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To: Julie L. Sigall
Associate Register for Policy & International Affairs

Date: 03/14/2005

From: Nick Langdon

Comment:
14 March 2004

Nick Langdon
Citrus Heights, CA

RE: Comment on "Orphan Works"

Dear Copyright Office,

I just returned home last night from Washington D.C., where I was a guest of the Library of Congress for a screening of a 1931 Marion Davies MGM film called IT'S A WISE CHILD. I had to travel all the way to D.C. to see this film because it has not been allowed to be screened since its original release due to a copyright problem. I have spent the last five years searching for the heirs or estate of the author, one Mr. Laurence E. Johnson. Mr. Johnson had no children or siblings at the time of his death in 1934, only his Wife and Mother. The Mother passed away in the late 30's but I never have found an obituary for the Wife, although since she was born in the 1870's I presume she has passed on by now.

Mr. Johnson wrote the original play, It's A Wise Child, in 1928 and it was produced by David Belasco on Broadway to great success. W.R. Hearst brought Johnson out to California to write the screenplay for the film version and also work on a few other Davies pictures. In 1934 Johnson would write the script for Marie Dressler's final film, CHRISTOPHER BEAN, which is also off limits to the public due to this copyright quagmire. Apparently the Wife copyrighted all Johnson's works in 1937, the WISE CHILD play eventually landed in the hands of its current owner, the American Entertainment Co. of Beverly Hills California. Warner Brothers currently owns the rights to the film but can not allow it to be shown due to the rights issue.

I am hoping that this is a case in which the two films associated with Laurence E. Johnson might be labeled as "Orphan Works" and allowed to be screened. It is rather irksome that 70+ year old motion pictures can't be shown on Turner Classic Movies because someone died in 1934 and left no family behind. I would be very curious to learn if this scenario fits the discussions on "Orphan Works" and if there is anything else I can do to see the film version of IT'S A WISE CHILD liberated from its current state.

Sincerely,

-Nick Langdon