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Introduction

The historian, essentially, wants more documents than he can really use; the dramatist only wants more liberties than he can really take.

Henry James, Preface to *The Aspern Papers*

History was dangerous in those days. History is always dangerous.

Abraham Polonsky, Interview, *The Box*

In 1976, as *Scoundrel Time*, her memoir of the 1950s, was about to appear, Lillian Hellman was questioned about Senator Joseph McCarthy in an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine. She responded that "McCarthyism came from powerful places. . . . McCarthy is a very inaccurate name for a shameless period. McCarthy only summed up the angers and fears of a great many people."[1] In fact, Senator McCarthy was only the most visible embodiment of the worst excesses of Congressional investigating committees, excesses that were associated in the public's mind during the early fifties with the term "McCarthyism."[2] I have found that many well- informed Americans are surprised to hear that Joseph McCarthy never served on the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), the Congressional body that is most closely associated with "McCarthyism." McCarthy's own bases of operation, the Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security and the Senate Committee on Government Operations, are not exactly household words, perhaps because they were essentially one-man shows, better known as "McCarthy Committees" than as anything else. HUAC, on the other hand, is well-known as Congress's anti-Communist investigating arm, and, although it had several chairmen who were almost as desirous of press coverage as Senator McCarthy – Martin Dies, John Rankin, and J. Parnell Thomas, for example – no single individual ever usurped the Committee's image in the public mind. It was HUAC, which conducted the Hollywood Ten hearings and the sub-

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sequent Show Business investigations, that captured the public's attention, rather than any individual congressman.

The Hollywood Ten hearings of October 1947 were HUAC's major media event. The Committee managed to stay in the limelight for a decade, however, by means of its much more extensive Show Business hearings of 1951 and 1952 and its perennial "Investigations into Communist Activities in the Los Angeles Area" and "Investigations into Communist Activities in the New York Area." This was in spite of the short-lived but determined headline-grabbing of its rival in the Senate, during the period between McCarthy's speech at Wheeling, West Virginia, on 19 February 1950, when he claimed to have the names of 205 Communists in the State Department, and his censure by the Senate on 2 December 1954. The impact of the Committee's investigations, and the industry blacklist that proceeded from them, on the movie industry and Hollywood community has been well-documented by historians, although the extensiveness of this effect is still being realized, as each year brings more documents to light, and more memoirs and biographies record their effects on individual lives.[3]

Never a direct target of the Committee in the way that the mass media were, the Broadway theatre never resorted to official blacklisting. Nevertheless, the show business investigations had a tremendous effect on American drama and theatre between 1947 and 1960. In the thirties and forties, actors, directors, and writers were accustomed to moving freely between Broadway and Hollywood, sometimes working on several different films and plays in the same year. During the HUAC hearings, an artist who was blacklisted in Hollywood could often find work in New York, particularly in the nascent Off-Broadway theatre, but being branded a Red generally had a negative effect at the box office. Not surprisingly, the New York theatre retreated from dramatizing overt political and social questions between 1945 and 1960, creating instead what Arthur Miller has called "an era of gauze" in the intensely personal and psychological plays of Tennessee Williams, William Inge, Carson McCullers, Robert Anderson, and others. In this most pervasively and oppressively ideological of times, the American theatre has seemed to critics and historians to have ignored the fundamental political issues that were dividing the country.[4] The one exception has been assumed to be Miller himself, who, as a target of the Committee, showed courage in adapting Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* in 1950 and in writing his own *Crucible* in 1953, two treatments of political demagoguery and the manipulation of mass hysteria against a scapegoat.

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This view ignores the persistent subtext beneath the apparent self-absorption of the theatre of the fifties, however – a subtext in which political, social, and moral issues were engaged and debated with intensity and passion.[5] Miller was not the only American playwright who found the use of historical analogy useful in attacking McCarthyism. Playwrights like Lillian Hellman, Bertolt Brecht (temporarily exiled to Santa Monica, California), Barrie Stavis, and Saul Levitt developed an aesthetic strategy that was firmly grounded on the representation of recognizable historical events – events that drew an immediate emotional response from the spectator. In their plays, the Spanish Inquisition and the Salem witch hunt become powerful historical analogies for HUAC. In the context of the Inquisition, the coercion of Galileo into recanting his belief that the earth moves around the sun was analogized with the situation of the friendly witness who repudiated his leftist beliefs and his leftist friends in order to appear cooperative with the Committee. The most sympathetic of Christian scapegoats, Joan of Arc, was a natural historical analogy for witnesses like Miller and Hellman, who were viewed as having been pilloried by the Committee for following the dictates of their consciences and refusing to bring harm to others by naming names.

The representational field in these plays was by no means limited to the distant past. Saul Levitt evoked the American Civil War in *The Andersonville Trial* and Arthur Miller the recent war against the Nazis in *Incident at Vichy*. Herman Wouk argued in favor of the state and against the dictates of the individual conscience in *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial*. Miller engaged in an analogical debate over the morality of naming names with Elia Kazan and Budd Shulberg through the medium of the tightly knit community of Brooklyn longshoremen in Schulberg and Kazan's *On the Waterfront* and Miller's *A View from the Bridge*. Film and television writers followed a similar strategy, particularly when films were adapted from plays, although the political implications were often considerably weakened during the studio production process. Occasionally, however, the discussion of the issues was allowed to go out directly to a mass audience right before the vigilant eyes of self-appointed censors, under the cover of historical drama. This was the case with Abraham Polonsky, Walter Bernstein, and Arnold Manoff, the three blacklisted writers who wrote the *You Are There* series for CBS television, with the help of producer Charles Russell and a number of "fronts," about Galileo, Joan of Arc, Socrates, the Salem witch trials and the Boston Tea Party. Common to many of these

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plays is a fundamentally forensic structure. All of them involve cultural institutions of interrogation, and many use the trial as a structural principle for the play's action. Reflected at the center of these theatrical representations, in other words, was HUAC's major weapon, the committee hearing, which was in reality a trial without a defense, a jury, or even, in many cases, evidence against the accused.

In this book, I have examined the dramatic representations of the Un-American Activities Committee. I have done so in the context of the Committee's own self-created drama, drawing on the anthropological model developed by Victor Turner to analyze the "social drama" of the HUAC hearings, in which American society tried through the redressive procedure of formal Congressional proceedings to heal itself of a deep ideological breach between Left and Right that had been widening since the first World War. I have also found the theory of scapegoating by comparatist René Girard illuminating in my examination of HUAC's social and cultural effects, and in developing my own model for the five-part ritual framework of the Hearings themselves. It is not theory but practice that is in the foreground of this book, however. Always keeping in mind the limitations of my own cultural perspective, I have tried to bring to light the significant body of dramatic works that quite consciously dramatized the effects of the Committee on American life and debated the political, social, and moral issues that its actions raised for American citizens.

If there is a larger contention in this book, it is that plays, screenplays and teleplays are written by individuals, and realized on stage or film in collaboration with other artists and craftsmen, in the inescapable context of events, both public and personal, that occur in those individuals' lifetimes. For cultural and literary critics and historians to ignore the unique personal histories of authors, and the impact of their experiences, both public and private, on the work they produce, is to offer at best a partial and limited analysis of that work. While a study with the fairly broad scope of this one cannot pretend to do the job thoroughly for any single writer, it can suggest some ways in which a single phenomenon in the United States's recent past, the Show Business investigations of HUAC, affected the complex weave of relationships – public and private, personal and political, aesthetic and ideological – that characterize the participation in the cultural moment of the years between 1947 and 1960 by writers who felt its effects keenly and personally.

As I show in the third chapter, there have been several direct dramatizations of individual experiences with the Committee in various per-

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formance media, of varying quality and sophistication. The great majority of writers, however, have made use of the aesthetic strategy of historical analogy. Employed most straightforwardly, the strategy is to construct a dramatization of a historical event so as to highlight its similarity to the events of the present, but to leave it to the spectator to make the connection. The writer thus compels the spectator or reader to participate in the process, taking on some of the responsibility for seeing the resemblance between contemporary events and the event in the past, and the implications of that resemblance. For these writers, the practical value of the use of analogy lies in this collaborative process. In a political climate in which, under the Smith Act, one could be prosecuted for conspiring to advocate subversive ideas, the ability to deny authorial responsibility for the political implications of a play and to secure the audience's complicity in developing them was an important consideration.

Despite the deliberate aesthetic camouflage, any serious critic who was even minimally aware of the Committee's activities noticed the analogies that were being made in these works, and the courageous ones did not hesitate to discuss their agreement or disagreement with their political implications. These writers were working in a culture that was attuned to their dramatic idiom and responsive to its contemporary subtext. This book is intended to make the subtext available again, to allow for a reconsideration of this passionate and compelling commentary on one of the nation's most divisive cultural crises.

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