what they called 'world-wide fascism,' but many were rejected as security threats. He joined, Zelma Wilson, said, because he thought he had something to prove, to compensate for not going to Spain. 'He wanted to be in the most aggressive, dangerous aspect of the war.'[25] Wilson spent three years in the Corps, mainly working in the intelligence section in Hawaii, and achieved the rank of major. During that time, he wrote to Jarrico: 'in this life, the life of the line or the line officer, consciousness is almost inevitably reduced to a lower level; your effectiveness in terms of the group has definite limitations; your effectiveness as an individual, as a writer, is necessarily swamped under by a mass of other details.'[26]

When he returned to Hollywood, he received a big break. Kohner secured him a job, paying $300 a week, with a new independent company, Liberty Films, which had been co-founded by three of the most successful directors in Hollywood: Frank Capra, George Stevens, and William Wyler (and the producer Sam Briskin). They had just signed a nine-picture deal with RKO. Wilson's first assignment was to revise a script written by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, to be directed by Capra. There were several interesting aspects of this assignment. The source, a very short story titled 'The Greatest Gift' (by Philip van Doren Stern), tells the story of George, a man about to commit suicide on Christmas Eve. He tells the angel who is sent to save him that he wished he had never been born. When George's wish is granted, and he sees the result of his absence, he learns the greatest lesson of life: he is needed. RKO bought the story, but three writers (Dalton Trumbo, Marc Connelly, and Clifford Odets) failed to create a satisfactory back story dramatically explaining George's decision.

When Capra read the story, he fell in love with it, purchased the rights from RKO, and assigned the script to Goodrich and Hackett. They hated working for Capra and refused to do any rewrites.[27] It is not clear why Wilson was chosen to revise the suicide portion. He had no track record on A pictures; his salary and stature were far below those who had preceded him and the two (Jo Swerling and Dorothy Parker) who succeeded him. Nevertheless, he worked on the script for four months and ended up contributing almost 230 pages of revisions, to correct what he identified as the 'major weakness' of the Goodrich/Hackett script: the lack of motivation for the suicide. In other words, the script, instead of developing, from the beginning, George's frustrations and his sense of failure, relied on a gimmick at the end to send him to the bridge. Wilson also stated that the characterizations of George's wife (Mary) and his enemy (Potter) had to be made more three-dimensional.[28] Wilson's main concern was to heighten the realism, impact, and dramatic tension of George's statement: 'I wish I had never been born,' and to dramatize Clarence's statement: 'Each man's life touches so many other lives.' Zelma Wilson recalled that her husband 'was not wild about pictures with angels. I remember him coming home groaning about having to write dialogue with an angel.'[29] Wilson did not reconstruct the script, but he

rewrote many of the early scenes relating George's ambitions, the key scenes between George and Potter, and the suicide segment, trying, as best he could, to de-sentimentalize Capra's vision. Although much of his work was used, he did not receive a credit, and he chose not to seek arbitration.[30]

Capra must have been satisfied with Wilson's work, because he immediately assigned him the job of adapting Jessamyn West's *The Friendly Persuasion*, 14 linked stories about a Quaker family living in pre-Civil War Indiana. West's stories were charming and witty, but they were disconnected and the characters did not develop or change from story to story. Wilson decided to build his script around the longest story in the book, 'The Battle of Finney's Ford,' because it encapsulated what he thought was the book's main conflict: 'how the serenity of Quaker life is disturbed by the alien values from the outside world.' He used two other stories and several events of his own invention to add drama to West's book, but he endeavored to retain what he called her 'slowly unfolding comedy.'[31] Wilson enlarged the role of several of the characters, invented a runaway slave, and intensified the family's involvement with the war. At the end, the family's values have been bent but not broken. Shortly after Wilson completed the second draft, Liberty and all its scripts were sold to Paramount Pictures. There, the project was shelved.

First quality credits: *A Place in the Sun* (1951) and *Five Fingers* (1952)

In January 1948, Wilson went with Liberty's directors to Paramount. His salary was raised (to $500 per week), and he was assigned to adapt Thomas Wolfe's very-long novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, for Wyler. It is easy to understand why this was one of Wilson's favorite scripts. It demonstrated his ability to cut to the filmic heart of a novel. He skipped the first two-fifths and began the script with the implosion of the Gant family. Deftly navigating through Wolfe's florid prose, Wilson illuminated the family's dysfunction and rage. He also carefully traced Eugene Gant's slow maturation process.[32] Studio executives, however, did not approve Wilson's script for production, a decision an angry Wyler called 'entirely unreasonable.'[33]

Wilson was then assigned to adapt another long novel, Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*. Published in late 1925, it had been adapted for the stage by Patrick Kearney in 1926 and made into a Paramount film in 1931. The novel has three main characters and is divided into three parts. Wilson began his script with the second part. He adhered closely to Dreiser's theme, telling the story of a young man, untutored in the ways of the world, who harbored dreams of success based on his reading of slick-magazine stories. Wilson, like Dreiser, viewed the 'tragedy' as a collective one—all the characters were 'stained with guilt,' but, in good dialectical fashion, Wilson insisted that two of the main characters (George and Angela) should be depicted as having positively affected each other.[34]

George Stevens, the director, was pleased with Wilson's work, noting in a memo: 'We were certainly not wrong in our appraisal of him. Mike is good. The work as we get on [*sic*] we find really gratifying.'[35] According to Wilson, his relations with Stevens were 'very good,' but 'eventually we came into conflict on

ideological points. Sometimes I would give way or be won over to his point of view. In other cases I would stick to my guns and the situation would get nasty.' The main sticking point was their respective visions: Wilson basically adhered to Dreiser's point of view about a young man who was enormously handicapped by 'ignorance, youth, poverty and fear,'[36] whereas Stevens wanted the main character to be full of bright hope, unencumbered by his background. In addition, as Wilson remembered it, Stevens felt that he, Wilson, was perhaps being 'too stubbornly Marxist,' and feared that 'the picture would be attacked as being a left-wing picture, that it would be picketed by the American Legion, or that the studio would lose its nerve and fail to back him up.'[37] A close reading of all of Wilson's drafts for this project have revealed no 'Marxist' inserts or class-struggle elements. (Although, it should be noted, many anti-Communists considered Dreiser to be at least a fellow traveler.)

Wilson completed his final draft on August 5, 1949, and Stevens then hired Harry Brown to make a series of revisions. After reading one of the revised shooting scripts (dated September 23), Wilson typed a five-page set of comments, asking that the characters of George's mother and uncle be deepened. As they currently were depicted, Wilson wrote, they undercut Dreiser's novel and George's tragedy, by hiding from the audience what George is running away from and what he is running toward. Wilson also thought that the revisions had eliminated important elements of George's affair with Alice, again weakening the tragic elements of George's story. During principal photography, 44 more pages were revised, mainly in the scenes between George and the two women, but none of Wilson's suggestions were followed. In sum, Stevens softened both Dreiser's and Wilson's themes, and there is nothing in the movie to explain why George acts as he does. In the finished film, he appears to be a not-very-bright man on the make, who blunders into two life-changing decisions.

Wilson considered the finished movie to be 'an honest and illuminating statement of the American scene,' and he wrote Stevens: 'I did have my moments of disappointment—subjective perhaps—in noting certain omissions, particularly in the climax of the picture. But what is not there is far outweighed by what is there, by the totality of the piece and its impact. You have given it the compassion of a true tragedy. It is a deeply pro-human picture—an inadequate word to describe a crucial quality in a time when our culture is being de-humanized and brutalized.'[38] Wilson continued to admire Stevens, and, 15 years later in a declaration provided for the director, Wilson wrote: 'In my view, George Stevens is a master craftsman among film directors.'[39]

The studio then assigned Wilson to adapt Jack Schaefer's western novel *Shane*. Wilson wrote a 17-page step outline, a 25-page revised outline, and a treatment. He thought that the book lacked tension and development, so he made four major changes. First, he transformed the role of the young boy from a narrator/observer to a main character and created several new scenes giving him influence on key events. Second, he created a developing relationship between the boy and Shane, because, he said: 'In the book, the boy's attitude toward Shane does not change … nor does Shane in any way change the boy's values. If we do not go beneath this superficial treatment of the relationship between Shane and the boy, we stand in danger of telling a stereotyped story which merely glorifies violence in the form

of the steely-eyed, silent stranger.' Third, Wilson noted that the relationship between the three adult characters (Shane and the boy's parents), as represented in the novel, is 'flat and uncomplicated,' there is no tension between them and their characters do not develop. In other words, there is no development of the conflicts 'essential to dramatic construction.' Last, and a key point for Wilson, was to have Shane say, at the end: 'Violence leads only to violence,' and 'a man who lives by the gun will die from the gun.'[40] But Wilson's contract with Paramount expired in April 1950. When the studio assigned the project to George Stevens, he read Wilson's treatment, proclaimed it 'excellent,' but chose A. B. Guthrie, Jr. to write the script.[41] Guthrie's script utilized many of Wilson's ideas, but Wilson did not receive a credit.

At some point in late 1950 or early 1951, Wilson signed a contract with Twentieth Century-Fox, where he was assigned to adapt L. C. Moyzisch's memoir, *Operation Cicero*. Moyzisch, an agent of the German Reich Security Department, who had been stationed in Ankara, Turkey, during World War II, had written an account of his purchase of secret documents from an employee of the British Embassy. Studio head Darryl F. Zanuck, after reading a summary of the book, assigned Wilson to write the script and provided the writer with an overview of how he should approach the story. Wilson proceeded to write a step outline, using only the bare bones of Moyzisch's account. He eliminated one major character, reduced the role of Moyzisch, and invented several other key characters. Zanuck called it 'very good,' made several suggestions, but left the structure untouched. Wilson completed a first draft screenplay on April 6, and a revised final draft on August 4.[42]

It is not clear exactly when director Joseph L. Mankiewicz read the script, now titled *Five Fingers*. But when he did, he told Zanuck: 'It has more than just potentialities—it is *on the verge* of being superb.' He thought the structure was fine; it only required 'some tightening and a little more ingenuity here and there,' and the dialogue needed 'help.' Zanuck agreed to allow Mankiewicz to direct it and to revise the dialogue, but Zanuck made it clear that Mankiewiciz would not receive a co-writing credit. According to Mankiewicz's biographer and the AFI Online Film Catalogue, Mankiewicz rewrote much of the dialogue, but retained most of Wilson's continuity.[43]

Wilson, however, was not in a position to protest the changes Mankiewicz had made. Shortly before he completed his final revision, Wilson received a subpoena from the Committee on Un-American Activities, and, when he publicly announced that he would not cooperate with the committee, he was fired. Years later, however, Wilson told Geist: 'Joe did a final polish job of my screenplay in which he contributed some twenty-five or thirty lines of dialogue—or, by page count, somewhat less than ten pages of screenplay … In fairness to Joe, I must say that the lines he did write composed [*sic*] some of the wittier and more sardonic speeches in the script and I was glad to find them there.'[44]

Salt of the Earth (1954)

During his short appearance on the witness stand, Wilson accused the committee of 'beating the drums of war,' and he invoked the Fifth Amendment when asked

about his political beliefs and affiliations.[45] Immediately blacklisted by the major movie studios, he intended to use this enforced absence to finish a novel he had begun several years earlier, but once again Jarrico intervened. In the late summer of 1953, Jarrico, who had formed Independent Productions Corporation with a few other blacklisted people, asked Wilson to write a script about a strike of Mexican-American miners in New Mexico. Though he was at first reluctant, Wilson came to see the great possibilities in a film about this strike. Using the experience of this particular group of Mexican Americans, he could tell a story about labor, race, and gender in the United States. Wilson later told a convention of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers (the strikers' union) that he and the film's producers had discovered 'a rich untapped vein in American culture … [A] story of epic proportions.' Wilson, Jarrico, *et al*. were determined to produce the first 'Hollywood' film 'made by and for union men and women.' They would tell the story of a strike from the point of view of the miners and their wives, deal honestly with the trials and tribulations of a democratic trade union, emphasize the union-busting attitudes of management, and raise the issue of racial discrimination in the southwestern United States.[46]

Wilson traveled to Bayard, New Mexico, in October 1953, and stayed for one month, 'listening all the time, not talking.'[47] Clinton Jencks, a union organizer, described Wilson as 'a wonderful human sponge, soaking up everything and saying very little.'[48] Slowly, Wilson recalled, 'the germ of an idea for a story' planted itself:

> It was to be a simple story, a love story, a story of a miner's family and their struggle for a better way of life. It was to be the story of what a typical miner learned in the course of the strike: that not only was the unity of Anglo-American and Mexican-American workers necessary to defeat the divisive tactics of the mine owners, but that the miners had in their own wives allies and reserves of power that they had not dreamed of. It was to be a story of hope and fulfillment.[49]

On his return to Los Angeles, Wilson told the producers: 'It's all there and nothing's there. It's not a matter of a situation. It's people. It's a story of people and the conflict is very complex. There are battles for equality taking place there on so many levels I can hardly unskein them yet myself.' Of one thing he was certain—at its core, the film story had to be about a couple in love and divided 'by everything outside themselves.' It will be the entrance of the women into the strike that will move the struggle for equality to a new level. The theme will be the 'indivisibility of equality,' demonstrating that without unity at every level there can be no victory.[50]

Wilson wrote a treatment, and brought it to the miners and their families the following spring. He listened to their criticisms, returned home, wrote two drafts of a screenplay, and returned to New Mexico for further discussion. Jarrico estimated that approximately 400 people read and commented on the script. Wilson later said about the experience: 'Ordinarily I would have detested it … But in this case I didn't mind it at all … I welcomed their opinions because in the process of hearing their opinions, I was learning more about them. It made me better qualified to write the story of their lives.'[51] One of the main criticisms was Wilson's

tendency to be a bit Anglo-paternal in his depiction of the decision-making process of the miners' local.[52]

For the first time in his screenwriting career, Wilson's Marxism took center stage. During his years in the Communist Party, he had participated in many discussions on racism, the treatment of Mexican Americans, and the role of women. His wife and sister-in-law were smart, strong women, as were many other women he knew in the Party. His problem was to find a way to tell a complex story about a variety of struggles in a ninety-minute film. He solved it by employing a conventional melodramatic frame—the marriage problems of a husband and wife—but he included them within a network of other people and conflicts. Since he could not individualize the large cast, he had to 'synthesize them, all of them; the weaknesses and the virtues, until the individual expresses a real element of the whole and something not atypical of the whole, even though a variant part of it.'[53]

The screen story is relatively simple: the miners' strike, the women push themselves forward as significant participants, the couple at the center of the story quarrel sharply over the new role of women, and, at the end, the miners, by remaining united and accepting the help of the women, win the strike. The men realize that the women were essential to that victory and begin to take them more seriously; the women have become conscious of their own strength. Some conservative critics dismissed the story as Red propaganda; some sympathetic critics have complained about the lack of complexity. In fact, the Anglo mine bosses and the sheriff's department personnel are one-dimensionally oppressive. But they are only foils; it is not important that they be shown in all their human complexity, nor does Wilson have the screen time to do so. Here, again, he had to synthesize and simplify.

In his script, Wilson also demonstrated his appreciation for the crowd elements used by Soviet film-makers, such as Eisenstein and Pudovkin. When the events unfold that lead to the call for a strike, Wilson wrote: 'long shot: the women standing on the knoll above the mine. They are silent and grave. The women's skirts billow in the wind, like unfurled flags, like the tattered banner of a guerrilla band that has come to offer its services to the regular army. Fade out.'[54] Later, when the men are enjoined from picketing, and the women take over the picket line, Wilson wrote: 'Medium long shot: miners on hillside. On the steep wooded slope about the picket post the varsity squats on its collective haunches. The men smoke, watching the picket line with awe and apprehension … The hillside. Another angle, higher up on the slope. Several miners stand here with their families. They, too, look unhappy.'[55] Then, when the sheriff tries to break the women's line with a convoy of cars and trucks, Wilson's script cuts back and forth among three crowds: the sheriff's group, the women, and the husbands. And, at the end, when the sheriff's attempt to dispossess a striker's family fails, Wilson wrote: 'Slow panning shot. The Sheriff's force is completely surrounded by over a hundred men, women and children. Appearing on the surrounding hills, on every side, are other miner, other women, other kids—massed, impassive.'[56]

When Hollywood Party ideologue John Howard Lawson, after viewing a rough cut, labeled the movie 'sectarian,' for its focus on a single family, Wilson replied: 'within the raw material of class struggle—a long and bitter strike against a ruthless monopoly—the story deals not only with the vital question of the

Mexican-American people, but with the woman question as well. These three factors in combination … are intrinsically militant, advanced stuff.' In other words, Wilson insisted, this movie is a *vanguard* work' not a sectarian one.[57]

Salt was, Wilson later said, an 'obviously tendentious [movie], was designed to be, is very class conscious, and makes no attempt to disguise its Marxist point of view.' Perhaps, he mused, it 'would have been a better picture had it been less tendentious.'[58] Writing it, however, gave Wilson enormous satisfaction, because, he said: 'I was in control all the way. No one could alter it without my permission.'[59] He and Jarrico took pride in having made a movie that the studio system would not have dared to make.

The blacklist epics: *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962)

Shortly after finishing *Salt*, the Wilsons moved to France. While he was there, William Wyler bought the 'The Friendly Persuasion' script from Paramount and resold it to Allied Artists. He still liked Wilson's script, but he wanted to make 'a great number of changes' in it. He hired Jessamyn West, gave her Wilson's script, and told her the changes he wanted her to make. Her rewrite, he said, 'contained elements' of Wilson's script (notably its structure and choice of stories), but he did not deem it to be shootable. Wyler then hired two other writers to work with her to revise her script. They shifted a few scenes, altered a few others, dropped two, added two, and altered the ending, but the structure and continuity were unchanged. Certainly, their contribution was significantly less than 35%. Wyler claims he wanted to assign the screen credit to Wilson, West, and Robert Wyler, his brother. But studio executives made it clear to Wyler 'that they would not consider giving Michael Wilson credit.'[60] When Wyler tentatively assigned credit to West and his brother, Robert, Wilson asked the Writers Guild to arbitrate.[61] The arbitration committee awarded Wilson sole credit, but when the movie opened, studio executives took advantage of a clause in the collective bargaining agreement with the Guild, allowing them to refuse credit to a blacklisted writer. Thus, for the only time in the history of talking pictures, the only writing credit to appear on the screen read: 'From the book by Jessamyn West.' Wilson later said that he considered the finished film to be 'a humanist statement on war,' although he found 'nothing particularly profound in it.'[62]

In Paris, Wilson was one of the most highly sought after blacklisted writers, and he co-wrote, with Jarrico, several scripts, including *Five Branded Women*. Of course, they were paid sub-market rates and did not receive screen credits. Then, in 1956, the screenwriting gods smiled upon Wilson. The blacklisted writer and would-be producer, Carl Foreman, had purchased the movie rights to the English-language version of Pierre Boulle's novel *Le Pont de la rivière Kwai*, but he could not get financial backing, until he met and formed a partnership with Sam Spiegel. Foreman would write and co-produce the movie, but, according to Foreman, 'in some fashion that I still can't understand after so many years, I soon found myself neither a partner nor the producer.' Spiegel's new partner, the director David Lean, thought Foreman's script was 'appalling.' He claimed he threw it away,

because Foreman had discarded Boulle's straightforward story-telling method. Lean claimed that he and his assistant prepared a new treatment; that Foreman disliked it; and that Lean forced Spiegel to terminate Foreman. (Foreman, however, claimed he left voluntarily, when he was offered a writer–producer contract by Columbia Pictures.) When the work of Spiegel's first choice as a replacement, Calder Willingham, displeased Lean, Spiegel turned to Wilson. He was to be paid $10,000 for six weeks of work, on location in Ceylon.

In some ways, this was the easiest of Wilson's assignments. The book is short (171 pages); there are only a few key characters; it has an easily adaptable structure. Essentially, it is a study of what occurs when single-minded people collide. The story is told from two perspectives: those building the bridge and those trying to destroy it. In a series of notes he wrote, in preparation for the revision, Wilson acknowledged the 'considerable' positive value of Foreman's script, and then listed several elements that required 'attention, study, and correction.' First, there was no dissent (conflict) among the British prisoners regarding their commanding officer's (Colonel Nicholson's) obsession with building the bridge. Second, the Japanese commandant (Colonel Saito) had been depicted as a 'psychotic barbarian.' His contest with Nicholson could not have any suspense or substance unless Saito was transformed into 'a man of stature.' And, third, one of the British commandos assigned to blow up the bridge (Shears), had to be transformed into an American sailor, to attract a big-name American actor (William Holden). Wilson wanted his Shears character to be 'a rough diamond with a peculiar sense of humor, an American rough diamond.' Also, unlike Boulle and Foreman, Wilson intended to use Shears as the voice of Wilson's attitude toward the madness of military types, like Nicholson and Saito, who lose all human perspective during a war. Wilson hammered home that point at the end of the movie, giving the last word to a British doctor, who as he surveys the dead bodies lying on the river bank, shakes his head and says: 'Madness'! Wilson later said that in his *Bridge* script he tried to make clear that 'the military mentality if it's allowed to take power, becomes completely irrational.'[63]

Kwai was the only mainstream movie on which Wilson worked that he had the last word. He wrote a second draft and the final shooting script. No one rewrote him. Lean later said that Wilson 'was a very civilised, good chap and he wrote the American part and sort of polished up and tightened up all that I had done. It was really Mike's and my script. I give Mike a huge amount of credit.'[64] When Wilson learned what Lean was saying about Foreman, he said: 'Lean's statement is most unfair to Carl. It is not true that all his work was thrown out, although I did alter it considerably and introduced many new elements.'[65]

Spiegel, who fretted that Wilson's 'wicked name might get out of the bag' and ruin the picture's chances,[66] used the name 'John Michael' on Wilson's drafts and gave screen credit to Boulle. Boulle, who was nominated for best screenplay by both BAFTA and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, admitted that he had not written the script; nevertheless, he won and accepted both awards. (The Academy gave Zelma Wilson an Oscar® in 1985.)

After *Kwai* opened, Wilson received a number of offers. He decided to stick with Spiegel and accepted an assignment to adapt Horton Foote's play, *The Chase*. When that project began to wallow, Spiegel and Lean discussed with Wilson a film

about Mohandas K. Gandhi, but they could not develop a frame for the story. Spiegel, for his part, had not been able to find in the life of this non-violent revolutionary, the father of Indian independence, who was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic, a tragic element.[67] At Lean's urging they decided to film the story of T. E. Lawrence. Spiegel, however, could not purchase the rights to Lawrence's memoir, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, though he bought the rights to as many of the Lawrence biographies as he could. (There were over two dozen.) Wilson was, he said, eager to write that screenplay, but he would only sign a contract if Spiegel met his terms, which included 'screen credit for the rightful author.'[68] Spiegel, in his usual manner, sort of agreed. The contract stated that Wilson would receive screen credit for the prints that were screened in the 'eastern hemisphere,' and, if Wilson signed 'a satisfactory statement as required by Mr. Spiegel' (meaning an affidavit stating he was not a Communist), Spiegel agreed to use his best efforts to secure a screen credit for the western hemisphere prints. Although Wilson was, officially, still on the blacklist, he was to be paid the going market rate for a screenwriter of his caliber: $100,000 plus 2.5% of the net profits.[69]

It is clear from Wilson's earliest notes that he had read *Seven Pillars*, Lawrence's letters and several of the biographies, including the harshly critical one written by Richard Aldington. Using these sources, Wilson closely analyzed Lawrence's character and the arc of his career. Fascinated by, but not enamored of, Lawrence, Wilson described him as a romantic visionary, who was torn between two cultures. Those two elements of Lawrence's personality explained the contradictions in Lawrence's behavior and demonstrated why victory was snatched from his grasp 'by chess players who invested that victory with a content he [Lawrence] had not foreseen.'[70] One week later, Wilson expressed his hope that the movie would trace what he called 'the burgeoning of the mystical (i.e. delusional) element in Lawrence's personality' and show how it affected his encounters with harsh reality.[71]

When it came time for Wilson to prepare his outline, he used *Seven Pillars* exclusively, even though Spiegel still had not obtained the right to use it. On one level, its chronological structure, *Seven Pillars* lent itself to a relatively straightforward adaptation, but Lawrence's writing style, his florid prose, and his self-aggrandizement posed problems. Elie Kedourie has said that it 'is a work seething with rancour and resentment, full of advocacy and rhetoric.'[72] The heart of the memoir, and the heart of Wilson's script, is Lawrence's determination to overcome any obstacles, even his government's policy and his superiors' orders, to insure that the Arab army alone liberated Damascus. To overcome the two major obstacles facing him—the perfidy of the British government and the weakness of the Arab army—Lawrence vowed 'to make the Arab Revolt the engine of its own success, as well as handmaid to our Egyptian campaign: and vowed to lead it so madly in the final victory that expediency should counsel to the Powers a fair settlement of the Arabs' moral claims.'[73] However, according to Kedourie, the Damascus episode 'is heavy and opaque with deliberate suppression.'[74] Wilson, of course, did not have to concern himself with complete historical accuracy.

In his 92-page outline and commentary on the adaptation, Wilson did a section-by-section condensation and analysis of the book's contents, to locate the 'dramatic form and progression' of the story. He decided that the key structural

element was the arc of Lawrence's career: an obscure second lieutenant reaches messianic heights and then suffers a political and personal failure. Wilson selected the battle of Akaba as the pinnacle of that arc. As a result of that battle, Wilson wrote, Lawrence learned 'the full potential of the Arab revolt and his possible role in it,' and he found 'the comradeship (with Ali in particular) that he has never known before.' It was at Akaba, that Lawrence felt 'his first sense of guilt,' over his Arabophilia, 'and his first sense of grandeur,' as a result of his identification with the Arab cause. Wilson broadened and reshaped the character of Ali, to 'personify for Lawrence all that is noble and worthy in the Arab cause' and to provide Lawrence with a friendship, 'based on mutual respect' and 'untainted by self-interest or ulterior motives.' Wilson also called for an enhanced role for General Allenby, as a counter to Ali. In a sense, Allenby and Ali would serve as the commentators on the downward arc of Lawrence's fortunes.[75]

In January, Spiegel showed Wilson's outline to Lawrence's executor, who immediately agreed to sell Spiegel the right to use *Seven Pillars* as the basis for the movie. Lean was effusive in his response to the outline, wiring Wilson: 'What a masterly job you are doing. Your extraordinary grasp and inventive appreciation of complex subject and character fills me with admiration and excitement.'[76] Wilson then wrote a treatment and a first draft screenplay (198 pp.). After reading Wilson's first draft, Lean expressed disagreement with several of Wilson's ideas. The most significant divide was over Wilson's depiction of Lawrence. Lean viewed Lawrence as 'an alternating current … with a negative for every positive,' and, as far as Lean was concerned, Wilson's script had glossed over 'the many-faceted aspects of Lawrence's character—[his] complexities and contradictions.' Lean also wanted to shift and change the emphasis of several key scenes. From Wilson's perspective, Lean wanted more than a polish or a rewrite of the first draft of the screenplay. In a note to himself, Wilson wrote: 'The alterations demanded are of such pervasive character that the script can only be polished after these alterations are made. My own attitude is that the *existing* script is the one to be polished.'[77]

After what he called that 'strenuous and exasperating' series of meetings with Spiegel and Lean, Wilson wrote to his agent telling her that if they were satisfied with Wilson's second draft (and only asked for a final polish), he would stay with the project. 'On the other hand, if Lean behaves like Lean, and remains fraught with insecurity and later demands a new departure to the material (and that is quite possible), then I'm afraid they'll have to find themselves another boy.'[78] In fact, when Wilson and Lean met in December to discuss Wilson's second draft, Lean declared his dissatisfaction with Wilson's work. Though Wilson had made many of the cuts Lean had asked for, he had not, to Lean's satisfaction, captured Lawrence's 'complex' personality. Nevertheless, Lean and Spiegel asked Wilson to travel to the desert location and spend six months there, continuously rewriting.[79] Wilson, however, having focused on what he considered the most important elements of Lawrence's mentality, was only prepared to devote four more weeks to the script, and he so informed Spiegel and Lean, who were stunned by the announcement.

Although Wilson believed he had written the two drafts necessary to fulfill the terms of the contract, he prepared a (revised second) or third draft, which he finished in January 1961. Wilson assured Spiegel that this draft was not a mere cut-and-polish job, but had been 'thoroughly reworked from beginning to end.'[80]

Spiegel and Lean claimed that they, in effect, threw away that draft. Spiegel also discarded the scripts of two other writers he hired, before convincing the British playwright Robert Bolt to take the assignment. When the movie was ready for previewing and credits were to be assigned, Lean and Spiegel did all they could to block Wilson's credit, not because they believed that Bolt's script was *ab ovo*, but out of sheer spite. Wilson, when he learned of the assignment and after comparing the two scripts, wrote to Spiegel: 'It is clear at once that little of my dialogue remains … Certainly less than ten percent.' But, he continued, Bolt 'used my approach, my construction, my objectives, my characterizations—not to mention my inventions.'[81] When Bolt denied that he had used Wilson's script in any way,[82] Wilson asked the British Writers Guild to arbitrate. One year later, the committee agreed with Wilson that Bolt had written his script 'using source material supplied by the [production] company.' Wilson received a co-credit and an award for Best Dramatic Script.[83]

Even though in most adaptation arbitrations, the advantage is heavily weighted in favor of the first writer (since both perforce use most of the same characters and scenes), there is no doubt of the similarity of structure and character between Wilson's third (or revised second) draft and the 1988 Director's Cut of *Lawrence*. In fact, the few significant differences weakened the movie. Lean, obviously besotted with the desert and desert sunsets, devoted three over-long segments to them. Furthermore, the Bolt/Lean Lawrence is indecipherable. Opaque for the first 60 minutes, he becomes overly mercurial for the film's remaining two-plus hours. Since the clear, simplified, arc of personal development sketched by Wilson had been dispensed with, Bolt/Lean had to rely on O'Toole's tortured facial expressions and the commentary of characters like Jackson Bentley to depict Lawrence's divided soul. In Wilson's scripts, Lawrence clearly states his goals in his first meeting with Feisal, near the beginning of the movie, and the rise and fall of his hopes are more clearly and cleanly depicted. Further, in Wilson's script, Allenby and Ali are much more clearly depicted as strophe and antistrophe. (It should be noted that Wilson later also used commentators to explain Che Guevara's behavior. He seemed to prefer giving several sides of a complex historical figure to trying to capture him in the performance of the leading actor.)

The post-blacklist films: *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and *Che!* (1969)

Wilson's first post-blacklist credit came later than those of his peers. Part of the reason was that he had been the lead plaintiff on two major suits against the studios. He also was unlucky in his choice of assignments. Ironically, his first post-blacklist credit was not for a script, but for a treatment (*The Sandpiper*, 1965). A series of contingencies, beginning with another Pierre Boulle novel, opened the door to a screen credit for a script. The project to adapt the French writer's novel, *La planète des singes*, began at Warner Bros. Producer Arthur Jacobs contracted with Rod Serling to write the script, but none of Serling's many drafts pleased the producer. Jacobs sent the script to Boulle, who offered to rewrite it and sent a 34-page treatment to Jacobs.[84] But when the intended director (Blake Edwards) signed on to another project and the proposed budget reached astronomical heights, Warner Bros. executives decided to shelve the project.

Jacobs then brought it to Twentieth Century-Fox, where he, Charles Eastman, and the new director, Franklin Schaffner, revised Serling's script. Schaffner later said that he had never thought of the project as science fiction, but rather as 'a political film, with a certain amount of Swiftian satire.'[85] Still dissatisfied, Jacobs hired Wilson, who concurred with Schaffner's take on the story. As he had done with *Kwai*, Wilson returned to the novel, and as he had done in *Five Fingers*, he used only the bare bones of the story. Wilson vastly improved the depth of the main characters (Taylor, Zaius, Zeus, and Cornelius) and heightened the plot's tension, suspense, and action. Unlike Boulle, who had satirized the scientific establishment, Wilson took on the cold-war culture of the United States and transformed Boulle's scientific hearing into a trial about political heresy. The apes' chief ideologue declares: 'There is a conspiracy afoot to undermine the very cornerstone of our faith.'[86] Wilson also altered the ending, to convey his own feeling about the precariousness of human existence. He wanted Nova (the humanoid love interest) to be impregnated by Taylor and for both of them to survive and face a future in which Taylor is the last human. Jacobs sharply disagreed. He insisted that Nova remain childless and that the apes kill Taylor.

Wilson completed his final draft of 121 pages on May 5, 1967. Jacobs then brought in John T. Kelley, who revised the dialogue on 75 of the script's pages. The structure and continuity were not altered, and Jacobs decided to retain Wilson's ending. After seeing a rough cut, Wilson told Jacobs and Schaffner: 'I'm positive that you have a winner,'[87] and he later told an interviewer that he was satisfied with Schaffner's direction and treatment of his script.[88] The movie was a box-office success, and it spawned four sequels, one remake (2001), and two reboots. (Though Serling had virtually no claim to the script's final structure, continuity, or dialogue, he received a co-credit. However, because Wilson had used Serling's key invention—Taylor landing not on a distant planet but the future earth and discovering that at the end of the movie by seeing the crown of the Statue of Liberty sticking up from the sand—he chose not to challenge that decision.)

Shortly after completing *Apes*, Wilson was approached by a producer named Sy Bartlett to revise a script about Che Guevara. Bartlett gave to Wilson several notebooks filled with his research and a script written by David Karp based on it. Wilson recalled: 'I undertook this whole project with grave misgivings … But I was persuaded by a number of my close friends to give it a try.'[89] Wilson divided Che's life into four parts (pre-Fidel, making the revolution, building the revolutionary state, Bolivia), created a series of composite characters to comment on Che's personality and activities, and employed voice-over quotations from Che's writings. As with T. E. Lawrence, Wilson aimed for objectivity; he made no attempt to glorify Che or the Cuban revolutionaries; and he did not try to resolve the controversies that were swirling around Che's life and death. In fact, the last third of the script is very negative, depicting Che as the author of his own destruction.[90]

Wilson made his last revision on October 2, 1968. Just before shooting began, Bartlett asked him to make a series of changes, all of which he felt made Che look foolish. When he refused to make them, he was terminated and Bartlett rewrote the screenplay. In November, after reading the revised script, Wilson wrote a letter to Bartlett and Richard Fleischer (the director), in which he accused Bartlett of reneging on their original agreement not to take sides or editorialize in any

way. Bartlett's revisions, Wilson declared, had destroyed the balance that he, Wilson, had 'so painstakingly achieved,' substituting for it Bartlett's 'political bias.'[91] When he failed to receive a satisfactory response, Wilson wrote to a studio executive asking that his name be removed from the credit list, because his screenplay had been drastically altered, 'both thematically and stylistically.'[92] Fleischer then telephoned Wilson, telling him that most of the offensive material either had not been shot or had been cut, and inviting Wilson to watch a rough cut. Wilson was mollified and rescinded his letter of withdrawal. But during the editing process, many of the scenes he disliked were put back into the film. As a result, he later said: 'My name was back on something for which I am completely ashamed and humiliated,' leaving him to worry about what his friends thought, wondering what had driven 'Mike to write such trash.'[93]

When Bartlett awarded himself a co-credit, Wilson asked the WGAw to arbitrate. Wilson claimed that Bartlett's dialogue changes amounted to, at most, 7% of the final script. Wilson also noted that material from Karp's script constituted about 13% of the final. 'For better or worse, the remaining per cent is mine. I am not proud of the totality. The producer's attempt to distort and bowdlerize my work was partially, but not completely, thwarted, and I wince, seeing and hearing his revisions in a projection room.'[94] Bartlett was, in fact, awarded a co-credit for story and script.

It is not clear who should get the blame for *Che!* It is a boring movie, featuring a horrendous performance by Jack Palance as Fidel Castro, and a cast of thoroughly unbelievable 'revolutionaries.' Omar Sharif, however, gave a very believable performance as Che. In fact, the Che characterization (by Wilson) and the personification of Che (by Sharif) distort the historical record and the movie. On the one hand, Wilson gave far too much credit to Che for the success of the Cuban revolution. On the other hand, the movie gives the impression that the powerfully played Che could not have succeeded without the limply played Fidel. The movie also sent a mixed message, by condoning the violence of the Cuban revolutionary movement, while criticizing the violence of the Bolivian insurrection. Perhaps the biggest problem is that the film-makers did not find a way to render radical political talk into believable cinematic language and effectively capture, in a few hours, something as complex as a revolutionary process.

Though Wilson remained in demand as a writer, and he completed several scripts, *Che!* was his last screen credit. In 1970, during an operation to remove some of his salivary glands, Wilson suffered a stroke and lost the use of his right hand and arm. In early 1976, his close friend Dalton Trumbo recommended him for the WGAw's Laurel Award, for career excellence. The selection committee and the executive board each voted unanimously in favor of that award. Wilson died two years later.

It is clear that Wilson's Marxist outlook sharpened his native ability to see and develop the key structural and characterization elements of a screen story. That, combined with his near-Calvinist work ethic, elevated him to the top rank of Hollywood screenwriters of his era. The best directors in Hollywood, many of whom are routinely exalted as *auteurs*, recognized and came to trust Wilson's intelligence, perfectionism, and attention to detail. Even the infuriated David Lean had insisted that Robert Bolt adopt Wilson's conceptual structure of the Arabian adventures of

T. E. Lawrence. Wilson's life and work are a testimonial to the importance of a screenwriter who can consistently deliver a well-structured screenplay.

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Notes

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2 Zelma Wilson, *Rebel and Architect*. UCLA Oral History Program, 1994, 103–104.
3 Michael Wilson, *I Am the Sum of My Parts*, UCLA Oral History Program (1982), 29.
4 Michael Wilson, A Hope for the Novel, May 9, 1937, Michael Wilson Papers, UCLA Special Collections, 47/12. Hereafter cited as MWP.
5 MWP, 47/9.
6 Wilson, *I Am the Sum of My Parts*, 70.
7 Zelma Wilson, *Rebel and Architect*, 87.
8 Ibid., 93, 98.
9 Wilson, *I Am the Sum*, 60–61. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that he volunteered to fight in World War II, wrote several war-themed scripts, and sharply criticized the war films made during the Cold War. See his Hollywood and Korea: conditioning the American mind—war films show vicious over-all policy, *Hollywood Review* 1, no. 1 (January 1953), 1, 3–4.
10 Ibid., 65.
11 Ibid., 106.
12 Mitch Tuchman, Michael Wilson, *Take One* 6(10) (September 1978), 34.
13 Michael Wilson, A Salute to John Howard Lawson, November 12, 1955, courtesy of Al Levitt.
14 Tuchman, Michael Wilson, 34.
15 Michael Wilson, Notes on Changes in Character, August 1, 1942, MWP, 44/6. For a discussion of the context of this paper, see Larry Ceplair, The base-superstructure debate in the Hollywood Communist Party, *Science & Society* 72(3) (July 2008), 319–338.
16 Michael Wilson, The Novelist's Point of View, nd [*c*. 1953], courtesy of Becca Wilson.
17 Wilson, *I Am the Sum of My Parts*, 109–110.
18 Wilson interview with Marc Bernard, *c*. March 1962, MWP, 18/8.
19 Declaration of Michael Wilson in the matter of *George Stevens v. National Broadcasting Company*, January 19, 1966, George Stevens Papers, 246/2900, MH.
20 Wilson, *I Am the Sum of My Parts*, 115–119.
21 Ibid., 125.
22 January 26, 1943, 3.
23 Those three scripts are in the Paramount Pictures Script Collection, MH. I have not been able to find a script for his fourth Hopalong Cassidy western, *Bar 20*

(October 1943), a story about a robbery, for which Wilson was one of three credited writers.

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25 Zelma Wilson, *Rebel and Architect*, 110–111, 117.

26 Wilson to Jarrico, November 11, 1942, Paul Jarrico Papers, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

27 Interview in Pat McGilligan (ed.), *Backstory: interviews with screenwriters of Hollywood's golden age* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986), 210.

28 Michael Wilson, Notes on *It's A Wonderful Life*, January 10, 1946, Paramount Pictures Script Collection.

29 Quoted in Joseph McBride, *Frank Capra: the catastrophe of success* (New York and London, 1992), 514.

30 According to McBride, one-fourth of the script was rewritten during the shooting, by Capra and Jo Swerling (p. 511). Dorothy Parker also worked on the script. Hackett, Goodrich, Capra, and Swerling received screen credits.

31 Michael Wilson, Introduction to Outline, June 9, 1946, MWP, 10/8.

32 Michael Wilson, Look Homeward Angel, First Draft Screenplay, June 21, 1949, Paul Kohner Agency Records, 120/1064, MH.

33 Jan Herman, *A Talent for Trouble: the life of Hollywood's most acclaimed director, William Wyler* (New York, 1995), 296. Wilson believed that Ketti Frings, who had the office next to him at Paramount, had 'borrowed' the 'structure, focus and deletions' of his screenplay for her hugely successful play based on the same novel. According to Wilson her play script was 'remarkably similar' to his screenplay. Referring to a later controversy, Wilson exclaimed: 'Shades of Robert Bolt'! Wilson to Paul Jarrico, March 8, 1974, MWP, 48/2. See also Zelma Wilson, *Rebel and Architect*, 137–338.

34 Michael Wilson, A treatment of a modern story, based on Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, May 23, 1949, MWP, 27/9.

35 Stevens to Montgomery Clift, April 29, 1949, George Stevens Papers, 244/2875, MH.

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38 Ibid.; Wilson to Stevens, March 26, 1951, George Stevens Papers, 244/2875, MH.

39 Declaration of Michael Wilson in the matter of *George Stevens v. National Broadcasting Company*, January 19, 1966, George Stevens Papers, 246/2900, MH.

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41 Marilyn Ann Moss, *Giant: George Stevens, a life on film* (Madison, WI, 2004), 184–185.

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47 Michael Wilson and Deborah Silverton Rosenfelt, *Salt of the Earth* (Old Westbury, NY, 1978), 127. See also James J. Lorence, *The Suppression of the Salt of the Earth: how Hollywood, big labor, and politicians blacklisted a movie in Cold-War America* (Albuquerque, NM, 1999); Ellen R. Baker, *On Strike and on Film: Mexican American families and blacklisted filmmakers in Cold War America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007); Larry Ceplair, *The Marxist and the Movies: a biography of Paul Jarrico* (Lexington, KY, 2007).
48 Quoted in Robert Nott, On the Line, *Pasatiempo*, February 21–27, 2003, 41.
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51 Wilson and Rosenfelt, *Salt of the Earth*, 127–28.
52 James J. Lorence, *Palomino: Clinton Jencks and Mexican-American unionism in the American southwest* (Urbana and Chicago, IL, 2013), 118.
53 Biberman, *Salt of the Earth*, 48.
54 Wilson and Rosenfelt, *Salt of the Earth*, 23.
55 Ibid., 56–57.
56 Ibid., 89.
57 Michael Wilson, Comments on the Memo, nd, *c.* January 1953, MWP, 45/14. Kate Weigand called Salt 'one of the most explicitly feminist cultural creations to come out of the predominantly antifeminist 1950s,' and she cites the strong support the movie received from Communist Party cultural critics. *Red Feminism: American communism and the making of women's liberation* (Baltimore, MD and London, 2001), 133–134.
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59 Quoted in Richard Corliss (ed.), *The Hollywood Screenwriters: a film comment book* (New York, 1972), 285.
60 William Wyler, Deposition, in the case of *Michael Wilson v. Liberty Films, Inc., et al.*, Superior Court of Los Angeles, July 7, 1960, 12, 20, 38, MWP, 10/9B.
61 For the complete story, see Joseph Dmohowski, *The Friendly Persuasion* (1956) screenplay controversy: Michael Wilson, Jessamyn West, and the Hollywood blacklist, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 22(4) (2002), 491–514. Wilson sued the studio, both in the United States and France, where he was then living, and eventually settled both cases for $5,000. The WGAw restored Wilson's credit in 1996.
62 Tuchman, Michael Wilson, 34.
63 Ibid.
64 Kevin Brownlow, *David Lean: a biography* (New York, 1996), 348–359.
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77 Zinsser, In Search, 101; Michael Wilson, handwritten notes, nd, MWP, 16/5.
78 Wilson to Ilse Lahn, October 10, 1960, MWP, 48/1.
79 Wilson to Ingo Preminger, November 25, 1961, MWP, 48/1.
80 Wilson to Spiegel, January 30, 1961, MWP, 16/6.
81 Wilson to Spiegel, November 7, 1962, MWP 18/8.
82 Bolt to Wilson, December 3, 1962, MWP, 18/8.
83 Credit Arbitration Report, December 18, 1963, MWP, 16/6; *Daily Variety*, December 23, 1963, 1, 4. The WGAw and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences recognized that co-credit in 1995. For an extensive analysis of the two writers' respective contributions to the finished film, both agreeing with the British Writers Guild decision, see Joel C. Hodson, *Lawrence of Arabia and American Culture: the making of a transatlantic legend* (Westport, CT/London, 1995), 107–130; and Stephen C. Catin, *Lawrence of Arabia: a film's anthropology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1999), 103–126.
84 Boulle to Jacobs, April 29, 1965, MWP, 32/8.
85 Interview in Dale Winogura, Dialogues on apes, apes, and more apes, *Cinefantastique* (Summer 1972), 21. Boulle, for his part, did not think he had written a science fiction novel. Ibid., 18.
86 Michael Wilson, Shooting Script, May 5, 1967, 69, Charlton Heston Papers, 12/130, MH.
87 Wilson to Jacobs and Schaffner, November 6, 1967, MWP, 33/3.
88 Interview in Winogura, Dialogues, 26.
89 Tuchman, Michael Wilson, 34.
90 Michael Wilson, Che, MWP, 5/2. Wilson may have seen in Che's story what he had seen in Lawrence's; namely, 'the futility of individual agency.' *Pace* James Chapman and Nicholas J. Cull from whom the phrase is borrowed. *Projection of Empire: imperialism and popular cinema* (London and New York, 2009), 103.
91 Wilson to Bartlett and Fleischer, November 3, 1968, MWP, 48/2.
92 Wilson to James Fisher, January 28, 1969, MWP, 7/3.
93 Tuchman, Michael Wilson, 34; *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, April 14, 1978, B-2.
94 Statement to WGAw, nd, MWP, 7/3.

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