Before [And After] Film: Other Creative Expressions

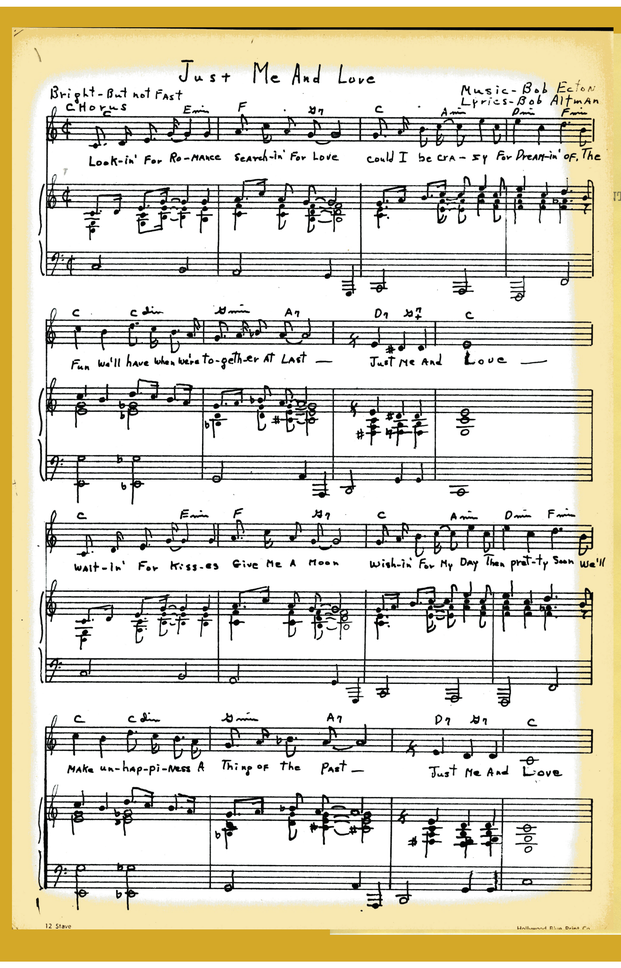
When World War II ended in 1945, Robert Altman was fresh out of the army and headed to Hollywood. He was an enterprising young man with lots of ideas about how he might make a living, but he thought he wanted to do something in the entertainment business. For several years he wrote story ideas for radio and television shows as well as lyrics for songs, and he also had several small acting jobs. He returned to Kansas City for a few years in the early 1950's, where he learned the craft of making films by working for a leading industrial-film company, and was able to come back to Hollywood with a resume that soon led him into television and film directing and producing. Later in his career he became involved in staging and writing operas, thanks to a timely invitation from the University of Michigan.

The Writer

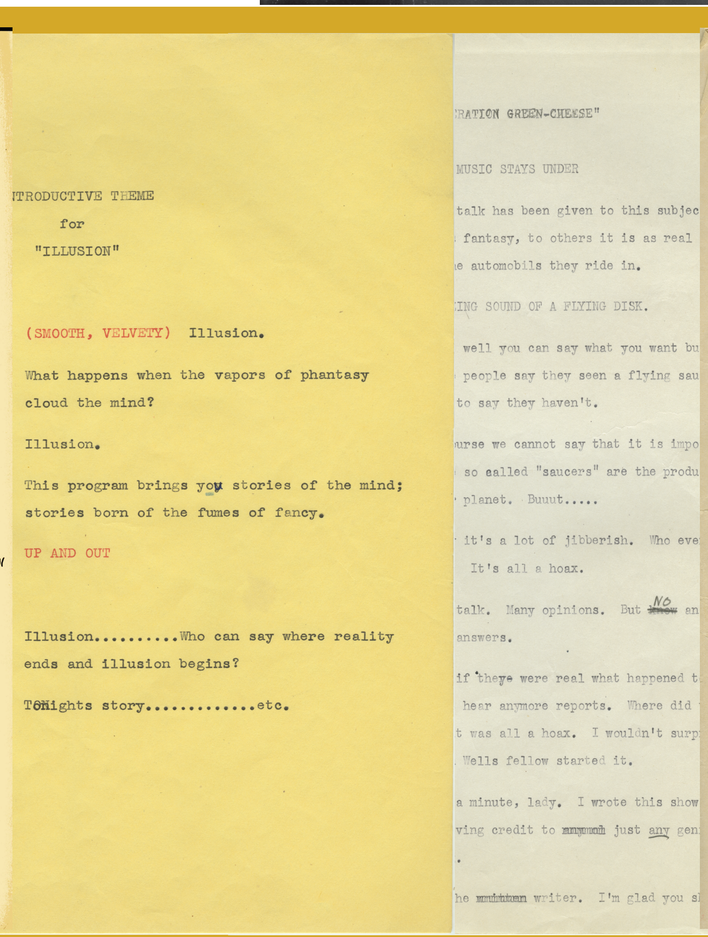
One of the ways in which Robert Altman tried to break into the entertainment world was as a lyricist, and a number of his songs that composer Bob Ecton set to music survive in the Altman archive. Eventually, Altman, Ecton, and writer James Rickard (brother-in-law to actor/dancer Ray Bolger) wrote a Broadway musical, but were unsuccessful in finding backing to have it produced.

Altman worked with the more experienced writer George W. George (the son of Rube Goldberg) on several scripts, including a proposed radio series called *Illusion* in which each story had a surprising twist at the end. One of their movie scripts was purchased and became the *noir* film *Bodyguard* (1947). Several other stories or script proposals also exist in the archive, mainly in the *film noir* vein but showing Altman's characteristic wry humor. Even after Altman returned to Hollywood after gaining more film experience in Kansas City, he still did some work as a writer.

Photograph of Robert Altman behind the scenes on the set of Combat!



"Just Me and Love," music by Bob Ecton, lyrics by Bob Altman, ca. 1948. Manuscript sheet music.



TRODUCTIVE THEME
for
"ILLUSION"

(SMOOTH, VELVETY) Illusion.

What happens when the vapors of phantasy cloud the mind?

Illusion.

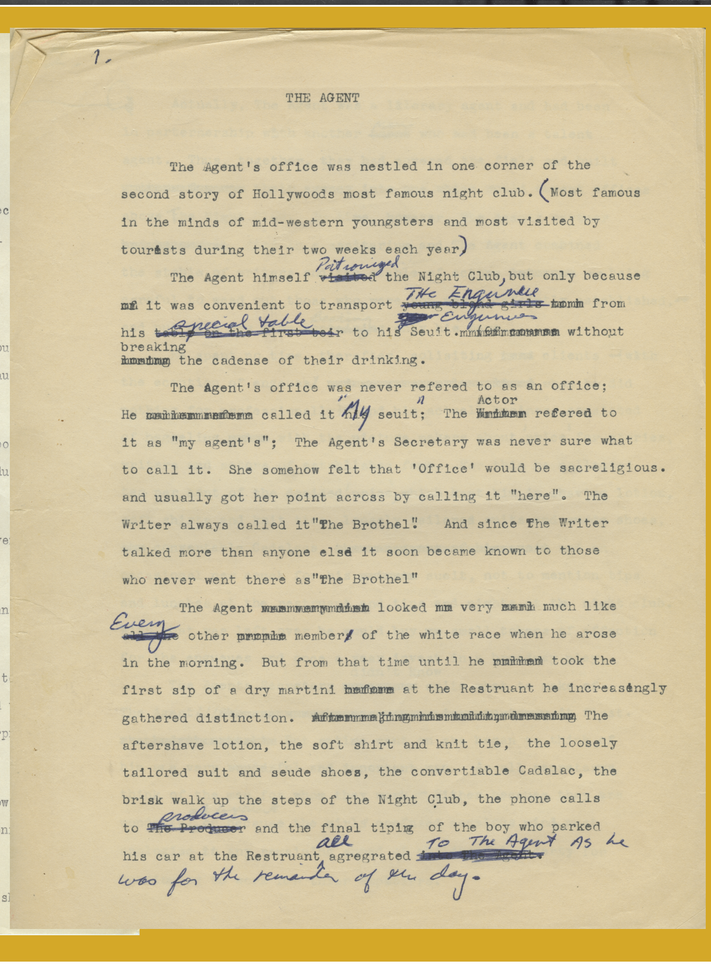
This program brings you stories of the mind; stories born of the fumes of fancy.

UP AND OUT

Illusion.....Who can say where reality ends and illusion begins?

Tonights story.....etc.

Typed sheets of the proposed introduction for the radio series "Illusions" by Altman and George and of the first page of a show in the series entitled "Operation Green-Cheese."



THE AGENT

The Agent's office was nestled in one corner of the second story of Hollywoods most famous night club. (Most famous in the minds of mid-western youngsters and most visited by tourists during their two weeks each year)

The Agent himself Patronized the Night Club, but only because it was convenient to transport The Enquirer from his special table to his Seuit without breaking the cadense of their drinking.

The Agent's office was never refered to as an office; He called it "My" seuit; The Actor refered to it as "my agent's"; The Agent's Secretary was never sure what to call it. She somehow felt that 'Office' would be sacreligious. and usually got her point across by calling it "here". The Writer always called it "The Brothel" And since The Writer talked more than anyone else it soon became known to those who never went there as "The Brothel"

The Agent looked very much like Every other member of the white race when he arose in the morning. But from that time until he took the first sip of a dry martini at the Restruant he increasingly gathered distinction. The aftershave lotion, the soft shirt and knit tie, the loosely tailored suit and seude shoes, the convertiable Cadalac, the brisk walk up the steps of the Night Club, the phone calls to producers and the final tiping of the boy who parked his car at the Restruant aggregrated All To The Agent As he was for the remainder of the day.

First page of a story by Robert Altman, "The Agent," not dated.

The agent's job involves haggling with producers about prices for stories, writers, and actors. His office is on the second story of one of Hollywood's most famous night clubs. He enjoys being able to bring women he flirts with at the club up to his office after everyone has left. The agent has a secretary who he finds attractive, but he doesn't want to upset the balance of the professional work environment. The secretary thinks the agent is a very wonderful and important man, "as all secretaries think of the men for whom they work." One night when the secretary stays after hours to do some extra work, she catches the agent and a woman "in a very silly looking position."