ERIC BENTLEY'S "DOUBLE" LIVES

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ABSTRACT

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Eric Bentley is arguably one of the most prominent theatre scholar-critics of the twentieth century. He is perhaps best known for translating and advocating for Brecht's plays in English-speaking countries. In books such as *The Playwright as Thinker*, he makes the case for non-commercial theatre as a political force and valuable form of cultural expression. In his later career, he turned his attention towards playwriting, which he identifies as his most worthwhile pursuit. His transition from critic to playwright is just one of many major shifts in his life and career, which I argue is defined by doubleness. Bentley even describes himself as living several double lives. These shifts involve politics, sexuality, culture, and artistic expression. In this study, I analyze various writings from throughout Bentley's career in order to examine the sociopolitical energies at play in his work.

Early in this study, I establish post-structural analysis as my overarching theoretical frame. I specifically employ the writings and theories of Michael Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt and the new historicists. Leftist politics and Marxism provide another broad arc to my study of Bentley's work. My theoretical approach allows me to examine his position within a constantly shifting field of power relations as it relates to public and private social, political, cultural, and artistic issues. Specifically, I look at the circular effects of the relations between Bentley and socialism, anticommunism, the New Left, the counterculture movement, and gay liberation. Throughout my analysis, I view artistic and social performance as a vital cultural expression and a valuable way of exercising power. I look to the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings, Vietnam War protests, the Radical Theatre Movement, and gay liberation as examples of how performance was at the foundation of various major social and political conflicts during
the twentieth century. I believe that Bentley was very much aware of performance's role in these struggles and actively used his capacities as critic, playwright, and public intellectual to draw attention to this, despite his tendency to be caught between opposing sides.
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As someone who believes texts are collectively and culturally produced, it is impossible for me to thank all those responsible for assisting me at some point in the process of creating this study. With that in mind, I will attempt to express my gratitude to many individuals who helped me along the way and apologize to those I do not specifically name.

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INTRODUCTION

If the past often helps us to understand the present, it is the present which establishes our historical perspective. The present is every historian's point of departure. But the trouble with the present is that we know too much about it—or think we do. There is the danger of spending so much time on the point of departure that we never actually depart. (*The Playwright as Thinker* 3)

Eric Bentley, prominent twentieth century theatre critic and scholar, describes his life in terms of duality, observing, "I have led not just one type of double life but several" (*Bentley on Brecht* 478). These double lives are evidenced throughout his body of work and pertain to a number of aspects regarding his life. While he was possibly best known as a theatre critic for the *New Republic*, author of critical works including *The Playwright as Thinker*, and advocate of Bertolt Brecht, Bentley identifies playwriting as his primary goal. In a 2002 interview with N. Graham Nesmith, he explains, "What I have the most ambition about is to be a playwright. That is what I was working toward" (*Nesmith Interview* 102). Along with his concealed playwriting ambitions, he spent decades as a closeted homosexual, eventually coming out during the late 1960s and the rise of the gay liberation movement. Many of his plays and critical writings from various points in his career deal with issues related to the closet, coming out, and living as an openly gay man. In terms of politics, he maintained a commitment to democratic socialism, yet he often spoke out against hard-line Communists, which strained his relationship with Brecht's inner circle. Additionally, his opposition to the House Un-American Activities Committee contrasts with his disapproval of Soviet Communism. While a professor at Columbia University,
he voiced support for student activism and opposition to the Vietnam War, yet criticized student radicals' actions during the contentious demonstrations of 1968. Throughout this same era, he expressed mixed feelings about the Radical Theatre Movement, finding fault with what he saw as pretension and political simplicity. This study inquires into issues of doubleness within Bentley's writings associated with these various political, social, and artistic movements.

In many of his writings, Bentley addresses the confluence of artistic and social issues in theatre performance. In my investigation of Bentley, I purposefully look to the margins of his body of work and closely examine political and dramatic writings that are not as well known as his translations of Brecht or *The Playwright as Thinker*. Additionally, I endeavor to look beyond these margins to the sociopolitical forces at play during his lifetime. In doing this, I run the risk of digressing from my primary subject; however, I am of the opinion that such divergences are valuable in that they draw attention to the ways in which social energies operate through artistic and critical works. My detours range from the historical to the theoretical and involve topics such as power and identity, as well as events including the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, and Gay Liberation. These various connections and circulations present themselves in obvious and subtle ways, as Bentley simultaneously affected and was influenced by a number of historical, cultural, and political epochs. I believe the complexity of these contexts is at the heart of the doubleness that defines Bentley's character.

Power relations are a key element of this study, as I read Bentley's work with an eye toward the ways he was affected by power systems, as well as how his own actions exerted influence. This task is simplified by the fact that his writings generally express a high level of concern for institutions of sociopolitical power. Perhaps most interesting are the changes and contradictions in his view of power over the years. In his autobiographical *Brecht Memoir*, he
writes, "In my political development, acceptance of power, even of what is now called superpower, was the first phase of my attempted self-reconstruction. After the disenchantment of 1939 to 1942 came a certain excessive, even bumptious, fatuous enchantment with the world" (*Bentley on Brecht* 478). This statement references his disillusion with the Communist Party and subsequent misgivings about state power during the Cold War. In this study, I argue that Bentley's critical and dramatic works are particularly concerned with the shifting field of power relations as it relates to politics, society, identity, and the arts during the mid-twentieth century in the United States and Europe.

My preoccupation with power and its complexities is very much influenced by Michael Foucault's conception of power as an all encompassing force that "makes individuals subjects." In his view, power "applies itself to immediate everyday life, categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him" (*The Essential* 130). In this perspective, power is engaged with virtually every individual and collective action, both positive and destructive. The active nature of power is important to Foucault's model, in that it only exists "as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action" (*The Essential* 137). He gives further explanation to this idea in *Discipline and Punish*:

> In short this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions—an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it.' (*Discipline* 27)
While power is mutable and defined through its operations, it is based upon available discourses. As Foucault explains, "it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures" (The Essential 137). In this sense, power is continually active, but also falls into established patterns kept in place—through force, coercion, rewards, privilege and other means—by sociopolitical institutions. Changes to established power structures usually only arrive after prolonged struggles. Foucault outlines three types of power struggle: those against domination, exploitation, and subjection. While these conflicts can be separate, they are by no means discrete. For instance, a struggle against exploitation—the separation of individuals from what they produce—is often wedded to a form of domination based upon race, religion or ethnicity. This connectedness is an outcome of the complexity and intricacy of power relations. As Foucault explains, power relations "are not univocal; they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion" (Discipline 27). For my study, this view of power allows me to draw connections between Bentley's writings and a wide variety of sociopolitical events and institutions. Instead of reading his work as a singular expression created in front of a sociopolitical backdrop, I approach his plays and critical writings as points of convergence within a complex web of social relations.

My theoretical framework is in many way similar to that of the new historicists, particularly their approach to cultural texts as collectively produced and malleable.¹ Proponents

¹ In the opening pages of Shakespearean Negotiations, Stephen Greenblatt calls for attention to the collective production of texts: "I propose that we begin by taking seriously the collective production of literary pleasure and interest. We know that this production is collective since
of new historicism generally describe their approach as a practice as opposed to an abstract theoretical framework applied to texts. In *Practicing New Historicism*, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt state, "We doubt that it is possible to construct such a system independent of our own time and place and of the particular objects by which we are interested, and we doubt too that any powerful work we might do would begin with such an attempt" (2). I share this skepticism for the possibility of a totalizing system of analysis that could exist independently of a particular context and provide concrete and definitive conclusions about the meaning of a subject; however, I continue to view theoretical discourse as a useful tool for discussion concerning possible meanings.

Greenblatt uses the term *circulation of social energies* in reference to his view of how texts interact with various institutions throughout society, particularly the multidirectional and complex circular exchanges that characterize such transactions. He outlines *a poetics of culture*, a concept of the complex interaction involving a multitude of facets within a society—of which the artist or writer is only a part—as the source of written and artistic work. This process extends beyond works of literature and art and can be applied to the individual subject.

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language itself, which is at the heart of literary power, is the supreme instance of a collective creation" (4).

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*I have termed this general enterprise—study of the collective making of distinct cultural practices and inquiry into the relations among these practices—a poetics of culture* *(Shakespearean Negotiations 5).*
Greenblatt describes his understanding of the relationship between cultural institutions and the individual subject:

I perceived that fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions—family, religion, state—were inseparably intertwined. In all my texts and documents, there were, so far as I could tell, no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity; indeed, the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society. (Renaissance Self-Fashioning 256)

I believe this view of a complex relationship between individual subjects and societal power dynamics enables a broader line of inquiry about a particular subject. I share the hope that shifting my gaze to the peripheries of the texts will facilitate a more nuanced understanding of cultural transactions involved in its creation.

New historicism is particularly valuable for a study of Bentley’s work, especially an examination of his more politically oriented writings. Complex systems of negotiation and exchange and an intricate circulation of social energies characterized the political and social contexts of the United States during the twentieth century. Greenblatt describes his understanding of this notion of circulation as particularly related to the political context of the United States: "sensitivity to the practical strategies of negotiation and exchange depends less upon poststructuralist theory than upon the circulatory rhythms of American politics" (Poetics 8). It is my understanding that the circulatory rhythms mentioned move in relation to shifting positions of acceptance and resistance to the capitalist system and its far-reaching influence in American society. The capitalist system in the United States circulates throughout the breadth of discourses within the society, yet allows for discourses to function somewhat independently. In
terms of Bentley's work, this circulation can be seen in the shifting role of the political Left in United States politics. The influence of Marxism and the Old Left gave way to the prevalence of the ostensibly apolitical New Criticism, the paranoia of the Cold War, and the repression of McCarthyism—all within the realm of postwar capitalism—eventually finding confrontation with the New Left, anti-Vietnam War protest, and identity politics. I am interested in reading Bentley's work in conjunction with this circulation of social energies over the course of the twentieth century, but especially during the sixties and seventies, which I believe to be particularly imbued with political and social tensions.

Since my study deals with past events and the decades-old authorship of written texts, I work with an awareness of post-structural historiography based upon the work of Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and others. I view post-structuralism as having two specific challenges for the historical angle of my project: the instability of meaning and the rejection of totalizing systems. Systems are not closed or self-determining and are the product of the observer not the object. This instability and undecidability of meaning stems from the nature of language—as described by Derrida—and renders representation ultimately unstable. History is not immune to the challenges articulated through cultural theory. As Mark Cousins has stated, history "cannot establish itself as a distinct and privileged mode of existence which displaces the human sciences" (128). This crisis of representation is a source of vigorous debate among historians, spawning a number of descriptions of a new history: postmodern, post-structural, and deconstructionist, to name a few. These views of history all reject Rankean empiricism and the overreaching view that historical narratives are based on concrete and verifiable evidence that corresponded to an objective reality. In The New History, Alun Munslow offers a succinct description of what he calls deconstructive history:
The deconstructive historian maintains the content of history, like that of literature, derives its meaning as much by the representation of that content, as by research into the sources, tracing the causes and effects of events as well as the hidden but discoverable structure(s) of historical change. This approach maintains that history, rather than discovering the most likely meaning to the past either by virtue of the evidence and/or its theoretical underpinnings can, rather, only offer a representation of pastness. (Munslow 6)

I concur with the deconstructive notion of history as a representation based upon available evidence, theories and concepts, and the linguistic process. Bentley himself draws attention to the constructed nature of history, writing, "there is no piece of historical interpretation that cannot be brought into question by reference to facts that don't fit with it, or don't seem to fit in with it" (Bentley on Brecht 309). Throughout my study, I examine the ways in which Bentley characterizes the past and describes current events for posterity. Additionally, I endeavor to maintain a critical eye in regard to my own use of historical sources concerning the sociopolitical contexts important to his work.

A major component of my study will be a comparison between what is often referred to as the Old Left and the New Left. While Bentley is in many ways most closely connected to leftist politics of the early twentieth century, a great deal of his work was produced during the nineteen sixties, seventies, and eighties. I am interested in the social energies related to leftist politics at play in his writings from various eras and possibly tensions between discourses related to the different contexts. This concern necessitates an understanding of Marxist theory as variously interpreted and employed throughout the twentieth century. Marxism is important to
my reading of Bentley's writing, as well as my own theoretical approach, and is a primary focus of the first chapter of this study.

My simultaneous interest in Marxist analysis and post-structuralism represents a tension that should be addressed, particularly the possibility that the two theoretical approaches are irreconcilably opposed. While I agree that post-structuralism presents a number of challenges for Marxism and other analytical approaches—especially those reliant upon notions of fixed meaning and truth—I believe Marxist analysis should be continually reformulated as social, political, and theoretical contexts change. Tony Bennett makes such a case for a post-structuralist Marxism he describes as "a Marxism which comes after structuralism, which is responsive to its criticisms—and, indeed, to those of other post-structuralisms—and which seeks to take account of them in reformulating its theoretical objectives and the means by which it should both represent and pursue them" (63). Bennett designates the term *reading formations* to describe his post-structural materialist practice that recognizes discursivity in the subject of study, the sociopolitical context, and its own operations. He defines reading formations as "a set of discursive and inter-textual determinations which organize and animate the practice of reading, connecting texts and readers in specific relations to one another in constituting readers as reading subjects of particular types and texts as objects-to-be-read in particular ways" (70). This concept is significant to my reading of theoretical, historical, and dramatic texts throughout my graduate education and is key to my approach to Bentley's texts. Bennett's view presents a nuanced view of the meaning-making process involving interplay amongst the text, context, and the reader. I find that the concept of reading formations complements each of the various theoretical strains of my approach and may be the glue to bind New Historicist practice, Marxist Analysis, and post-structural history.
The importance of context for my reading of Bentley's texts requires historical investigation as part of my methodology. I utilize histories related to the American Left during the nineteen-forties, the McCarthy era, Vietnam War protests, and the gay rights movement. I incorporate both primary sources and historical studies of events related to my subject of inquiry. My intention is to situate Bentley's writings within a dynamic political and social context, which will require me to formulate a historical narrative. My method of historiography is in no way foundationalist, meaning that I enter my project with the understanding that any narrative of the past is liable to err. I recognize history's dependence upon statements of meaning rooted in discourse and that the past is fundamentally unknowable. Alun Munslow's description of the deconstructive approach to history allows for both the discursive limitations of historical narrative and the role of the historian's convictions, which supports my historiography:

The act of writing a meaningful historical narrative is where the historian's own ontological beliefs and decisions about how the present and the past are turned into the realm of the epistemological. The historical narrative, rather than presenting the 'findings' of the archive, is the site where different strategies of explanation operate . . . while the real past may not alter, what is knowable and believable about it, and what it means as history, can never be fixed except within and by the architecture of the historical narrative. (162)

This view of history informs the manner in which I will apply my methodology in regards to the past. I will carry out my methodology of historical analysis with an awareness of my role in constructing a particular view of past events.

My investment in this study stems from a number of personal interests, values and beliefs, which range from a fascination with theatrical performance to an attraction to the politics
of the Left. Eric Bentley's association with political theatres from throughout the twentieth century speaks directly to my principal interests. While my academic background is in theatre studies and performance, I spent a number of years working part and full time as a community organizer for multiple political, social, and environmental organizations. My experiences with political campaigns, the media, and public demonstration have shaped my views on the merits of didactic theatre performance. While I consider myself in many ways a political independent, I have sensitivity for beliefs associated with the Left. These political considerations certainly play a role in my reading of Bentley's texts and my understanding of their position within the broader socio-political context. I am sympathetic to those questioned by the HUAC, the student dissidents during the Vietnam War, and the rioters at the Stonewall Inn. It is true that Eric Bentley expressed similar sympathies throughout his writing; however, my goal is not to create a celebratory testament to Bentley or the political Left of the twentieth century. My perspective has led me to ask certain questions and will no doubt affect the way I carry out my study.

In July and December of 2009, I had the opportunity to meet with Eric Bentley in person and discuss a range of topics involving his life and work, as well as his views on modern and contemporary theatre. A transcript of the first conversation is contained as an appendix to this dissertation. The fact that we met personally surely affects my perceptions and ideas contained herein. I feel, however, that the benefits far outweigh drawbacks. In speaking with Bentley—who was remarkably astute at the age of ninety-three—I got a sense of how he continually seeks to question, reinterpret, and play devil's advocate, which is likely what made him an effective critic. Because of our interaction, I developed a personal fondness of him that I likely would not have had otherwise. One could criticize this for tainting my objectivity, but this is countered by my lack of faith in objectivity in the first place. In my investigation, I hope to maintain a
respectfully critical approach to my subject, while producing a unique reading of his life and work. My approach to Bentley's life and work is significantly different than a narrative and analysis he might offer.  

My approach to the study of history, society, politics, and theatre is based upon an interdisciplinary view of scholarship and research. It is my position that the most illuminating pieces of scholarly and critical writing draw from a variety of disciplines and employ a number of theoretical approaches. This will be evident in my study as I utilize various political, social, and historical theories. It is also my belief that theatrical events may be studied for their performance aesthetics, cultural significance, socio-political impacts and influences, and social critique. Throughout my study I engage primarily with theatre criticism, aesthetics, and history; additionally, I draw from queer theory and gender studies, Marxist theory, post-structural historiography, and historical studies of topics including the House Un-American Activities Committee, Vietnam War resistance, the Gay Liberation Movement, and the New Left. My embrace of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of written works certainly influences the way in which I perceive my object of study. My endeavor to convey an awareness of the interconnectedness of variant discourses stems from a sincere belief in the political efficacy of theatre performance and the necessity for critics to draw connections between political performance on stage and in the streets.

Despite his profile as an influential critic and writer, substantial studies of Bentley's work are relatively scarce. The majority of existing material that comments on Bentley's writings are

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3 Bentley would likely take issue with the central role theory plays in my study. When I spoke with him, he voiced objections to the amount of theory in higher education: "I also think that in contemporary education there is too much theory, or talk of theory."
by Bentley himself, often in the form of an interview. However, there are a couple of published dissertations I will reference as existing scholarship on the subject. Donald H. Cunningham's 1981 dissertation, "Eric Bentley's Dramatic Criticism: Background and Theory," is most helpful for my study. The abstract to Cunningham's dissertation provides a succinct description of his project: "This study analyzes the sources and qualities of Eric Bentley's critical theory, a broad and sophisticated realism which emphasizes the sociological and psychological convergence of drama and life" (vi). This focus on the 'sociological' amounts to a somewhat limited inquiry into the political and social philosophy important to Bentley's work as stated by Bentley himself. I find the limited focus on Bentley's explicitly stated political and social philosophical influences—a pragmatic interpretation of Freud and Marx—insufficient for my goal of exploring the constantly shifting meanings of his work. Cunningham establishes Bentley's earliest published writing, A Century of Hero Worship, as the template for all of the work he would produce over the following three decades. In fact, Cunningham operates under the assumption that "Bentley's critical output may be considered as a fairly homogeneous body of work" and that "the major direction of Bentley's theory to have been set by the time of the publication of The Playwright as Thinker" (5). I believe this approach ignores a great deal of explicit and implicit change present in Bentley's authorship and reception. While I agree the theoretical foundations of Bentley's writing may be identifiable, I intend to address the manner in which these theories are continually reconstituted within changing discursive contexts.

Cunningham's analysis is largely preoccupied with Bentley's "influence" upon mid-twentieth century American theatre criticism and production; however, this influence is extended to the establishment of the canon of dramatic literature within academic study. Cunningham views Bentley's editorship of play anthologies as "perhaps his most influential work . . . whose
selections and introductions have helped to reshape the content of drama and theatre courses and . . . the programs of the expanding number of repertory theatres in America" (2). Bentley is posited as a stable entity influenced by humanist and pragmatist philosophy, which in turn affects scholarship on the basis of his authority. I do not dispute Bentley's status as an individual subject working to produce texts; however, I view both identity and meaning as mutable and subject to constantly changing social, political, and theoretical contexts. Cunningham's close reading of Bentley's writing does not incorporate a clearly defined theoretical framework—a materialist influenced "pragmatism" is inferred—therefore, the reader is left to guess as to the author's approach. I endeavor to make my theoretical underpinnings much more transparent. I believe that a comprehensible description of my theoretical approach and positionality as a writer gives the reader a more nuanced understanding of my reading of Bentley's texts.

Jay Warren Byer's "The History of Eric Bentley's Contribution to the American Theatre" is a 1967 dissertation that attempts to measure the influence of Eric Bentley's work as a critic, translator, and editor upon theatre production in the United States. Bentley is credited with furthering the Off-Broadway movement and establishing a critical environment receptive to plays intended to convey a specific political message. Byer closely reads Bentley's writing and relates it to theatre production on and off Broadway. Little attention, however, is paid to theoretical frameworks. In Byer's study, theatre history is posited as a positivistic development to which Bentley made a discernable and concrete contribution. In my study, I view theatre history as a constructed narrative subject to reinterpretation.
The Play and It's Critic: Essays for Eric Bentley, edited by Michael Bertin, is a collection of essays about and dedicated to Eric Bentley that will have limited benefit for my project. The volume opens with an introduction by the editor who makes no effort to conceal his admiration: "The record will show eventually, I think, that not a single critical influence this century did more to release the energy of the important theatre into our world than Eric Bentley's" (xiv). The bulk of the volume is concerned with two elements of Bertin's statement: praise of Bentley and criticism of "important" theatre. Sixteen essays concerned with topics and playwrights addressed throughout Bentley’s career follow twenty-five pages of brief personal tributes. The collection may be most useful as an example of the way in which Bentley's criticism is read, received, and then reconstituted in later critical works. However, one of the more curious aspects of this volume is that many of the essays do not directly reference Bentley's life or work in any way whatsoever.

My study is limited in its scope to the investigation of Bentley's political writing and the most compelling cultural transactions and events associated with this work. While my inquiry involves research into Bentley's life beyond what is mentioned in his plays and criticism, this is not intended to be primarily a biographical study. I share a view of authorship held by Barthes and others that works are created through the interaction of a number of individuals, operations, and contexts referred to as the author function. By contemplating authorship in this way I limit awareness of individual biography in favor of events with which Bentley may not have been directly involved. These events involve a broad range of social and political movements from

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4 I am aware that Bertin wrote a dissertation about Bentley's work; however, my attempts to obtain a copy were unsuccessful.
throughout the twentieth century including the Old Left, McCarthyism, the New Left, and Gay Liberation.

While working on this project, I read and consulted the totality of Bentley's body of work from more than fifty years of writing. However, I focus my study on works most imbued with social energies related to specific socio-political events and conflicts. Much of Bentley's writing is somehow related to political theatre and social events, therefore I closely examine a substantial amount of his work. Certain lengthier works of criticism—*The Playwright As Thinker* and *Life of the Drama*—and collections of shorter reviews and criticism—*What is Theatre?*, *Theatre of War*, and *The Theatre of Commitment*—offer a more overt political focus than others and receive greater attention in my study. His most political plays—*Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?*, *The Red, White, and Black*, *Expletive Deleted*, and *Lord Alfred's Lover*—also receive greater scrutiny.

I believe this study is a worthwhile endeavor in that it closely examines the complex socio-political currents at play in the authorship of critical and artistic works. A more nuanced understanding of the complex power relationships within political hierarchies and role of cultural practices such as theatre performance and social protest should be a valuable undertaking. Additionally, I believe there is a lack of outside analysis regarding his work. Bentley was unique in that his writing was both scholarly and popular, and he arguably has no contemporary equivalent. Bentley's writing offers a compelling subject of study because it has taken so many forms; I may be justified in saying that Bentley the playwright in 1970 was literally a different author than Bentley the critic in 1946. His various works are concerned with some of the most potent social and political struggles and conflicts seen in the United States during the latter half of the twentieth century: war, civil unrest, generational conflict, civil rights, and gay liberation. I
believe a critical biography of Bentley simultaneously makes the case for theatre and performance as vital expressions closely connected to sociopolitical phenomenon. Each of my chapters addresses a specific area of Bentley's doubleness as it relates to social, personal, and political events.

My first chapter, "A Double Life," examines Bentley's complex relationship with leftist political movements during the middle part of the twentieth century. I address Marxist historiography, which I believe to be a foundational theory in Bentley's approach to the past in writing and on stage. This leads to an analysis of how Marxism is variously interpreted by specific individuals and groups in particular contexts. I look to Bentley's autobiographical writings in order to explicate his simultaneously ambivalent and enthusiastic feelings toward the radical Left while he was an undergraduate at Oxford University and after he emigrated to the United States during World War II. His collaboration with Brecht is marked by conflicts related to differing approaches to political theatre and contrasting views of Soviet Communism. I use Bentley's autobiographical accounts of his relationship with Brecht, as well as records of their written correspondence, to create a narrative of their political agreements and disputes. Their political disagreements carry over into their approaches to political theatre, and I offer a discussion of Galileo as an example of their contrasting views of historification and political analogy. Finally, I look to Bentley's subsequent statements on Brecht's legacy throughout the past five decades, which often take issue with contemporary academic approaches to Brecht and Epic Theatre.

Chapter Two, "A Rite of Purification," is specifically focused on anti-Communism and the House Un-American Activities Committee. Eric Bentley uses the word "ritual" to describe the hearings, which I use as the basis for my analysis of the Committee. Drawing from the work
of Victor Turner, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, and Brenda Murphy's *Congressional Theatre: Dramatizing McCarthyism on Stage, Film, and Television*, I examine the hearings as political performance. Additionally, I investigate Bentley's critical responses to a number of theatre and film performances that dramatize the proceedings using historification and analogy, particularly those of Arthur Miller and Elia Kazan. I reference Bentley's *Thirty Years of Treason*, a collection of transcripts from the HUAC hearings, throughout the chapter. His extended introduction and afterword to the collection offer a frank assessment of the various players where he challenges simple distinctions between heroes and villains. His play based upon the transcripts, *Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been*, is more polemic in regard to the behavior of individual witnesses. Much of my focus is on Bentley's attempts at influencing the historical narrative of the House Un-American Activities Committee through his critical and dramatic writing. Ultimately, this chapter examines Bentley's relationship with politics and artistic reactions to persecution during the post-war era of HUAC, anticommunism, and the Cold War.

The third chapter, "The Un-Liberated University," deals with the New Left and the student protest movement during the 1960s. I examine Bentley's position within the atmosphere of radicalism during the late 1960's, which was, but perhaps more importantly was not, in step with the New Left. He was a professor at Columbia University in 1968, when members of Students for a Democratic Society engaged in a number of protests and eventually occupied campus buildings, resulting in a police response. In his writings, he expressed both support and ambivalence for various aspects of the student movement, encouraging political activism, but warning against what he viewed as reactionary behavior. The Radical Theatre Movement was closely connected with the political activism of the era and prompted a similarly mixed response.
from Bentley. However, this did not prevent him from creating a rock musical, *The Red, White, and Black*, which used many techniques of the Radical Theatre Movement and engaged with issues related to student protest and the counterculture movement at large. In this chapter, I employ Foucault's notions of power to analyze various texts related to the student protests, the Radical Theatre Movement, and the New Left, in order to draw conclusions about Eric Bentley's involvement with these political and artistic trends.

Chapter Four, "Gay Liberation," examines the various roles sexuality plays in Bentley's work. He gradually came out as a homosexual during the late 1960s. However, I believe many writings from throughout his life engage with discourses related to homosexuality and the closet. As critic for the *New Republic*, he wrote a number of reviews for works by playwrights such as Tennessee Williams and William Inge that dealt with homosexual desire. Upon coming out of the closet—as a playwright, as well as a homosexual—he authored plays about homosexuality including *Lord Alfred's Lover* and *Round Two*. Both of these plays openly address gay issues, some of which Bentley identifies as autobiographical. In my analysis, I employ queer theory, based upon readings of Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, and Alan Sinfeld, as well as Michael Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, which points to the constructed nature of sexuality and allows for readings of subaltern desire in a variety of cultural expressions. I believe this approach allows me to examine sexual discourses at play in Bentley's critical and dramatic writings.

I hope my work is conducive to continued understanding of arguably one of the foremost dramatic writers of the twentieth century. By not focusing on *The Playwright as Thinker* and *Life of the Drama* and instead on his perhaps lesser-known critical and dramatic works, my study
hopefully offers a compelling and unique rendering of Bentley's position as public intellectual and artist. In a broad sense, I examine the ways in which social discourses, critical analysis, and cultural practice interact within specific media. I view theatre as but one part of a broader conversation involving a wide variety of cultural expressions, political discourses, and social operations within the public sphere. Bentley consistently offers a nuanced perspective on various social and political movements of the past century, in that he was often in-between various sides of a given conflict. At this point I will take Eric Bentley's suggestion and attempt to depart from the present in order to examine the past. Or perhaps more accurately, I will offer a version of the past based upon the available discourses and my current perspective.
CHAPTER ONE
"A Double Life"

Eric Bentley's politics resist simple categorization. Despite his working relationship with Bertolt Brecht and other committed Communists, he never embraced Soviet Communism as a viable political entity. At the same time, he maintained deep skepticism over the increasing influence of liberal democracy and free market capitalism in western society. Despite his professed pacifism and opposition to armed conflict, he comes out in support of the Allied effort during World War II. Bentley describes this period of his life in terms of doubleness most directly when discussing his work as Brecht's translator and collaborator. He explains, "a double life I cultivated during World War II had these parts: I consorted with Brecht and his Communist associates; and at the same time I sought out scholars and critics in the academic world in which, after all, I made my living" (Bentley on Brecht 478). This chapter examines this doubleness as it relates to Bentley's politics, specifically his relationships with Brecht, Socialist and Communist political parties, and Marxist thought. These shifting—and at times contradictory—positions in many ways epitomize the sociopolitical tensions at play in a number of discourses during the middle part of the twentieth century. More specifically, I believe his politics indicate the broader fortunes of democratic socialism during that era, which was caught between liberal capitalism and hard-line communism, and therefore out of keeping with dominant political discourse.

"The Sum of Social Relations"

Throughout his career, Bentley expresses conflicted opinions on the practice of Marxist historiography. In many respects, Marxist theory is a clear influence upon his interpretation of
the historical narrative. In "Days of the Commune" (1971), he warns against accepting a history as factual without first examining the historian, advising the reader to "be a little suspicious of what is offered as a purely factual refutation of historical interpretation. One should ask the interpreter: don't you have any ideas? And, if you do, can I not proceed to question them on what purports to be a factual basis?" (Bentley on Brecht 310). In various writings dealing with the construction of histories—in the form of written narrative and stage performance—Bentley points to the role sociopolitical contexts play in the writing process and the interpretation of past events. In doing so, he draws from Marxist theory, adapting and integrating it with other approaches to suit his needs. At the same time, he voices objections to what he identifies as flawed interpretations of Marx in the practices of other writers and academics. As a critic in the West during the Cold War, he is a member of a generation of thinkers influenced by Marx who were unsure of how to appropriate Marxist practice within a culture directly opposed to socialist ideals.

Numerous statements and theories from throughout Marx's oeuvre are foundational to contemporary historiography and to Bentley's approach to writing history as well. In The German Ideology, Marx argues, "circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances" (186). This well-known declaration supports the investigation of sociopolitical contexts as instrumental forces affecting the actions of individual players involved in what are identified as historical events. In a similar vein, Marx argues that while history is a construction, it is based upon the lived and felt experiences of human beings:

This manner of approach is not devoid of premises. It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and fixity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible
process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts, as it is with the empiricists (themselves still abstract), or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists. (Marx 28)

While Marx stresses the importance of lived material experience, he also notes the influence sociopolitical circumstances have upon the individual subject's awareness. He states, "The phantoms formed in the brains of men are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises" (27). This view indicates the profound role contextual circumstances play in the thoughts and perceptions involved in both the writing and reading of histories.

His first book, *A Century of Hero Worship* (1944), contains some of Bentley's most direct references to Marxism. He points to Marx and Engels's conception of humanity "as the sum of social relations," which "makes of the universe a complex of systematically interacting forces" (211). He continues by noting that despite the intricacy of Marxist theory, "in practice the historiography of Marx and Engels is kept firmly anchored by their common sense and their materialism" (211). This example of Bentley favoring praxis over theory is one of many from throughout his career. In a number of discussions on topics ranging from Marxist theory to Brecht's performance aesthetic, he consistently favors straightforward theoretical statements grounded in concrete action. Additionally, Bentley cautions against simple categorizations and draconian judgments that do not account for the complexities of a given sociopolitical and historical context. Writing over fifty years later in 1998, he warns against reducing Brecht's

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*A Century of Hero Worship* was published under the title *Cult of the Superman* (1947) in the UK.
politics to a version of Marxism palatable for contemporary academic tastes. He explains, "Not only nineteenth-century Marxism but also twentieth-century Leninism-Stalinism was seductive—a proposition hard for American students in the 1990s to grasp, though they could easily find a neo-Marxist professor to explain it away for them" (Bentley on Brecht 10). The later part of this statement is a clear disparagement of contemporary Marxist academics, many of whom advocate a post-structural approach Bentley finds objectionable. He warns against revisionism in the wake of the fall of Soviet Communism and its effect upon contemporary Marxist criticism, stating, "the Marxism no European proletariat ever yet embraced is being desperately held on to by what on might call a cadre of American (and British and French) academics" (Bentley on Brecht 8). While this is a clear argument against revisionist historiography, it also seems to imply belief in traditionalism as the only valid interpretation of Marx's theories; however, Bentley himself employed theoretical models based upon Marxist historiography that expanded and reinterpreted orthodox approaches. In other words, Bentley utilized Marx in ways suitable to his arguments, but was in no way a committed proletariat.

If we are to accept Bentley's assertion that contemporary Marxism is far removed from the theories and practices of the nineteenth century, it does not erase the fact that throughout his lifetime the Left was consistently marked by divergent interpretations of Marxism, socialism, and communism. In Specters of Marx, Jacques Derrida examines issues related to the effect Soviet Communism and the Cold War had on his generation's relationship with Marxism:

"Whither Marxism?" For many of us the question has the same age as we do. In particular for those, who . . . opposed . . . de facto "Marxism" or "communism" (the Soviet Union, the International of Communist Parties, and everything that resulted from them, which is to say so very many things . . .), but intended at least
never to do so out of conservative or reactionary motivations or even moderate right-wing or republican positions. For many of us, a certain (and I emphasize *certain*) end of communist Marxism did not await the recent collapse of the USSR . . . All that started . . . at the beginning of the '50s. (15)

Derrida describes conflicts experienced by himself and his contemporaries between the "quasi-paternal figure of Marx" and post-structuralism. He identifies a number of theoretical debates related to the coexistence of these newer forms of analysis and an "interpretation of a world in which the Marxist inheritance was—and still remains, and so it will remain—absolutely and thoroughly determinate" (15). For example, Derrida refers to various critical inheritances contemporary theory draws from traditional Marxism, specifically the notion that "hegemonic force always seems to be represented by a dominant rhetoric and ideology." However, this conflicts with post-structural sensibilities that "lead us to be suspicious of the simple opposition of dominant and dominated" (Derrida 68). In this sense, theorists like Derrida and Foucault can examine hegemony and dominant discourses and "refer in this way to a hierarchized and conflictual field without necessarily subscribing to the concept of social class by means of which Marx so often determined" (Derrida 69).

Many of Foucault's statements on Marx share features with those outlined by Derrida, which are in turn useful in examining Bentley's own relationship with Marxism. Perhaps most significantly, Foucault suggests that Marxism is the signifier for a wide and fluctuating discourse in many ways far removed from Marx the individual and his initial theories. He notes, "As far as I'm concerned, Marx doesn't exist. I mean, the sort of entity constructed around a proper name, signifying at once a certain individual, the totality of his writings, and an immense historical process deriving from him" (*Power/Knowledge* 76). For the purposes of this project, I take this
to mean that there is not a definitive interpretation of Marxism that fits the numerous processes derived from his initial work. To be sure, the Marxist view of history is present in a myriad of theoretical approaches that arose throughout the twentieth century. Foucault remarks upon the ubiquity of Marxism in contemporary historiography:

> It is impossible at the present time to write history without using a whole range of concepts directly or indirectly linked to Marx's thought and situating oneself within a horizon of thought which has been defined and described by Marx. One might even wonder what difference there could ultimately be between being a historian and being a Marxist. (Power/Knowledge 53)

In short, Marx's theories are foundational to contemporary historical practice, specifically the view of the historical narrative as a social construction. However, this notion is so ubiquitous in historiography it is often present in practices far removed from traditional Marxism. In regards to Bentley, this line of thinking draws attention to the ways in which Marxist thought is variously employed in his work. While he is by no means a dyed-in-the-wool Marxist, his view of history is in many ways derived from this brand of historiography. Additionally, his readings and criticisms of Brecht's work, as well as their collaboration, is highlighted by differing interpretations of and experiences with socialism.

"Social Democratic, Not Communist"

*The Brecht Memoir* (1986) is primarily an autobiographical narrative focusing on various elements of Bentley's life before, during, and after his collaboration and friendship with Brecht. He traces his first political stance of pacifism to his involvement with the Society of Friends during his undergraduate years. This was during the late 1930s, and Bentley connects his
pacifism to a belief that "the world seemed headed for a war that would destroy civilization" (*Bentley on Brecht* 467). He describes this stance as politically simplistic, in that it offers an incredibly condensed solution to armed conflict: everyone refuses to fight. In the memoir, he identifies the degree to which pacifism defined his role in British society. He recalls, "As a pacifist, I would declare myself a conscientious objector and enter a camp for such. Indeed I was in a camp near Birmingham when news came that I had won the scholarship to Yale, which I had applied for the previous winter" (468). As the war progressed and details of the abuses perpetrated by Nazi Germany spread, Bentley's commitment to pacifism wavered. He describes the mutability of his convictions, "Now my own politics had been wobbly. I had wobbled all the way over from absolute pacifism to an excessive enthusiasm for the Allied war effort, headed as it was by Marshal Stalin" (432). This would be the only time that he would vocally support an armed conflict and would later voice stern opposition to the Vietnam War.

Bentley first gained exposure to the radical Left during his undergraduate studies at Oxford University, coming in contact with Socialists, Marxists, and Communists within the student body. He identifies this brand of radicalism with social and economic privilege:

> Communism was the sophisticated thing, in the mid-1930s, for student rebels to believe in, but I was not sophisticated. I wasn't upper class enough for Oxford proletarianism . . . How, without the right accent and self-assurance would one ever get into a club like that? . . . Marxism was something (I thought) that they must have picked up on their expensive vacations on the Continent" (*Bentley on Brecht* 467).
As the son of working-class parents attending the university on a scholarship, he is clearly aware of his difference in class; however, ironically, this awareness is precipitated by his perceived elitism of student radicals.

While still at Oxford, Bentley eventually joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP), which disaffiliated from the Labour party in 1932. The split was precipitated by ILP members' support of a more socialist approach to domestic and foreign policies in the wake of the Third International. The membership of the ILP faction felt that "the Labour Party, in emphasizing the need for obtaining power was losing sight of what its real goals should be; in short, "the primary duty of the ILP was to act as the guardian of socialism" (Cohen 9). In The Failure of a Dream: The Independent Labour Party from Disaffiliation to World War II, Gidon Cohen examines the ILP as one of the "alternative centers of radical thought and action" during the first half of the twentieth century (3). The ILP is identified as an alternative radical organization because its relatively short-lived existence was fraught with constant internal division. Cohen suggests that the ILP's difficulties stemmed from "divergent reasons for disaffiliation" from the Labour Party in the first place. He identifies the dominant reason favored by ILP leadership as the belief that they "needed to break with the Labour Party's undemocratic and non-socialist reformism because working class unity could only come under the 'red banner of revolutionary Socialism'" (15). Similarly, he suggests that many ILP members "rejected the larger party's gradualist politics" (16). At the same time, Cohen discerns a great deal of political diversity within the ILP's parliamentary group, which resulted in "considerable disagreement about the function of the group and the appropriate relationship to the ILP outside parliament" (17). Over the course of the 1930s, regional disputes, an influx of Trotskyites, opposition to Soviet actions during the
Spanish Civil War, and the emergence of a hard-line Marxist group within the Party lead to a precipitous decline in membership.\(^6\)

The ILP offered a position in between the Labour Party and Communist Party, which was a difficult stance to maintain during the Second World War and the following decades of the Cold War. At the same time, ILP members and groups had a number of successes in liberalizing British society throughout the twentieth century including women's suffrage, the establishment of trade unions, the right to consciously object to military service, decolonization, access to birth control, socialized medicine, and nuclear disarmament (Winter 365). Writing in 1986, Bentley describes his continuing identification with the sociopolitical aims of the ILP, "It represented the kind of socialist I was and have been ever since: Social Democratic, not Communist" (\textit{Bentley on Brecht} 432). In his 1992 essay, "The ILP: a Century of Socialism," Barry Winter offers a justification for the manner of socialism practiced by the contemporary ILP, which rejoined the Labour Party in 1975:

\begin{quote}
Coming from a different socialist tradition, the ILP disagrees with the received wisdom. We accept that socialism is down but it is not out. For us, much that has been done in the name of socialism has been wrong, very wrong. However, the need for a more equal, just and democratic society remains as important as ever. For a price, capitalism can deliver a multiplicity of goods and service but it is incapable of delivering a fair society. (366)
\end{quote}

Despite the various political and regional factions within the ILP throughout its existence, it generally maintained the broad aims of supporting a more equitable, peaceful, and progressive society.

\(^6\) Between 1932 and 1939, ILP membership fell from 16,773 to 2,441 (Cohen 31).
Bentley's belief in radical, but not revolutionary, democratic socialism is expressed in many of his political writings from throughout his career. However, this brand of socialism was at odds with the dominant political forces on both ends of the political spectrum. During a 2007 public appearance, Bentley remarks upon his and the ILP's marginal position in regard to the Left, as well as the role Marxism played in his early writing:

I was at the time a young Englishman and a member of the Independent Labour Party in London, which was a Marxist party, very anti-Soviet, but also fundamentally anti-capitalist. The communists called us "Trotskyites," but we didn't regard ourselves as such. Although I perhaps wasn't as open about that as I might have been in the early drama criticism, this was the impetus. (32)

Despite his interest in socialist politics and general acceptance of the Marxist view of history, his political stance—or perceived lack of commitment—resulted in conflict with hard-line Communists. While it would seem appropriate for Communists to welcome social democrats as fellow travelers, there was a great deal of provincialism within the Left, which resulted in discord amongst the various groups. He describes the situation in religious terms, "Just as a fanatic Protestant hates a Catholic more than a Buddhist or Hindu, so Communists of the Stalin era loathed the Social Democrat more than the reactionary" (Bentley on Brecht 432). On multiple occasions, his criticisms of Soviet policies led to disagreements with members of Brecht's entourage who viewed his politics as hopelessly naïve. On a similar note, he had corresponding disputes with vehemently anticommunist colleagues who objected to his defense of socialist ideals. He describes such a situation while writing for The Nation:

The magazine at that time led a double life somewhat as I did, politically speaking. The front matter was in the Communist orbit, the back keenly if
somewhat quietly anti-Communist. Given my tendency always to assert the \(A\) part of myself if my interlocutor was asserting the \(B\) part, it was inevitable that I would take the Communist side when dealing with the literary editor who was a fierce anti-Stalinist. (Bentley on Brecht 479)

This statement reveals the degree to which Bentley purposefully plays devil's advocate when entering into political discussions with individuals holding extreme beliefs. I suggest that his writings display a similar push-and-pull when addressing issues related to Marx, Communism, and anti-Communism.

"A Certain Deliberate Depersonalization"

The collaboration between Bentley and Brecht began in 1941 while Brecht was living as a political exile in Santa Monica and Bentley was doing his first year of teaching at UCLA. He knew little of Brecht's work and had only heard that there was a German poet in the area in need of a translator; however, this chance encounter resulted in a working relationship that lasted the rest of Brecht's life. Their relationship was complex and marked by various disagreements and heated exchanges, often in the form of letters and third parties. In Bertolt Brecht in America, James K. Lyon offers an apt characterization of their working relationship, "Though he recognized Brecht's genius, Bentley was no blind disciple of his theories, but a perceptive critic who, as Brecht told him later, was almost the only person who would raise issues that really challenged his ideas" (163). This was not always the case. While there are many examples of Bentley carefully picking opportunities to voice his opinions and critiques of Brecht's work, he initially assumed the pose of deferential acolyte. He recounts, "the tactic that I felt I had to adopt towards Brecht was that of quiet listening" (Bentley on Brecht 480). As their relationship
progressed over the course of a decade, Bentley felt an increasing obligation to challenge Brecht's artistic and political stances. He explains, "By the time Brecht invited me to work at the Berlin Ensemble, in the 1950s, I realized that my listener's, learner's stance would entail a good deal of hypocrisy if I were to last out the proposed year in East Berlin" (481). While a great admirer and proponent of Brecht's artistic work Bentley admits that he "did not share his politics or the philosophy behind them," going so far as to describe himself as an anti-Communist in 1956 (Bentley on Brecht 6). Nevertheless, he repeatedly makes the case for the publication and production of Brecht's work despite the hostile climate of the Cold War. This relationship is a compelling example of the doubleness characteristic of Bentley's life and career.

Writing in 1965, Bentley admits to having no idea about what he was getting himself into when he first met with Brecht in his bedroom/study in a small rented house in Santa Monica in 1941. He describes the charming disarray of Brecht's appearance, recalling, "I had no sense of being in the company of a famous man" (Parables 4). Acknowledging the haziness of his memories of this first encounter, he suggests, "It is possible that I took Brecht for a truly proletarian writer on the score of his current lack of cash and his general style of living and dress. This would no doubt have been naive of me" (4). Bentley's opinion of Brecht undergoes significant change as he became increasingly famous in the United States, developing a cult of personality Bentley would disparagingly refer to as Brecht-ism (Bentley on Brecht 77). Yet in this first meeting, Bentley was struck by his candid singleness of purpose:

Most famous writers, of course, would have made sure that before I left after our first interview I did have a sense of their fame. Remarkable about Brecht was that he didn't bother about this. Here we see the real human value of what I came later to recognize as a certain deliberate depersonalization of things which Brecht
brought about. He did not try to find out much about me. He did not invite me to find out much about him. As in his plays, two people would encounter each other for the sake of what they have to do together. I was a student of German and of poetry. He was a German and had written some poems. I would therefore translate some of him. (Parables 4)

It appears that Bentley uses this description to draw a direct parallel between the detachment of Brecht's social interactions and the distancing effect—verfremdungseffekt—central to his dramatic theories. Lyon makes a similar claim based upon Bentley's description, that Brecht "consciously structured his highly specialized, unusual existence to minimize or exclude the subjective element. His mode of life mirrored and inspired a unique type of drama that attempts to objectify and depersonalize most human relations" (206). Bentley's account of this aloofness in personal and professional relationships gives the impression Brecht viewed his collaborators as ancillary components in service of his broader artistic and political visions.

Despite the association of Brecht's name and work with state Communism and committed socialist ideals, his politics were not entirely stable and underwent significant permutations throughout his career. On various occasions, Bentley references that he discerns "ambiguities in Brecht's communism" (Baal 104). In his 1998 essay, "Brecht's Reputation," he characterizes Brecht's enthusiasm for the Soviet Union as based upon its implications for the reception of his plays:

Although America and Russia had not yet emerged as the two superpowers, he always seemed to think that they would so emerge, and as rivals—indeed as hell and heaven. He liked individual Americans but had no doubt that theirs was the evil empire. Russia was the future, and if he hadn't seen it work he had seen, in
the Marxist-Leninist classics, the proof that it was going to work, that its success was inevitable. Except as "socialism" succeeds, he told me, his works had no future.  (*Bentley on Brecht* 6)

Bentley suggests that Brecht's commitment to Soviet Communism was at least somewhat provisional, yet identifies his objection to war as unwavering and perhaps the most basic underlying theme in his plays and poetry. He states that war "provided the experience which determined his outlook, and opposition to war was his most consistently held stance" (*Baal* 104). He calls Brecht's pacifist convictions "solid as a rock" and explains, "at times they even conflicted with his loyalty to the Communists" (104). Brecht's pacifism is perhaps best displayed in his plays, *Mother Courage* and *Antigone* in particular. Bentley identifies pacifism and war resistance as a major point of agreement in his relationship with Brecht, a significant belief in the work of both writers.

Because of the constraints of time and location, much of Bentley and Brecht's collaboration was carried out through letters and intermediaries, which was sometimes a source of tension, but left a written record of their correspondence. Upon the publication of *The Playwright as Thinker* (1946), Bentley sent a copy to Brecht, which generated some particularly interesting and fruitful written exchanges. Bentley made a number of statements about the viability of Brecht's performance theories throughout the course of this study, sending a copy of the work to Brecht in Germany in hope of a direct response. He equates Epic Theatre with Naturalism in that he believes both forms operate from a desire to present an objective rendering of lived human existence. As Bentley explains, "If the earlier Naturalism came in with the discovery of the 'true meaning of life' in the Darwinist science, the later Epic Drama came in with the discovery of the 'true meaning of life' in Marxist science" (259). He quotes Brecht's
own assertions that epic theatre is the only form that deliver an accurate impression of the reality of social struggle. He identifies these claims as faulty, "Only the Epic form will do! Like his opposite number Cocteau, who says that "pure" theater should be the only kind, Brecht mars his highly interesting suggestions with dogmatism and oversimplification" (259). He continues by claiming that Brecht's art did not match his rhetoric, which he intends as a compliment, "The disproof of Brecht's theory is Brecht's practice. His art makes up for his criticism. In his art there is stage-illusion, suspense, sympathy, identification. The audience is enthralled and—most important of all—the highly personal genius of Brecht finds expression" (260). He reiterates his opinion that Brecht was unsuccessful in realizing his theory of Epic Theatre:

In his theoretic pronouncements Brecht carries the naturalistic emphasis to an impossible extreme—impossible, that is, in practice. It follows that his practice must be either a catalogue of failures or inconsistent with the theory. The later is the truth. Brecht is a naturalist but non-naturalistic elements are of more and more importance as his art develops. (261).

These various statements were the beginning of an ongoing exchange through letters, which eventually resulted in Brecht writing A Short Organum for the Theatre in 1948.

Writing in 1980, Bentley recounts the exchange of letters between Brecht and himself concerning the statements made in Playwright As Thinker. In his initial response, Brecht indicates points of agreement, "Your first thesis—that throughout the whole modern epoch the issue is Naturalism—is a real clarification of things" (Bentley on Brecht 342). However, in subsequent letters he articulates areas where his opinion differs and attempts to clarify his theory.

7 The letters referenced here are contained in "Brecht - Bentley Correspondence," Bentley on Brecht (340-352).
of Epic Theatre, specifically that his intention is not to arrive at a fixed aesthetic, but to promote experimentation:

I am not claiming the epithet Great for a particular dramaturgy, I'm only guarding against the usual neutralizing talk, which even you do not always come out against sharply enough—all those pacifying hints that we are dealing only with the ephemeral, provisional, nonbinding, that it's a matter of mere experiments, whereas actually it is a matter of an attempt to establish the experimental as a defining function of theater. (Bacon's experiments are not themselves what count. What counts is the definitive introduction of experiment into the sciences.) The very diverse theatrical forms are by no means attempts to arrive at a final form: only the diversity itself should be final. Nor is the introduction of the experimental into dramaturgy just a matter of forms. Actually, the spectators should be transformed into social experimenters, once the critique of reflected reality has been opened up as a man's source of artistic enjoyment. (Bentley on Brecht 343).

Despite Brecht's attempts to clarify his intentions, Bentley was left with a number of unanswered questions. In return he asked, "Could you elaborate your distinction between Experimentalism as something provisional and Experimentalism as something much more important and lasting? . . You have a conception of art which few understand. I think I am probably not one of the few. You will have to explain yourself" (345). He connects his misunderstanding to Brecht's broader reception in the United States:

I think you will do yourself a service if you can help American readers and playgoers to see the difference between "Brechtism" and the impossible
vulgaries of "proletarian literature" of which the most impossible is Socialist Realism . . . I warn you that you will never make any further advance in America unless you can dispel the illusions and doubts that at present surround your kind of enterprise. They will not listen to your message until they are "sold" on your art. (346)

As was often the case, a significant amount of time went by before he received a response, which came in the form of what would become perhaps Brecht's most famous critical essay. Bentley remembers, "I got no answering letter. The answer, it seems, was his now famous essay "A Short Organum for the Theatre""(346). While it is impossible to gauge the exact level of influence Bentley had in Brecht's decision to write his essay, it is certainly plausible that Brecht was concerned that one of his closest collaborators and primary advocates in the United States did not understand his dramatic theories and took it as an opportunity to further explain his ideas and establish the way he works would be received by generations of audiences and scholars. I view this as an example of how Bentley's critical voice could work in favor of Brecht's artistic objectives, prompting him to refine and better articulate his performance theories.

Bentley's narrative in The Brecht Memoir and other writings contains references to various political disagreements with Brecht and his collaborators, especially playwright Ruth Berlau, and Helene Weigel, Brecht's wife and leading actor. These conflicts seem to become increasingly pronounced as their relationship progressed, the political situation between the Soviet Union and the West deteriorated, and Bentley himself became more vocal about his beliefs. He explains one of these differences of opinion, "In 1948 I became an American citizen, and I'm sure the Brecht circle took for granted that I supported their candidate for the American presidency, Henry Wallace . . . I took no part in [the Wallace campaign] and did not vote for the
man" (*Bentley on Brecht* 480). Bentley does not specifically identify his reasons for not supporting the Progressive Party candidate, but his reasons could include Wallace's position toward the Soviet Union. His candidacy was opposed by many anti-Communist liberals, progressives, and socialists because he refused to disavow support from Soviet Communists and actively promoted closer ties and cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union and it is likely that Bentley shared these reasons for his objections to the candidate.

These disagreements with Brecht's circle would become increasingly heated as the escalation of the Cold War pushed their politics further apart. Bentley recounts a particularly spirited 1950 conversation with Ruth Berlau, who he believes was sent as Brecht's emissary:

"Why aren't you one of us?" "Us?" "Oh, you know what I mean. I'm not afraid of the word! Communism! Or just antifascism if you want to call it that! Why aren't you?" "Well, I am . . . sort of . . . partly . . . All my best friends . . ." "Pah, we've read your book! And don't you have a new piece saying Brecht would be a better writer if he gave up Marxism?" "Not exactly, what I said was . . ." "We know what you said. We are asking if you are ever going to change!" "Change?" "Yes, change. Brecht says, if all these rumors are true, and the Russians are about to take over West Germany, it'll be very good for Bentley, because they'll carry him off to Moscow and reeducate him. He'll learn a lot!" (*Bentley on Brecht* 430).

At this point in time Brecht lived in the German Democratic Republic and was firmly committed to establishing his artistic legacy within the Communist system, while Bentley resided in the United States and was exposed to drastically different accounts of the actions by the Soviet
government. Bentley and Berlau's differing stances toward the Moscow Trials exemplifies this rift:

At the mention of the trials, Ruth blew up. Literally *stood* up in the restaurant and shouted: "Du bist so dumm"—"you are so dumb! Ignorant too! What do you know about the Moscow Trials?" "Well, I did look into them. And I didn't think they were on the level!" "That's it, then. I have to tell you this: you can never represent Brecht in America while you represent reactionary views, while you are . . . on the other side in the fight!" (347).

While their professional relationship would continue, political differences would remain a stumbling block even after Brecht's death in 1956. Bentley references a statement made by Helene Weigel to John Fugei: "Er ist ein ausgesprochener Feind von uns," or "a definite enemy of ours" (349).

Upon Brecht's death, Bentley would publish an obituary in *The New Republic* where he would declare, "He was a Communist, and I am anti-Communist." This is arguably the most clearly drawn statement of political differences between the two men, reducing their respectively complex political beliefs to a binary opposition. He characterizes their friendship as existing in spite of their political resentments:

I had the experience of being his political enemy and his personal friend, and I must record that the friendship was given precedence over the enmity . . . He was, in the strict sense, the most fascinating man I have ever met. There were times when I hated him, but there were no times when I did not love him. ("Bertolt Brecht")
This tribute to friendship between adherents to seemingly irreconcilably opposed political ideologies quickly became the subject of a column by Joseph North published in *The Daily Worker* entitled "An Anti-Communist Pays Tribute to a Communist." North praises Bentley for overcoming his prejudices by maintaining a friendship with a Communist, "It is my notion that people on Bentley's side never understood Brecht very well because too many people in today's world don intellectual and moral blinders instinctively when they hear that a man is a Communist" (1). Despite their glorification of individual friendship, both the column and the obituary re-inscribe the prevalent Cold War ideology that someone should be either pro or anti-Communist.

Looking back on this era and these particular events, Bentley expresses a significantly different perspective, that he was actually less of an anti-Communist fundamentalist than he made himself out to be at the time. He argues that despite the emphatic claims of opposition to Communism, "I had not become an integrated personality, free of contradictions. I had merely got rid of one particular set of illusions" (*Bentley on Brecht* 481). Writing in 1980, Bentley recalls how he came to find himself in this seemingly irreconcilable position:

> Such was my experience of the Cold War. Not being on the Communist side of it, I was placed, by them, on the anti-Communist side. And, in the fifties, in the midst of those giant antagonisms, I even came at times to believe this was true. I look back at some of my writing of that period and note now (though I have forgotten in the intervening decades) that I had allowed myself to be assigned a role in the Cold War, had foolishly allowed myself to assume that if one was not a Communist, one was an "anti-Communist." (348)
I believe this statement implies that he was very much caught up in the rhetoric of the Cold War and that this discourse presented itself in his thinking, writing, and approach to his relationship with Brecht.

In many ways, Bentley's various responses to Brecht's two versions of *Galileo* (1943 and 1947) best represent the artistic, social, and political divergences between the two men. The 1947 version of *Galileo* received perhaps more of Bentley's attention than any of Brecht's other plays, much of it critical. In the introduction to the Grove Press collection, *Seven Plays*, Bentley finds faults with Brecht's historiography:

> What Marxist historian would accept the unhistorical major premise: namely that if an Italian scientist had refused to renounce Copernicus in 1633 "an age of reason would have begun," and our age of unreason would have been avoided? What Marxist historian could accept the notion that a Catholic scientist of the seventeenth century, whose best friends were priests, who placed both his daughters in a convent as young girls, was halfway a Marxist, resented convents and church-going, doubted the existence of God, and regarded his tenets in physics as socially revolutionary? *(Bentley on Brecht 90)*

Bentley complains that *Galileo*—particularly the later version—presents a version of history and take on heroism that is very specific to Brecht's view of the world and not the advertised Marxist analysis of history and class relations. He explains, "*Brecht is not Marxism. Brecht is Brecht—and Galileo is his, not Marx's, prophet*" (92). He continues by alleging that *Galileo* "is an attempt to bring together the most widely divided sections of Brecht's own divided nature: on the one hand, the hedonist and "coward," on the other, the "hero”—and masochist" (92).
Bentley's reading of the play is primarily based upon Galileo's actions in the climactic scenes where he recants his scientific discoveries to avoid martyrdom, which he felt portrayed the character in too negative of a light. He explains his idea of the playwright's intentions, "In Brecht's view, Galileo should have been willing to die because the news of his refusal to recant could have been exploited by the right side" (95). His statements indicate that he felt Brecht's play to be reductive, politically simplistic, and not in keeping with the loftier versions of Marxism.

Bentley refined his argument against Galileo for the critical introduction to the Grove Press edition of Brecht's Galileo published in 1966. As before, his primary objections stemmed from what he viewed as a deliberate misrepresentation of history for the purposes of creating a simplistic conflict. As he states, "The axis of Brecht's story is passivity-activity, cowardice-courage, slynness-boldness. To make his story into a play, Brecht exploited whatever ready-made material came to hand but must himself take full responsibility for the final product" (Bentley on Brecht 214). He alleges that Brecht was less than forthcoming about his free interpretation of historical events, "Sometimes he talked as if he had indeed taken everything from the historical record; other times . . . he would admit to changes but maintain that they didn't distort history; at other times still, he would talk as if he had an entirely free hand" (214). He continues by identifying major philosophical questions related to the writing of historical plays, "Lukács has suggested that while playwrights and novelists depart from the facts of history, they still present the larger forces of history. But the forces of what period of in history, that of the ostensible action, or that of the playwright?" (216).

Bentley offers this hypothesis about the differences between the two versions of the play, "Galileo I is a "liberal" defense of freedom against tyranny, while Galileo II is a Marxist defense
of a social conception of science against the "liberal" view that truth is an end in itself" (221).

He suggests that in the second version of the script, Galileo is portrayed as a coward who refuses martyrdom, as opposed to the persecuted scientist presented in the earlier version and implies that the later play is based upon simplistic binary opposition. He warns, "Unless we can see all history and society in these terms of progressives and reactionaries, we shall not respond as Brecht would like us to" (231). Marxist historiography is used as support for this critique, "It seems to me that a Marxist should object that the dialectic of history and society is here excessively attenuated. The result is a melodramatic simplification" (231). This particular disagreement is indicative of the variance within Marxism, in that both Bentley and Brecht would argue that Marxist historiography supports their interpretation of *Galileo*.

As Brecht's work became increasingly popular in academic circles during the second half of the century, Bentley often reacted with bemusement toward the legacy of his work. Writing in the extended preface to *Seven Plays* (1960), he observes, "Brecht has died, and what we have chosen to inherit is a cult, an ism" (*Bentley on Brecht* 77). He does however find potential advantages in this recent increase in interest, "War can be waged on Brechtism in the name of Brecht. More shrewdly: the cult of Brecht might be exploited to arouse a deeper interest in the work of Brecht" (78). He identifies much of this newfound fascination with Brecht with the rise of the New Left during the 1960s. In his 1962 introduction to *A Man's a Man* entitled "Brecht and the Rule of Force," he characterizes Brecht as a countercultural figure, "It is precisely the Brecht the Communists condemn that young Americans are attracted by . . . Brecht has become, and will remain, a symbol of malaise and rejection here" (111). Throughout the essay, Bentley seems to play upon the parallels between Brecht's philosophy and the ideals of the New Left. He states that Brecht is "anarchistic in a sense closer to the spirit of the great Anarchists. His
negatives imply positives. All this hate means love. All this conflict means conciliation. All this war means peace" (111). This statement reflects a general trend in Bentley's writing during the 1960s of encouragement for the young social activists and war resisters, so it's not surprising that his writings on Brecht would be part of this.  

The later part of Bentley's career is marked by increasing candidness on a number of subjects, Brecht included. The publication of *The Brecht Memoir* and recent editions of *Bentley on Brecht* contain detailed descriptions of their relationship, as well as frank appraisals of contemporary interpretations of his work. For example, in 1998 he relayed the following story to a group of students attending a graduate seminar on the works of Brecht:

> Back in the early twenties, Brecht plays were not getting much attention. "What you need," a friend told him, "is a theory. To make your stuff important." So Brecht went home and got himself a theory, which now is known to more people than are the plays. "We shall approach Brecht," I announced at Hunter College, "not through the theoretical essays but through the poems. This was a poet who proceeded from lyric to dramatic poetry. You can postpone your reading of the theoretical essays till later—or forever." (*Bentley on Brecht* 10).

He remarks upon the difficulties inherent in judging the effects of Brecht's artistic work, "Brecht has the reputation of a man of influence, but signs of that influence are often hard to seek and even more often are just the influence of Brecht the theorist—Brecht the Communist sage, head of a Marxist-Leninist think tank" (8). By the later part of his career, Bentley was ready to completely disavow Brecht's theoretical writings, offering the advice for audiences to "just see his plays and read his poetry" in order to "reach more interesting, more differentiated

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8 Bentley's relationship with the New Left is the focus of the third chapter in this study.
conclusions" (11). Bentley was present as Brecht continually revised and reinvented his own approach during his lifetime and therefore objects to static interpretations based upon theoretical writings produced in the last decade of his career.

In many ways, Bentley's self-described double life contributed a great deal to his perspective, as well as Brecht's writing. His democratic socialist political background allowed him to understand Brecht's work while maintaining a critical perspective more detached than most members of Brecht's circle. While Bentley and Brecht both employ Marxist historiography, they differ greatly as to their individual methods and interpretations of this approach. These differences are imbued with the social energies of the sociopolitical surroundings where the respective writers worked and in many ways reflect the disparities between the United States and the German Democratic Republic. It was precisely these contrary discourses endemic to a field of power relations far greater than any personal relationship that provided the conflict necessary for the creation of vital political theatre. I believe Bentley's complex relationship with Brecht is mirrored throughout his career in his varied and at times oppositional associations with radical politics and performance.
CHAPTER TWO

"A Rite of Purification"

Eric Bentley's already complex relationship with radical politics was further complicated by the fervent anti-Communism and Red-baiting associated with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and McCarthyism. During the initial decades of the Cold War, many leftist artists and performers, including Bertolt Brecht, were brought before the Committee to testify as to their participation in and knowledge of the Communist Party in the United States (CPUSA). In 1947, the Hollywood Ten Hearings captured the attention of a nation fearful of a perceived communist menace and eager to see famous men and women publicly chastised for their former political associations. Witnesses were given a simple choice: inform on others or be held in contempt of Congress. Contempt usually resulted in a short jail sentence, but perhaps more damaging was the unofficial Hollywood blacklist that prevented hostile witnesses from holding gainful employment because of their refusal to cooperate with HUAC. This threat resulted in various writers, directors, and entertainers naming names in order to protect their careers. The hearings took on a purposefully theatrical atmosphere, with the Committee exploiting the fame and publicity associated with the motion picture industry in order to sensationalize the proceedings. Additionally, the hearings are sometimes described as ritualistic, in that questionings and testimonies follow identifiable patterns with the social function of determining the witness as either friendly or hostile to HUAC's mission. In the afterward to *Thirty Years of Treason* (1971), his collection of testimonies from the hearings, Bentley describes the proceedings as a dramatic ritual:
HUAC carefully dramatized the act of informing for purposes of waging political warfare: to intimidate some, to encourage others, and so on. It was theater or, if you like, ritual: a rite of purification that would also put the fear of God (HUAC's man in Heaven) into the as yet unpurified. (947)

The theatricality of the hearings made them a natural subject for a number of plays and films throughout the mid-twentieth century; however, many writers used historical events and allegory in order to obscure communist sympathies. 9 Bentley generally disapproves of the subterfuge many playwrights believe necessary when addressing HUAC and objects to the use of historical parallels such as the Salem Witch Trials, which he believes do not accurately represent the complexities of anti-Communism. Additionally, in much of his writing from the era, Bentley is caught between his support for socialist humanism and his dislike of the CPUSA, Stalinism, and Soviet Communism. In his reviews published in *The New Republic* and *The Nation*, Bentley regularly addressed issues related to communism imbedded in much of the theatre of the era, carving out a varied and at times contradictory position between the communist sympathizers and anticommunists. As the 1960s drew to a close and HUAC lost its power and influence, Bentley published his collection of testimonies from the hearings, as well as a direct dramatization based upon the transcripts, *Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been*. In these writings, Bentley reexamined his positions on the hearings and witnesses, reinterpreting the motivations of those who remained silent and those who named names.

This chapter examines Bentley's relationship with radical politics during the post-war era of HUAC, anti-Communism, and the Cold War. I view the hearings as a performance event, or

9 Perhaps most notably in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which is addressed in detail later in this chapter.
what Victor Turner labels "social drama," staged in order to generate a culture of fear and
suspicion, thereby uniting mainstream American society against a foreign and domestic
communist menace.\(^\text{10}\) In spite of the seemingly all encompassing authority of HUAC, many
individuals called in to testify were successful in undermining the Committee's authority—or at
least recording their dissent for posterity. Stephen Greenblatt\(^\text{11}\) notes that power "is not
monolithic and hence may encounter and record in one of its functions materials that can
threaten another of its functions" (\textit{Shakespearean} 37). I believe the HUAC hearings exemplify
the complexities of power relations, particularly the polymorphous relationship between power
and dissent. Bentley's writings express an awareness of the Un-American Activities Committee
hearings as social performance events with broad political implications. Through his play
reviews, he attempts to draw greater attention to the connections between artistic expression and
political extremism. This chapter explores discourses related to HUAC and anti-Communism
within Bentley's writings on film, plays, and politics, as well his own dramatic work. I
specifically examine Bentley's specific version of the hearings expressed through his reviews,
critical writings, and documentary play. Through his writings, he constructed a narrative of
HUAC based upon available discourses, therefore his narrative changed significantly as more
information became available over the course of the two decades in which these works were
published. I believe this line of inquiry is beneficial for an understanding of how sociopolitical
forces operate through his work in various ways within shifting contexts, as well as how his
writings contributed to the state of affairs.

\(^{10}\) See \textit{Anthropology of Performance} 33-46.

\(^{11}\) Greenblatt's notion of power is highly influenced by Foucault's conception of power relations,
which is explained in \textit{History of Sexuality: An Introduction} 92-102.
"Cheap Publicity Hounds"

The hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities spanned four decades during the mid-twentieth century and incorporated a range of anti-Communist measures. The hearings' context went through a great deal of change during the life of the Committee, therefore general statements regarding the national temperament during this era run the risk of being reductive. Bentley's writings on HUAC tend to focus on what is generally referred to as "McCarthyism," which is characterized by arguably the most intense bout of anti-communist repression during the early 1950s. However, McCarthyism itself is multiform and complex, with implications far beyond the actions of Joseph McCarthy, who as a member of the Senate was not actually part of HUAC. Ellen Schrecker goes so far as to state, "there was not one, but many McCarthyisms, each with its own agenda and modus operandi" (xii). During this era, Jews, homosexuals, and Leftists were all persecuted under the guise of anticommunism. McCarthy himself was known for his diatribes against "Communists and queers" (Schrecker 148). In this respect, HUAC was part of a broader movement to determine and enforce a specific version of American identity through intimidation and harassment. My study focuses on the time period between 1947 and 1953, when the Committee was at its height and wielded what was arguably its broadest power over individuals and institutions; an era historians sometimes render with sharp divisions between pro and anti-Communists. HUAC's power and the broader cultural discord was demonstrated most vividly through the investigation of the motion picture industry; a piece of political theatre designed to utilize Hollywood fame in order to sensationalize the hearings and generate fear and suspicion throughout the nation.
The background story of the Communist Party in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century offers clues as to why HUAC and the anticommunists were so successful in making scapegoats of former Communist Party members who posed little material threat to the United States government. In the introduction and afterword for *Thirty Years of Treason*, Bentley traces the roots of communist suspicion to actions undertaken by the CPUSA itself during the 1930s. He believes distrust of the Party was largely generated by its secretive practices regarding official party politics and activities. He describes the extent to which the CPUSA concealed its operations: "Not only was [secrecy] a Machiavellian scheme of life with widely spread nets, it was a veritable mystique, respected and adhered to beyond all rational plan" (*Thirty Years* 945). Bentley points out that this institutionalized furtiveness runs against Marxist philosophy and ultimately hampers revolutionary action.  

He goes so far as to state that "more than a revolution was betrayed. Marxism was betrayed. The whole tradition of radicalism was betrayed" (945). This characterization of the CPUSA as secretive is present in various historical narratives of the American Left during the 1930s. John Patrick Diggins describes the CPUSA as a "byzantine organization" that "demanded a loyalty that confused discipline with indoctrination" (151). Diggins also points out that few intellectuals officially joined the party because "its leaders frequently treated intellectuals with disdain, and its internal doctrinal disputes often took on the arid flavor of medieval scholasticism" (151). As a public intellectual, Bentley's aversion to the Communist Party may have stemmed from this perceived anti-intellectualism, while the American public's fear was largely fueled by the CPUSA's

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12 Bentley directly cites the *Communist Manifesto*: "The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions" (*Thirty Years* 945).
surreptitiousness. HUAC exploited the public's antipathy towards an enemy within in order to persecute anyone with even the remotest connection the Leftist politics; however, they could not have been able to do so with such ease without the Party's widespread secrecy.

Bentley was certainly unsympathetic to the CPUSA and Soviet Communism, yet he was clearly in opposition to the aggressive anti-Communism enacted by HUAC. His writings on the anti-American investigations are consistent with his Social Democratic personal politics, in that he questions the validity of hegemonic class structure and capitalism, but does not endorse revolutionary action. He casts HUAC members as fundamentalists with an almost religious devotion to free market capitalism. To the Committee, communists represent a threatening atheism towards both the divine and economic social structures. Bentley describes these dual transgressions:

God and Free Enterprise undoubtedly are the twin pillars of the edifice they [HUAC] defend. That this edifice may be a castle in the air is only to add that we are dealing here with pure opinion, indeed with ideology, the falsest of false consciousness. Such notions may have small weight in the realms of truth or logic but may nonetheless—or all the more—be deftly woven into the fabric of history. (Thirty Years 934)

He positions HUAC's political crusade alongside other ideological campaigns that led to the victimization of social groups, National Socialism in particular. In these instances, abstract political and cultural beliefs are used as the basis for the persecution of those who fall outside the

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13 For a detailed description of Bentley's personal politics see Bentley on Brecht 432, 467-468.

This is also addressed at length in the first chapter of this study.
majority position. For Bentley, ardent adherence to a rigid ideology may lead to mass persecution.

Those involved with HUAC strongly believed that communists threatened the ideological underpinnings of western capitalism. If these foundations were called into question, it would greatly undermine the basis for hegemony. According to Bentley, HUAC was ultimately concerned with maintenance of that class structure:

The mythology goes back long before the nineteenth century: you mustn't meddle with the class structure, because it has divine sanction. The classical economics of the nineteenth century added: you mustn't meddle because, under God, the system runs itself better than men could ever run it, rich men get richer, an occasional poor man gets rich, and if the poor chiefly remain poor, or even get poorer, such is life under God. (Thirty Years 935)

In this regard, anti-Communists believed they were defending the very basis of American life. Communists were seen as a threat to the political, social, economic, and religious structures that offered privilege to people like those involved with the Committee.

Bentley's characterization of the conflict between HUAC and communist sympathizers as ideological may also explain why Hollywood became a primary target of the investigation. The motion picture industry represented the most visible expression of leftist ideals in American culture, therefore any attack upon the industry would be sure to command publicity. In Hollywood and Anticommunism, John Joseph Gladchuk postulates that public interest was the Committee's motivation for targeting the motion picture industry. He suggests, "Hollywood, with its star power, global allure, and large progressive population, provided the perfect target for the zealous band of conservatives who viewed the "Committee" as a vehicle to social and
political prosperity" (Gladchuk 6). HUAC members were well aware of the sensationalism involved in an investigation of Hollywood and deliberately constructed the inquiry to maximize the public scandal. Bentley comments upon HUAC's desire for media attention:

The HUAC's most notorious target of all was Hollywood, and to be sure they chose it because, in Arthur Miller's phrase, they were "cheap publicity hounds."

Yet if we impute this motive alone we fall into the trap of overstressing the HUAC's frivolity and thereby underestimating its seriousness. In our America, publicity is no marginal phenomenon, and its ballyhoo, though unreal in one sense, is, in mere common sense, reality itself. (Thirty Years 948)

Bentley indicates his belief that those in charge of the Un-American Activities Hearings were mindful of the dramatic potential of a full-blown investigation of the film industry and exploited this theatricality in order to generate widespread anti-communist angst throughout American society. Anti-Semitism and homophobia were also factors in the targeting of Hollywood, with the Committee exploiting prejudices related to Jewish control and homosexual influence within popular entertainment. In this sense, the hearings functioned as a public display of power through which the Committee intended to assert its political and cultural authority.

While much of HUAC's rhetoric characterized Hollywood communists as revolutionary agents of the Soviet government, in actuality most people targeted by the investigation were far from committed in their devotion to communist ideals. Perhaps the most tragic element of the hearings was the interrogation and blacklisting of many individuals only peripherally involved with the Communist Party, or what Ellen Schrecker refers to as "small c" communists, otherwise known as "fellow travelers" (5). The ultra right-wing committee heads, along with their liberal
allies in the U.S. Congress, targeted anyone associated with the American Left, regardless of their level of participation in the Communist Party. Schrecker suggests:

In order to eliminate the alleged threat of domestic Communism, a broad coalition of politicians, bureaucrats, and other anticommunist activists hounded an entire generation of radicals and their associates, destroying lives, careers, and all the institutions that offered a left-wing alternative to mainstream politics and culture.

(Schrecker x)

The broad scope of the investigation meant that even the most uncommitted communist, or someone who only attended a handful of meetings, would be dealt with as a treasonous Soviet sympathizer. John Joseph Gladchuk explains in *Hollywood and Anticommunism*, "by choosing not to differentiate between the "moderate" brand of Hollywood Communism and the more doctrinaire or hard-line Communism . . . the Committee effectively listed all Hollywood Communists under one "subversive" label" (87). The fact that many individuals involved with the CPUSA during the 1930s—a time when the U.S. was allied with the Soviet Union against Hitler—were no longer involved with communist organizations did not prevent HUAC from behaving as if they were uncovering a full blown conspiracy within Hollywood to overthrow the United States government. The Committee would employ theatrical tactics to instill public anxiety over the perceived threat of a communist menace.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* offers a number of observations about modern and contemporary penal mechanisms germane to an investigation of the HUAC hearings. In particular, the author examines punishment as a "complex social function" and "political tactic" with broad positive and negative implications across an array of "epistemologico-juridical" formations (23). The Committee certainly had broad political and social reverberations
throughout American society, which fed widespread fear of an internal red menace, as well as a backlash seen in the counterculture movement. HUAC also follows Foucault's notion that the contemporary justice system involves a number of "subsidiary authorities" invested with a degree of power to punish. He explains how punishment is diffused throughout society:

As soon as the penalties and the security measures defined by the court are not absolutely determined, from the moment they may be modified along the way, from the moment one leaves to others than the judges of the offence the task of deciding whether the condemned man 'deserves' to be placed in semi-liberty or conditional liberty, whether they may bring his penal tutelage to an end, one is handing over to them mechanisms of legal punishment to be used at their discretion. (21)

The unofficial Hollywood blacklist is a prime example of judicial power residing in an institution not directly associated with established governmental authority. Individuals were deprived the ability to freely seek employment without the benefit of the constitutionally mandated right of due process because the punishment was not carried out through official government agencies. In 1946, three former FBI agents received private funding to establish American Business Consultants, becoming what Ellen Schreker refers to as "professional blackmailers" (218). They published a newsletter, *Counterattack*, which gave the names of individuals with supposed communist ties. Their 1950 compilation, *Red Channels*, contained information concerning 151 people involved with the entertainment industry (Fried 157). The former agents involved with ABC surely utilized contacts and resources gained through their association with the Bureau, but were not official agents of the government. The Hollywood studios were not legally bound to refuse hiring people on the basis of their alleged political affiliations, but willingly complied
with these unofficial rules using information gathered through unofficial channels. In this way, judgments and punishments associated with the HUAC hearings were dependent upon the general willingness of a number of mechanisms and individuals throughout American society.

"Bringing Their Theatres With Them"

Through his criticism and play reviews, Bentley examines dramatizations of the hearings, as well as the theatrical qualities of the hearings themselves. His description of HUAC as a "rite of purification" casts the hearings as performances carried out in order to exert political power over a select group of dissidents, as well as the American public at large. His reviews of plays and films including *The Crucible* and *On the Waterfront* acknowledge the socio-political implications of artistic expressions within a performance context shaped by HUAC. He addresses Miller's defiant "innocence" and Kazan's complicity as part of a vast social drama played out in front of the Committee, in film, and on stage. In effect, these reviews posit theatrical and film performance as part of a much broader political drama played out in the government and through the media. His 1972 documentary play, *Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been*, opened shortly before the Committee was disbanded and functioned as an early postmortem for the hearings. The presence of microphones and cameras is used throughout the play to convey that the hearings were indeed a media event. His preface to the published version of the play contains a description of the media quoted from *The New York Times*:

Scores of correspondents covered the proceedings, which took place before 30 microphones, six newsreel cameras and blazing klieg lights. Fervent applause, boos, cheers, hisses and laughter punctuated the packed sessions, at which Mr. [J.
Parnell] Thomas presided with a rapping gavel and flourishes of rhetoric.

(Rallying Cries 3)

This description of the hearings is clearly important for Bentley's work, in that his
dramatizations, reviews, and critical writings all characterize HUAC as a distinctly theatrical
phenomenon. Bentley gives his own account of the theatrical contexts and HUAC's ability to
exert power through social drama:

There have always been other theaters besides the professional playhouse and the
political arena, notable the law court, the church, and the schoolroom. Witnesses
from each of these are also present below. In a degree, they may be thought of as
bringing their theatres with them: we hear the characteristic style of each different
setting. But then again, the theater environment imposed by HUAC soon takes
over and asserts its own character. (Thirty Years xxviii)

He identifies differing ideologies related to divergent performances of political identity as the
source of the dramatic conflict in the hearings. The Cold War era performances of the
conservative Washington politician and the Left-leaning Hollywood writer are cast as necessarily
opposed, which blurs the distinctions between social and artistic performances. This
characterization reflects an expanded notion of performance, which mirrors theories of social
performance central to late-twentieth century performance studies.

As Richard Schechner explains, "awareness that social and dramatic roles are indeed
closely related to each other, and locating their points of convergence in the mise-en-scène rather
than in the mind of a playwright, has been one of the major developments in its contemporary
theatre theory and practice" (122). I suggest that much of Eric Bentley's writing about HUAC
addresses "points of convergence" between dramatic and social roles demonstrated through the
hearings. Additionally, Victor Turner's concept of social drama, which he defines as "an objectively isola
table sequence of social interactions of a conflictive, competitive or agonistic type," may be used to describe the HUAC hearings as a social performance played out within the broad political context of American society during the McCarthy era (Anthropology 33). Since Bentley himself described HUAC as ritualistic, I look to Turner's theories to explain how the hearings may have been constructed. For example, Turner explains how social dramas are performed throughout various unique cultures and incorporate an array of socio-political factors:

My contention is that social dramas are the "raw stuff" out of which theatre comes to be created as societies develop in scale and complexity and out of which it is continually regenerated. For I would assert that the social drama form is, indeed, universal, though it may be culturally elaborated in different ways in different societies . . . The degree of force employed may vary; the tempo may be fast or slow; the rhetoric passionate or restrained; the motivation to produce an unambiguous outcome highly variable. Some societies may regularly favor legal, others ritual, modes of regress. Class, gender, status, and age, as well as cultural traditions, may affect the style as well as the vehemence of social dramas. Types of issues, whether serious matters of communal survival or debate about how to decorate a house, also affect the aesthetic shape of social dramas. ("Liminality" 24)

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14 Brenda Murphy uses Turner's theories to examine HUAC in Congressional Theatre: Dramatizing McCarthyism on Stage, Film, and Television. Her study is important to my argument later in this chapter.
During the Cold War, social dramas related to anti-Communism were played out in a number of venues including Congressional hearings and theatre performances. Bentley's writings address the various layers of performance involved in the social drama of the HUAC, including plays based on the events, as well as the hearings themselves. In this respect, Bentley expresses an awareness of the proceedings functioning as a social drama, even if he does not use that exact term.

Turner elaborates a procedural structure he believes to be common to all social dramas within various cultures, which he divides into four distinct and progressive phases: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration. While I do not believe social dramas are essential functions of society, I suggest that social and political conflicts are often constructed to follow similar identifiable patterns and HUAC plausibly utilized these structures. Turner explains what is involved in each phase of his conception of social drama:

I define social dramas as units of aharmonic or disharmonic social process, arising in conflict situations. Typically, they have four main phases of public action. These are: (1) Breach of regular norm-governed social relations; (2) Crisis, during which there is a tendency for the breach to widen . . . (3) Redressive action ranging from personal advice and informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery, and, to resolve certain kinds of crisis or legitimate other modes of resolution, to the performance of public ritual . . . (4) The final phase consists either of the reintegration of the disturbed social group, or of the social recognition and legitimating of irreparable schism between the contesting parties. (Anthropology 75)
This story arc can provide an adequate narrative of how the Committee constructed the social
drama of the hearings. A breach between the political left and right in the United States occurred
during the opening decades of the twentieth century following the Russian Revolution and then
the Great Depression, as those associated with the "Old Left" became interested establishing a
viable Communist party. Crisis occurred as the Second World War drew to a close and the U.S.
government stoked paranoia over threats from our former Soviet allies including espionage,
socialist revolution, and nuclear attack. The hearings were a form of redressive action, which
utilized the juridical and legal instruments of the government, despite the fact that many of the
actions undertaken by the committee undermined foundational principles of the United States'
Constitution. The final phase was brought about gradually during the rise of radicalism in the
1960's, as the HUAC lost influence and was finally disbanded in 1975; however, one could argue
that the "schism between the contesting parties" is alive and well. My historical narrative of
these events is constructed with Turner's account of social drama in mind, focusing on the
middle phases of crisis and redressive action.

I believe HUAC initiated a particularly volatile social drama through the utilization of a
rapidly expanding mass media, staging the hearings for radio and television broadcast. Richard
Schechner's view of the news media as a powerful force in contemporary culture that straddles
the thin line between artistic and social performance is clearly applicable to the HUAC hearings.
He explains how the presence of news media affects other types of performance:

TV news is staged not only by the obvious editing of raw footage to suit the video
format, especially the need to sell time in prescribed short units (based on how
long an average viewer's attention can be held), but also because "media events"
and "camera opportunities" are classes of events created for TV. Many guerrilla
theater events, terrorist acts, kidnappings, assassinations, and street
demonstrations—not to mention more banal happenings such as press
conferences, dedications of public buildings, parades—are theatricalized in order
to catch the TV eye. (123)

Schnecher's remarks on media events are certainly applicable to the Un-American Activities
Committee Hearings because it seems clear that the proceedings were staged with media
presence in mind. The political officials who carried out the HUAC hearings—as well as many
of those who testified—demonstrated an understanding of the role theatricality would play in the
events. This view of social and media events is indicative of the increasing prominence of
broadcasting during the postwar period in the United States. Arguably, this trend has only
gained momentum and my own view of the hearings as media events is part of this epoch.

In his introduction to *Thirty Years of Treason*, an anthology of selected HUAC
testimonies, Bentley characterizes the hearings as media events. He relates the context of the
hearings as if he was describing the given circumstances of a play:

The transaction is called Investigation. The scene is the Old House Office
Building in Washington, Room 1105 in the United States Court House, Foley
Square, New York, or some high rectangular chamber in some other
governmental building designed in the grand Greek post-office manner. In the
early years, before television, HUAC hearings were often heard on the radio,
which meant that the drama was played to a national audience. Later, Speaker
Sam Rayburn forbade that, but, since hearings were nationally reported in the
papers, the occasion was never contained within the room where it took place.

(xxviii)
He suggests that the broad implications of the hearings were apparent to the various parties involved, including both the committee members and the witnesses. Those in charge of the hearings consciously made them into major press events in order to provide examples of acceptable behavior to the public by rewarding friendly witnesses and sanctioning those who refused to cooperate. In this sense, HUAC employed the spectacle of public punishment in order to assert its political will throughout the country. At the same time, the presence of the media and public nature of the hearings allowed individuals brought before the Committee to voice their dissent and have it entered into the sphere of public discourse.

Many “unfriendly witnesses” successfully utilized the theatricality of the hearings, which was designed to magnify the power and influence of the Committee, thereby subverting the power structure. For example, Lionel Stander seemed well aware of the significance of these events and it almost seems as if he expected his testimony to be used as stage performance material at some point in the future. The following excerpt from Stander's 1953 testimony reads almost like a script of a vaudeville routine:

MR. CLARDY. Are you a Communist today?

MR. STANDER. No, I am not a Communist today. If you ask me was I a Communist yesterday, no, I wasn't, and I swore under oath, and it's a matter of public record—

MR. CLARDY. Were you at any time ever a member of the Communist Party?

MR. STANDER. You know that is a trick question to trap me to answer the same question. I would be an absolute idiot—

MR. CLARDY. No, I don't think you are.

MR. STANDER. Then, if you don't, you must think I am a political moron.
MR. CLARDY. Were you ever at any time a member of the Communist Party?

MR. STANDER. My record is absolutely clear. How many times do I have to swear under oath before governmental agencies?

MR. CLARDY. Just this once.

MR. STANDER. And how many times do you have to use my name to get headlines?

MR. CLARDY. Just this once.

MR. STANDER. And how many—

MR. CLARDY. Just this once. (Bentley *Thirty Years 649*)

In his testimony, Stander undertakes the dual tasks of speaking at length in order to make the testimony appear as ridiculous as possible, and not giving a straight answer as to whether or not he held Communist sympathies. He exploits the theatricality of the proceedings in order to draw public attention to the absurdity of the situation.

Stander's testimony corresponds with the characterization of the hearings as a theatrical production, with the audience residing well beyond the walls of the courthouse. Bentley explains the expansiveness of the audience for the testimonies:

As in a play, the actors were never really talking to each other but for an audience, and HUAC could always confidently feel that its audience was not limited to guests physically present. The Committee performed for the nation, present and future. If not the Judaeo-Christian God, then Clio, Muse of History, sat in the royal box. (xxviii)

Bentley suggests that the various players understood that the event had wide repercussions throughout American society. The Committee members, investigators, informers, and hostile
witnesses used performance as a way of exerting influence over the historical narrative of the hearings. These theatrical gestures remain an integral part of historical narratives of the events.

In her excellent study, *Congressional Theatre: Dramatizing McCarthyism on Stage, Film, and Television*, Brenda Murphy sets out to examine "the dramatic representations of the Un-American Activities Committee . . . in the context of the Committee's own self-created drama" (4). Murphy draws upon Victor Turner's conceptions of social drama to analyze how with the HUAC hearings, "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" (4). She examines the theatricality of the hearings themselves, as well as various dramatic interpretations of HUAC including direct representations of the hearings and various historical analogies. Her narrative is based upon what she identifies as a five-part ritual, which echoes Bentley's characterization of the hearings as a "ritual: a rite of purification" (*Thirty Years* 947). This approach has a number of features useful to my study; therefore, I will explain Murphy's methodologies and adapt them to suit the purview of my study.

The first part of Murphy's ritual is the asking of the question: "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist party?" This "sixty-four dollar question" effectively set the ritual process in motion. As Murphy remarks, "the witness's answer to, or refusal to answer, this question immediately established his or her function in the ritual of purgation" (61). If the witness did not directly answer the question, the Committee would immediately identify her as obstructive and respond accordingly. The following excerpt from Edward Dmytryk's 1947 testimony serves as an example of a witness establishing himself as uncooperative:
MR. STRIPLING. Are you now or have you ever been a member of the
Communist Party, Mr. Dmytryk?

MR. DMYTRYK. Well, Mr. Stripling, I think that there is a question of
constitutional rights involved here. I don't believe that you have—

The Chairman. When did you learn about the Constitution? Tell me when you
learned about the Constitution?

MR. DMYTRYK. I will be glad to answer that question, Mr. Chairman. I first
learned about the Constitution in high school and again—

MR. MCDOWELL. Let's have the answer to the other question.

MR. DMYTRYK. I was asked when I learned about the Constitution.

MR. STRIPLING. I believe the first question, Mr. Dmytryk, was: Are you now,
or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?

MR. DMYTRYK. All right, gentlemen, if you will keep your questions simple,
and one at a time, I will be glad to answer.

MR. STRIPLING. That is very simple.

MR. DMYTRYK. The Chairman asked me another question.

THE CHAIRMAN. Never mind my question. I will withdraw the question.

MR. DMYTRYK. I have been advised that there is a question of constitutional
rights involved . . . and what I say cannot be questioned by this Committee.

MR. STRIPLING. Then you refuse to answer the question?

MR. DMYTRYK. I do not refuse to answer it. I answered it in my own way.

MR. STRIPLING. You haven't answered whether or not you are a member of the
Communist Party.
MR. DMYTRYK. I answered by saying I do not think you have the right to ask—

MR. STRIPLING. Mr. Chairman, it is apparent that the witness is pursuing the same line as the other witnesses.

THE CHAIRMAN. The witness is excused. (Bentley *Thirty Years* 167)

By resisting the Committee's authority and not answering the question, Dmytryk identified himself as a "hostile witness" unfit to take part in the rest of the HUAC ritual.

Despite the protections of the First and Fifth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution, Dmytryk's refusal to cooperate was essentially viewed as an admission of guilt, which resulted in his placement on the Hollywood blacklist. The Committee developed specific tactics that would publicly brand a Fifth Amendment taker as guilty, though not officially. In *Nightmare in Red*, Richard Fried describes the risks involved in using Fifth Amendment rights during the hearings:

HUAC tried to quick march Fifth-takers into pitfalls. One gambit was a logical fork: if answering would incriminate him, a witness might use the Fifth; but if innocent, he could not honestly do so. Thus, the committee held, the witness was either guilty or lying—even though the courts did not accept this presumption of guilt. However, a new odious category, the "Fifth-Amendment Communist," was born. Such witnesses, whether teachers, actors, or others, rarely hung onto their jobs. (Fried 155)

Refusing to answer the initial question about communist sympathies precludes the witness' participation in the rest of the ritual. By not finishing HUAC's rite of purification, the witness was tainted against involvement in civil society and barred from gainful employment.
Writing in 1971, Bentley claims that the exploitation of the Fifth Amendment was not limited to those on the political Right. He accuses some on the Left of similar, if not worse, misuses of the amendment:

Hypocritical Leftists were not above exploiting the situation quite grossly. In the matter of invoking the Fifth Amendment, for example. While Joe McCarthy on his side—or for that matter, Sidney Hook—taught a credulous public to believe that anyone who invoked this amendment was a Communist, Communists edged non-Communists toward invoking it just in order to prove McCarthy and Hook wrong and, more broadly, to blur the lines between Communism and non-Communism in their own interest. (*Thirty Years* 943)

He alleges that on one occasion, members of the CPUSA "actually blackmailed" a non-Communist into taking the Fifth Amendment; however, specifics are not given. If this is indeed true, it represents a significant reinterpretation of the power relations at play in the hearing ritual. Bentley—showing his doubleness by simultaneously attacking those on the Left and Right—offers this as an example of the complexity of the situation, in that some of the purportedly oppressed utilize the hearings to oppress others. Despite this attempt to blur the lines between Communism and non-Communism and regardless of whether or not she is actually a Communist, once a witness invokes the amendment, she is identified as a Fifth Amendment Communist and blacklisted.

In *Nightmare in Red*, Richard Fried describes the lengths former Communist witnesses had to go to in order to be welcomed back into mainstream society. He explains, "to regain grace, some sinners had to repent publicly, express robust patriotism in a speech or article, or confess to having been duped into supporting leftist causes" (158). This "admission of guilt" is
the second part of Murphy’s description of the HUAC ritual. If the witness decided to answer the initial question, he or she would have to provide specific descriptions of their political affiliations and activities as examples of their guilt. This culpability could involve "the major "crime" of belonging to the party or of lesser ones like signing petitions, marching in parades, or going to meetings" (Murphy 63). After Edward Dmytryk spent four years languishing on the blacklist, he testified for a second time in 1951 as a friendly witness. The following transcript contains his admission of guilt:

MR. TAVENNER. Were you a member of the Communist Party at the time you were subpoenaed before this Committee in 1947?

MR. DMYTRYK. No, I was not.

MR. TAVENNER. Had you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

MR. DMYTRYK. Yes, I had been a member from sometime around the spring or early summer 1944 until about the fall of 1945. Most of this was during the period when the Communist Party as such was dissolved and the Communist Political Association had taken its place . . .

MR. TAVENNER. Are you willing to cooperate with the Committee in giving it the benefit of what knowledge you have, from your own experiences, both while a member of the Communist Party and later?

MR. DMYTRYK. I certainly am. (Bentley Thirty Years 378)

As far as HUAC members were concerned, the confession should be as detailed and thorough as possible. The admission of guilt was expected to take place regardless of whether or not the witness was actually involved in Communist Party activities. Having nothing to confess did not
excuse one from HUAC's expectation that he or she admit to partaking in illicit political beliefs and actions.

After the witness confessed to proscribed Communist activities, she was expected to publicly reproach herself for this previous lapse in judgment. This "expression of repentance" is Murphy's third part of the HUAC ritual. In his 1953 testimony, in which he named more individuals than any other witness, Broadway choreographer Jerome Robbins offers a succinct expression of repentance: "I've examined myself. I think I made a great mistake before in entering the Communist Party, and I feel that I am doing the right thing as an American" (Bentley Thirty Years 634). As with the previous stages of the ritual, numerous witnesses resisted HUAC's script for acceptable confession. Many would-be confessors attempted to explain or justify their former affiliations with the Communist Party. For example, in his 1951 testimony, Larry Parks denies wrongdoing:

This is in no way an apology for anything that I have done, you see, because I feel I have done nothing wrong ever . . . In 1941 the purposes, as I knew them, fulfilled simply—at least I thought they would fulfill as I said before—a certain idealism, a certain being for the underdog, which I am today, this very minute.

This did not work out. (Bentley Thirty Years 313)

Parks’ testimony did not meet the Committee's expectations, which were that the confessor should fully and completely disavow him or herself from past communist sympathies to the point of self-debasement. Since HUAC desired to use the witnesses as public examples or scapegoats, it meant that "the more self-abasing the confession, and the more groveling the confessor, the better" (Murphy 64).
Implicating others as communist sympathizers or "naming names" is a fundamental element of a "friendly" testimony before the Committee. This "proof of repentance through willingness to name names" is the fourth part of Murphy's HUAC ritual. In his 1951 testimony, Edward Dmytryk identifies naming other former or current Communists as an important signifier of repentance:

MR. JACKSON. One more question, if I may, Mr. Chairman. What would you call the final test of credibility of a witness purporting to be a former Communist? Would you say the test of credibility would have to be primarily the willingness to name names, places, and circumstances surrounding such membership?

MR. DMYTRYK. I personally believe so. That is why I am doing it. I think if a man says that he is convinced that the Communist Party is a subversive or criminal organization, that he certainly shouldn't mind giving names.

(Bentley *Thirty Years* 399)

The Committee usually did not gain any new information or names from the witnesses—the FBI provided extensive intelligence regarding CPUSA enrollment and activities—however, the naming of names served as proof of the witnesses' full cooperation. Because of this, Murphy describes the naming of names as the "most ritualistic part of the interrogation" (Murphy 64).

For many witnesses, implicating others was a major stumbling block in their completion of the testimony ritual. A number of witnesses attempted to circumvent this stage of their testimony by offering to give information about themselves but not others. In his excruciating 1951 testimony, Larry Parks made an effort at opting out of naming names:

MR. TAVENNER. Are you acquainted with Lionel Stander?

MR. PARKS. I have met him.
MR. TAVENNER. Have you ever attended a Communist Party meeting with him?

MR. PARKS. I don't recall ever attending a Communist Party meeting with this Lionel Stander.

MR. TAVENNER. Do you know whether or not he is a Communist Party member?

MR. PARKS. No.

MR. TAVENNER. Are you acquainted with Karen Morley?

MR. PARKS. I am.

MR. TAVENNER. Is she a member of the Communist Party?

MR. PARKS. Well, counsel, these—I would prefer not to mention names, if it is at all possible. I don't think it is fair to people to do this. I have come to you at your request. I will tell you everything that I know about myself, because I feel I have done nothing wrong, and I will answer any question that you would like to put to me about myself. I would prefer, if you will allow me, not to mention other people's names. (Bentley *Thirty Years* 316)

Larry Parks was ultimately worn down over the course of hours before the Committee and eventually gave the names of various individuals with ties to the Communist Party. However, the Committee was forthcoming about the usefulness of Parks' testimony:

MR. WALTER. I think you could get some comfort out of the fact that the people whose names have been mentioned have been subpoenaed, so that if they ever do appear here it won't be as a result of anything that you have testified to.

MR. PARKS. It is no comfort whatsoever. (345)
Parks' testimony serves as an example of the ritualistic function of the naming of names before the Committee. By engaging in this action, the witness officially ostracized him or herself from the Left in that he or she would be viewed as an informer. This public separation from the Left was the climactic moment of the rite of purification and made the witness once again acceptable within mainstream American society.

Murphy states that the witness's "expression of gratitude" to the Committee is the final part of the ritual. The Committee members are thanked "for pointing out the error of the witness's ways" and sometimes the witness inquires about what he or she "could do to help the Committee fight the spread of Communism" (Murphy 69). There are certainly many examples of witnesses extending thanks to the Committee for what Lee J. Cobb called "the privilege of setting the record straight" (Bentley Thirty Years 665). However, I suggest that the Committee members just as often thank the informing witnesses for their testimony. For example, the Committee members gave thanks to Edward Dmytryk after he identified former Communists during his 1951 testimony:

MR. WALTER. Mr. Dmytryk, it is refreshing to find that there are people who are willing to assist in our feeble efforts to make a contribution in this world-wide struggle against Communism. I think that you have made a very great contribution.

MR. DMYTRYK. Thank you . . .

MR. WOOD. Permit me, Mr. Dmytryk, to add my feeble expression of appreciation for your coming here, and for the information that you have given to the American people, millions of whom haven't the vaguest conception of what the Communist movement in America stands for. (Bentley Thirty Years 399)
In this and other testimonies, the Committee positively reinforces testimonies where the witness identifies current and former Communist Party members. This sends the signal to potential witnesses that their successful completion of the HUAC testimony ritual results in their acceptance into anti-communist society.

Murphy's view of HUAC testimony as a ritual—or a "ritual of purification" according to Bentley—has advantages and limitations for an examination of the hearings. Viewing the proceedings as a ritual helps in understanding how the Committee systematically makes something that isn't a tangible crime—holding a political belief—into a definite offense against society. The hearings are ritualistic in that they perform an identifiable social function through what is arguably a predetermined pattern of behavior. However, this view runs the risk of reducing varied individual interactions into a limited model of social behavior. Each testimony reflected the unique experiences of the individuals brought before the Committee and there are few testimonies that perfectly fit Murphy's five-part ritual. However, Murphy structured her model to fit the transcripts of the HUAC hearings and is successful in constructing a pattern that fits a substantial portion of the recorded testimonies. It is also significant that Bentley himself described HUAC in ritualistic terms, identifying testimony as a rite of passage for a communist's reentry into American society. I find this view beneficial in that it draws attention to the hearings as a performative form of cultural production.15

"The Missing Communist"

15 I employ the term performative in the sense used by J. L. Austin, meaning that the hearings performed the action of creating either a communist sympathizer or a patriotic American citizen, removing all ambiguity from the witnesses' politics.
As theatre critic for The New Republic Eric Bentley had the opportunity to review a number of plays dealing with the HUAC hearings. Because of the repressive political situation, many playwrights opted to historicize and allegorize the action of their plays in order to maintain plausible denial when criticizing McCarthyism. A common technique involved the use of a historical event or historical figure through which a playwright or director could draw parallels with the anticommunist hearings. Perhaps the most well known example of historical analogy usage during this era is Arthur Miller's The Crucible, which transposes HUAC issues onto a historical drama concerning the Salem Witch Trials. Miller explains his understanding of the parallel:

A living connection between myself and Salem, and between Salem and Washington, was made in my mind—for whatever else they might be, I saw that the hearings in Washington were profoundly and even avowedly ritualistic . . . The main point of the hearings, precisely as in seventeenth-century Salem, was that the accused make public confession, damn his confederates as well as his Devil master, and guarantee his sterling new allegiance by breaking disgusting old vows—whereupon he was let loose to rejoin the society of extremely decent people. (Timebends 331)

Through historification, playwrights were able to rely on the audience's ability to draw the connections between the staged events and McCarthyism. As Murphy suggests, such a play "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" (5). This device was necessary because of a government wide crackdown on any kind of subversive speech or activity. Section 2 of the
Smith Act passed by Congress in 1940 explicitly forbade the public display of subversive writing:

> It shall be unlawful for any person . . . to print, publish, edit, issue, circulate, sell, distribute, or publicly display any written or printed matter advocating, advising, or teaching the duty, necessity, desirability, or propriety of overthrowing or destroying any government in the United States by force or violence.

(*qtd. in Fried McCarthyism 15*)

This prohibition was legally applicable to theatre performance and had a chilling affect upon overtly political theatre performance for more than twenty years. A playwright could possibly face legal sanctions for writing a play critical of the Un-American Activities Committee.

Eric Bentley's reviews and essays express varied opinions on political theatre produced during the McCarthy era. While he supports efforts to address communism and anticommunism through artistic performance, he continually objects to playwrights' use of analogy and metaphor when writing about these issues. In an essay entitled "The Missing Communist" (1956), he conveys a good deal of frustration as an audience member, admitting that he "felt the temptation to rewrite a play, putting the missing Communist in the niche that plot and theme seemed to leave for him" (313). In this and other essays, Bentley objects to equivocation when discussing communist related matters both on and off stage and demands candidness, but does not always acknowledge the penalties at stake for a procommunist writer openly expressing his or her sociopolitical views.

Bentley's objection to evasiveness extends well beyond the theatre and into the social and political spheres. "The Missing Communist" begins with an acknowledgement that a significant number of theatre practitioners hold communist sympathies:
While the Communists have never been numerous in this country, it is a commonplace that their influence anywhere is out of proportion to their numbers. It is also true that, while the failure of the Communists to attract the American "proletariat" has been abysmal, they have been distinctly more successful with the professional classes. And with no group whatsoever, it seems to me, have they done so well as with the theatrical profession. (What is Theatre 309)

He attributes the high level of Communist Party involvement amongst entertainment professionals to their tendency to be "very easily carried away with enthusiasm," as well as a desire to simultaneously "burst out crying form sheer love of mankind" and "exact from the world a preposterous over-valuation of their own importance" (309). According to Bentley, the Hollywood actor or Broadway playwright's Communism is a "Stalinist brand of pseudo-radicalism" that has little to do with traditional Marxism and is more likely expressed as liberal or progressive (310-311). This trend is identified as a shift away from the openly Marxist political drama of Brecht toward a surreptitious form of propaganda where "mystification is a method, a fine art practiced for definite ends and on a gigantic scale" (315).

The work and politics of Arthur Miller and Elia Kazan during the 1950s are emblematic of the broader situation that involved hundreds of artists and political activists during the era. Their respective stage and film work uses analogy to explore the implications of capitulating to a repressive authority by informing on others, becoming either a martyr or a villain. Bentley's writings on Kazan and Miller offer what are perhaps his most conflicted opinions on matters related to HUAC and Communism in American society. It should come as no surprise that he criticizes Miller's use of analogy and evasiveness; however, Kazan is treated in an arguably more sympathetic manner. In his 1958 essay, "On the Waterfront," Bentley compares Miller and
Kazan's respective treatments of the informer theme: "Mr. Kazan took the position that Communist affiliations should be publicly declared, while Mr. Miller did not take that position but broke with Mr. Kazan and, with the help of another director, put on a play with a hero whose heroism consists in refusing to "talk"" (What is Theatre 258). In this and other essays, Bentley wades into a deeply personal and political rift between the former friends and collaborators involving celebrated theatre and film performances, as well as official testimony before an apparatus of state power.

In Thirty Years of Treason (1971) Bentley remarks, "the Committee handled Elia Kazan with kid gloves" (482). Kazan was certainly given preferential treatment, which one could even go so far as to describe as pandering. His 1952 testimony was presented in a closed executive session, which Bentley believes was "no doubt to preserve Kazan from hecklers in the audience" (482). The following excerpt illustrates how the Committee clearly valued his testimony:

MR. TACENNER. Mr. Kazan, the staff or members of the Committee may desire to recall you at some future time for the purpose of asking you to make further explanations of some of the matters contained in you sworn statement.

MR. KAZAN. I will be glad to do anything to help—anything you consider necessary or valuable.

MR. WALTER. Mr. Kazan, we appreciate your cooperation with our Committee. It is only through the assistance of people such as you that we have been able to make the progress that has been made in bringing the attention of the American people to the machinations of this Communist conspiracy for world domination.

(Bentley Thirty Years 495)
Kazan's testimony was a major success for the Committee because he was one of the most acclaimed ex-Communist artists to corroborate HUAC's narrative of the CPUSA's supposed plan to overthrow democracy.

Kazan's compliance with the ritual served to validate the Committee's position of power over artists with leftist politics, which made him a reviled figure to many. Kazan himself admits, "there's something disgusting about giving other people's names" (Interviews 158). At the same time, he rejects the notion that it would have been better to refuse to inform on others:

Concerned friends have asked why I didn't take the "decent alternative," tell everything about myself and not name the others in the Group. But in the end that was not what I wanted. Perhaps ex-Communists are particularly unrelenting against the Party. I believed that this committee, which everyone scorned—I had plenty against them too—had a proper duty. I wanted to help break open the secrecy. (A Life 464)

In his autobiography and in various interviews, Kazan is fairy consistent in justifying his actions through patriotism and outrage over the actions of the Communist Party in the United States and abroad.

Arthur Miller's 1956 testimony was in many ways the polar opposite of Kazan's earlier appearance before the Committee. While Kazan's interaction with HUAC was mutually amicable, Miller was cited for contempt and received a thirty-day suspended sentence and a five hundred dollar fine. In his autobiography, Miller suggests that the HUAC investigation of the entertainment industry was motivated by disdain for artists' ability to influence people, "The overwhelmingly significant truth, I thought, as I still do, was the artist-hating brutality of the Committee and its envy of its victims' power to attract public attention and to make big money at
it besides" (242). For Miller, the hearings were as much about differing cultural beliefs as they were about the threat of a Communist takeover of the United States government. He characterizes the hearings in ritualistic terms, "Of course in our brief exchange of words there was no mention of my having broken a law. Purely a matter of my agreeing to a public rite of contrition was what it came to, an obligatory kowtow before the state, the century's only truly credible god" (395). By compelling Miller and others to take part in the testimony ritual, the Committee exerted power over potentially subversive artists and sent a clear anticommunist message to the American public.

Eric Bentley did not view Arthur Miller as simply a victim of HUAC's inquisition and disapproved of Miller's rhetorical maneuvering. His 1956 essay, "The Missing Communist," contains a number of criticisms aimed at Miller, most of which are based upon various statements he made to the press immediately prior to his testimony. Bentley quotes Miller's 7 February 1956 press release, "More, when my liberty was in effect suppressed in America, no American writer . . . raised a protesting voice" (What is Theatre 312). Miller's complaint stems from him being denied renewal of a passport, thereby denying him the liberty to travel abroad for speaking engagements and productions of his plays. He was also disconcerted that Columbia Pictures declined to allow filming of The Hook after he refused to change characters in the film from corrupt union officials to Communists. In regard to Miller's complaints, Bentley scoffs, "what is here flatly defined as the suppression of liberty was actually the refusal of a single employer to let Mr. Miller go through with a single assignment." Adding "Mr. Miller had a play running on Broadway during the very season when he said his liberty had been suppressed; his income as a playwright must obviously be far beyond what most writers have earned in any country in any age" (312). Bentley suggests that Miller and other political writers of the Left—
as well as many liberals—express a "popular front mentality" through their work, even if these plays do not directly identify communism as their subject. It is in these essays where he is the most condemning of the Left, leveling out criticisms he would later explain as endemic of the hysterically anti-red sociopolitical environment.

In "The Innocence of Arthur Miller" (1953), written three years before "The Missing Communist," Bentley begins by acknowledging, "in The Crucible, Mr. Miller says something that has to be discussed" (What is Theatre 62). The opening paragraph of the essay emphatically complements Miller for making investigation the subject of a play:

> At a moment when we are all being "investigated," or imagining that we shall be, it is vastly disturbing to see indignant images of investigation on the other side of the footlights. Why, one wonders, aren't there dozens of plays each season offering such a critical account of the state of the nation—critical and *engagé*?

The appearance of one such play by an author, like Mr. Miller, who is neither an infant, a fool, or a swindler, is enough to bring teats to the eyes. (62)

Bentley's praise for Miller is short lived and he moves into criticisms of the very analogy that *The Crucible* is based upon. In the same essay, he argues that while the fear of witches is founded on belief with no basis in fact, fear of communism is grounded in an actual threat. He points out that "the analogy between "red-baiting" and witch hunting can seem complete only to communists, for only to them is the menace of communism as fictitious as the menace of witches" (63). This criticism comes off as a bit harsh, since analogies often employ fiction and Miller did not set out to draw a direct parallel.

Bentley does not go so far as to accuse Miller of Communism, but instead maintains that "his view of life is dictated by assumptions which liberals have to unlearn and which many
liberals have rather publicly unlearned" (*What is Theatre* 63). For Bentley, Miller is guilty of assuming a "general innocence" that applies to both his political and artistic endeavors. The corollary of Miller's innocence is Kazan's guilt:

Elia Kazan made a public confession of having been a communist and, while doing so, mentioned the names of several of his former comrades. Mr. Miller then brought out a play about an accused man who refuses to name comrades (who indeed dies rather than make a confession at all), and of course decided to end his collaboration with the director who did so much to make him famous. (64)

Bentley suggests that Kazan would have made a much better director for *The Crucible* than Jed Harris, "Mr. Kazan would have taken this script up like clay and re-molded it. He would have struck fire from the individual actor, and he would have brought one actor into much livelier relationship with another" (65). According to Bentley, Kazan would aid Miller in more than an artistic level, "He needs not only the craftsmanship of a Kazan but also—his sense of guilt. Innocence is, for a mere human being, and especially for an artist, insufficient baggage" (65).

In an essay originally published in *The New Republic* entitled "On the Waterfront" (1955), Bentley compares Kazan and Miller's artistic portrayals of the informer. He opens with the observation, "Not long ago Elia Kazan made a movie about the New York waterfront, and now Arthur Miller had brought out a play about the New York waterfront. The climax of both movie and play is reached when the protagonist gives information to the police" (*What is Theatre* 258). He suggests that the sole reason for the creation of *On the Waterfront* and *A View from the Bridge* is to convey the artists' personal views on the merits of Kazan's friendly testimony before HUAC. Bentley seems bothered by this:
It will surprise no one that, in Mr. Kazan's movie, the act of informing is virtuous, whereas, in Mr. Miller's new play, it is evil. What is surprising, or at any rate appalling, is that both stories seem to have been created in the first place largely to point up this virtue and that evil, respectively. (258)

Given the title of the essay, one would expect it to focus on Kazan's film; however, Bentley devotes far more time to Miller's work, which he describes as pretentious and clumsy. While the essay scrutinizes Miller's politics, Kazan's are generally left out of the equation. Miller is congratulated for "attempting to abandon" what Bentley describes as thinly disguised Stalinism, whose "adherents weren't usually Communists but only "progressives" whose feelings were hurt whenever anyone said anything against Russia" (260). Bentley would eventually soften his position on Miller and become somewhat more critical of Kazan in the decades following the height of McCarthyism. His reviews of Miller and Kazan's work were composed during the mid 1950s, when Bentley went so far as to describe himself as anti-communist.16 While he was most opposed to Stalinism and nondemocratic forms of government, the extent of his antipathy towards many liberals and the CPUSA is concurrent with the level of anti-Communism expressed throughout American society at the time.

"The Sixty-Four-Dollar Question"

By the time Bentley's play Are You Now or Have You Ever Been was first produced in 1972, HUAC was well into its decline. His dramatization of the events reads as an attempt to affect the historical narrative in a manner sympathetic to those who were forced to testify, with both the unfriendly and friendly witnesses portrayed as victims of a bureaucratic inquisition. By

directly transposing the text from the hearings into the dialogue for the play, Bentley implies that HUAC's significance is embedded within the pages of the transcripts, or specifically, "these characters wrote their own lines into the pages of history" (Bentley Rallying Cries 3). In the introduction to the published version of the play, Bentley identifies his intentions as journalistic. He describes his approach to the material:

While I have my own opinions and commitments, I have tried to be fair, and my aim in employing a high degree of selectivity was not, lawyer-fashion, to make an overwhelming case for a client. The kind of client I represent would not be served by suppression of any relevant factors . . . What I hope to have captured in this shorter treatment is a story, a newspaperman's "story," and a writer's, even perhaps a playwright's story: a dramatic Action. (4)

This position implies that whether one reads the HUAC transcripts or views Bentley's dramatization of the testimony, the essentials of the conflict are self-evident. Or as he succinctly states, "The drama is there. All it needs is a reader" (Thirty Years xxviii).

When it was first produced, some critics criticized Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been for employing inadequate and stilted historiography. Despite the "documentary theatre" label attached to the play, the work conveys a particular narrative of the events, which did not go unnoticed at the time of the play's initial production. In his New York Times review of the production, Mel Gussow offers criticism of Bentley's constructed narrative, "Intentionally or accidentally, his selection of materials leads to distortions, which are doubled in the play-acting" (77). Bentley makes an effort to foreground these concerns, describing his play as a "collage" that juxtaposes edited portions of selected testimonies. He admits, "all these processes—choice of witness, abridgment, editing, arrangement—bring into play the personal judgment, not to
mention talent, of the writer responsible. To the extent that he is either a knave or a fool, the result will reflect his knavery or folly" (Rallying Cries 4). In other words, despite the author's best effort at evenhandedness, the writing of such a play would necessarily incorporate tacit opinions about HUAC.

*Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been* involves a great deal of selectiveness in how the Committee, witnesses, and testimonies are arranged to create a stage adaptation. Perhaps most notably, the play presents the Committee as a relatively homogenous group of nameless inquisitors and does not distinguish between the dozens of individual congressional representatives and investigators who were members of HUAC over the course of three decades. Bentley describes his intention: "The image is of a single Committee in session throughout, presided over by a single Chairman, assisted by Investigators" (Rallying Cries 3). The choice to not identify the Committee members is justified because of the practical challenges caused by the fact that "membership varied a good deal in the course of the nine years covered" (3). He also suggests, "these variations are unimportant to the action here presented" (3). However, in actuality there was a great deal of variation amongst the Committee members. For example, Arens, Stripling, and Tavener each employed distinctive methods of interrogation, but are merged into a single investigator character for the purposes of Bentley's play. The witnesses, whether they are friendly or hostile, are generally portrayed as victims of an overwhelming political force. The Committee seen in the play is a uniformly menacing power, which reflects the author's historical viewpoint when it was written during the early 1970s. Suffice it to say, Bentley was far more sympathetic to the witnesses—despite their CPUSA affiliations—than he was when he was writing for *The Nation* during the 1950s.
The play is structured as a collage of testimonies culled from the transcripts of hearings conducted between 1947 and 1956. Bentley edited and arranged the testimonies so that there would be an identifiable dramatic arc to the play, which provided a broad narrative for the various experiences of the witnesses. In her examination of plays and films based upon the HUAC hearings, Brenda Murphy suggests that despite its lack of formal act or scene breaks, Bentley's play is "carefully structured as a four-act melodrama" (96). I generally concur with Murphy's assessment, which I believe accurately describes the broad arc of the narrative; nevertheless, there are no formal act breaks and there are moments that break from this structure. According to Murphy, "the first "act" establishes the identity of the persecutors and the nobility of the resisters" (98). While I agree with this, I also believe that the opening portion of the play introduces a broader sociopolitical epoch resonating beyond the individuals in the room. The first act opens with the testimony of Sam G. Wood, which establishes the climate of fear and Red-baiting as the backdrop for the events of the play. The following lines are taken directly from his friendly 1947 testimony:

INVESTIGATOR. Will you tell the Committee of the efforts of the Communists to infiltrate the Screen Directors Guild?

MR. WOOD. Our most serious time was when George Stevens, who was president, went into the service, and the Guild was turned over to John Cromwell. With the assistance of three or four others, Cromwell tried to steer us into the Red River.

INVESTIGATOR. Will you name the others?

MR. WOOD. Irving Pichel, Frank Tuttle, Edward Dmytryk.
INVESTIGATOR. Mr. Wood, do the Communists maintain schools in Hollywood for the purpose of training actors or writers?

MR. WOOD. They have a Laboratory Theatre there.

INVESTIGATOR. What is the function of this?

MR. WOOD. The youngsters go to these schools, they get parts, they study, and we see them in theatres. The Laboratory Theatre, I think, is definitely under the control of the Communist Party. Any kid that goes in there with American ideals hasn't a chance in the world. (12)

After establishing the highly charged political climate with Wood's testimony, the play quickly shifts its focus to unfriendly witnesses. Relatively short excerpts from Edward Dmytryk and Ring Lardner's 1947 Hollywood Ten testimonies initiate the oppressor/oppressed binary relationship that becomes one of the central themes of the play. Lardner's testimony is a particularly dramatic example of the Committee exerting power—physical as well as political—over a resistant witness:

THE CHAIRMAN. Any real American would be proud to answer the question, "Are you, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?"—any real American!

MR. LARDNER. I could answer it, but if I did, I would hate myself in the morning.

THE CHAIRMAN. Leave the witness chair!

MR. LARDNER. It was a question that would—

THE CHAIRMAN. Leave the witness chair!

MR. LARDNER. Because it is a question—
THE CHAIRMAN. *pounding his gavel.* Leave the witness chair!

MR. LARDNER. I think I am leaving by force!

THE CHAIRMAN. Sergeant, take the witness away!

*A Sergeant takes him away.* (15)

After Lardner is forced off the witness stand, the script moves to Lardner's account of a later encounter he had in the prison yard with Committee Chairman J. Parnell Thomas, who had been convicted of embezzling taxpayer's money. If anything, this anecdote reinforces Bentley's characterization of the Committee as hypocritical and power-hungry politicians, and of the witnesses as victims of a corrupt political system.

The second act, which focuses solely on an extended scene crafted from the 1951 testimony of Larry Parks, is an excruciating example of a witness slowly broken down through the HUAC's persistent browbeating. Bentley describes this testimony as "the most pathetic in all the annals of the Committee," and therefore an exemplification of HUAC's politically motivated harassment (*Thirty Years* 299). The Parks segment of the play is divided into three sections—morning, afternoon, and evening—which points to the excessive duration of his questioning, as well as his gradual submission and naming of names. The midpoint of this act is marked by Parks' tearful plea that he not be forced to testify against others:

I don't think my career has been ruined because of this, and I would appreciate not having to—Don't present me with the choice of either being in contempt of this Committee and going to jail or being forced to crawl through the mud and be an informer! For what purpose? I don't think this is a choice. I don't think this is sportsmanlike. I don't think this is American justice for an innocent mistake in judgment, if it was that, with the intention of making this country a better place to
live . . . This is probably the most difficult thing I have ever done, and it seems to me it would impair the usefulness of this Committee . . . . God knows it is difficult enough to come before this Committee . . . If you do this to me, it will make it almost impossible for a person to come to you and tell the truth. I beg you not to force me to do this! (29)

Parks' harrowing and lengthy testimony serves to highlight the torturous aspects of a HUAC testimony, which is in keeping with various analyses of contemporary punishment. As Foucault suggests, there remains "a trace of 'torture' in the modern mechanisms of criminal justice - a trace that has not been entirely overcome, but which is enveloped, increasingly, by the non-corporal nature of the penal system" (Discipline 16). The sequence concludes with Parks' eventual decision to "crawl through the mud" and ritualistically identify names that the Committee already had:

INVESTIGATOR. If you will just answer the question, please. The question was: Who were the members of the Communist Party cell to which you were assigned?

A long silence.

MR. PARKS. Morris Carnovsky—

INVESTIGATOR. Will you spell that name?

MR. PARKS. I couldn't possibly spell it. Morris Carnovsky, Joe Bromberg, Sam Rossen, Anne Revere, Lee Cobb—

INVESTIGATOR. What was that name?

MR. PARKS. Lee Cobb, Gale Sondergaard, Dorothy Tree—
INVESTIGATOR. What was the name of Dorothy Tree's husband? Michael Uris?

MR. PARKS. Yes

INVESTIGATOR. Was he a member of the cell?

MR. PARKS. Not to my knowledge. (33)

This extended sequence shows HUAC at its most powerful and repressive, following the narrative that many of those who named names did so only under extreme duress, which one could describe as a form of mental torture. Since the Committee members knew they already had any information Parks might give, the purpose of his testimony was public humiliation, which would mark him as a Red in mainstream society and a traitor to the Left.

The third act focuses on the testimony of friendly witnesses including Sterling Hayden, Elia Kazan, Tony Kraber, Jerome Robbins, and Edward Dmytryk in his second appearance. Murphy explains that this act involves "the exhibition of a series of friendly witnesses, each juxtaposed with, and ironically undercut by, their own or others' statements" (100). This is generally true, but the testimonies are not uniform in their submission to the Committee. For example, Abe Burrows' testimony is included in this section and while he strongly denounces Communism, confirms the involvement of specific individuals, and refers to himself as stupid for ever associating with members of the Party, his testimony was deemed over vague, causing him to lose a film option with Paramount (Rallying 51). I believe this section of the play successfully highlights the differences between the various witnesses who gave friendly testimony before the Committee, showing that while some struggled greatly, others took pleasure in their appearance. One notable inclusion is a brief 1951 speech by Ronald Reagan claiming victory over the radical Left:
For many years the Red propagandists and conspirators concentrated their big guns on Hollywood. They threatened to throw acid in the faces of myself and some other stars, so we would never appear on screen again. I packed a gun for some time. Policemen lived at my home to guard my kids. But that was more than five years ago. Those days are gone forever! (Rallying 41)

Reagan's brief monologue in the original production provides an example of the rhetoric—or hyperbole—employed against the American Left during the Red Scare. The version of the play published in 1977 contains an extended version of Reagan's speech, whose election as governor of California increased interest in his actions during the investigations.

Only a brief segment from Elia Kazan's infamous testimony is represented in Bentley's adaptation of the hearings, which is surprising given the significant attention given to Kazan's role in the HUAC investigations in Bentley's earlier writings. The page-long segment shows Kazan reading a prepared statement before the investigator where he thoughtfully explains how he was alienated into testifying against his former collaborators:

I was assigned to a unit composed of members of the Group Theatre . . . The last straw came from a functionary from Detroit. I regret I cannot remember his name. He made a vituperative analysis of my conduct in refusing to fall in with the Party plan for the Group Theatre and invited my repentance. I had had enough. I had a taste of police-state living, and I didn't like it. That night I quit. (52)

Despite Kazan's status as one of the most prominent villains to name names before the Committee, Bentley only felt it necessary to include a brief segment of his testimony in which he justifies his actions. It is certainly possible that he decided to go easy on Kazan because of his
often-stated admiration for his artistic work, or perhaps the actual testimony lacked the dramatic flair of some of the other friendly witnesses. The Kazan presented in Bentley's play is a well reasoned and compliant friendly witness who tells the Committee that he "will be glad to do anything you consider necessary" (52). However, there is somewhat of a rebuttal in the form of Tony Kraber's testimony:

INVESTIGATOR. Mr. Elia Kazan testified that he was recruited into a Communist Party organization within the Group Theatre by Tony Kraber.

MR. KRABER. Is this the Kazan that signed the contract for $500,000 the day after he gave names to this Committee?

INVESTIGATOR. Would it change the facts if he did?

MR. KRABER. Would you sell your brothers for $500,000?

CM 1. Do you say that Mr. Kazan committed perjury before this Committee?

MR. KRABER. I will decline to answer this question.

INVESTIGATOR. Did you recruit Mr. Kazan into the Communist Party?

MR. KRABER. I decline to answer on the ground of the First Amendment and the Fifth Amendment. (53).

The fourth and final act is characterized by defiant statements like that of Tony Kraber, and includes testimonies by Lillian Hellman, Lionel Stander, Arthur Miller, and Paul Robeson, among others. The final section marks a clear shift in the trajectory of the piece, which Murphy describes as "an upward turn, suggesting that there is hope for American society after all" (101). I believe Murphy is accurate in this description and that Bentley chose to end the play with witnesses who successfully used the theatricality of the hearings to record their dissent. Interestingly, Arthur Miller's name is not on the list of witnesses for the initial 1972 Yale
Repertory Theatre production; however, his testimony is part of the final published version of the play. Given Bentley's earlier essays concerning Miller's political and artistic associations with HUAC, one might presume that he left Miller out of the original version because of objections to Miller's "innocence." The excerpt from his testimony that appeared in the play shows Miller taking a moralistic stand against HUAC:

MR. MILLER. I understand the philosophy behind this question and I want you to understand mine. I am trying to—and I will—protect my sense of myself. I could not use the name of another person and bring trouble on him. I ask you not to ask me that question.

CM 1. We do not accept you reasons for refusing to answer. If you do not answer, you are placing yourself in contempt.

INVESTIGATOR. Was Arnaud d'Usseau chairman at this meeting of Communist writers in 1947 at which you were in attendance?

Pause.

MR. MILLER. My conscience will not permit me to use the name of another person. (66)

Bentley's final version of the play presents Arthur Miller as a stoic and principled resister to the Committee, which signals a change of opinion from his earlier assessments of Miller's role in the ordeal.

If Miller opted to make his resistance philosophical in nature, Lionel Standers decided to exploit the public context of the hearings and make his testimony as flamboyant as possible. Stander repeatedly dodges the Committee's questions, opting instead to rail against HUAC's unconstitutionality:
MR. STANDER. Well, I am more than willing to cooperate—

THE CHAIRMAN. Now, just a minute.

MR. STANDER. —because I know of subversive activities in the entertainment industry and elsewhere!

THE CHAIRMAN. Mr. Stander, the Committee is interested—

MR. STANDER. If you're interested. I can tell you right now.

THE CHAIRMAN. —primarily in any subversive knowledge you have—

MR. STANDER. I have knowledge of subversive action! I know of a group of fanatics who are trying to undermine the Constitution of the United States by depriving artists of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness without due process of law! I can cite instances! I can tell names. I am one of the first victims, if you are interested. A group of ex-Bundists, America Firsters, and anti-Semites, people who hate everybody, Negroes, minority groups, and most likely themselves— (61)

When reading the transcript of the testimony, especially the portion used in Bentley's play, one gains the impression that Stander was performing for future audiences who would recognize his victimization.

The play ends with singer Paul Robeson's defiant 1956 testimony, which addresses both the repression of leftist politics and the oppression of African Americans in the United States during the mid-twentieth century. Robeson's testimony bluntly draws attention to the Committee's hypocrisy, in that an organization supposedly dedicated to the American way of life would openly curtail the freedoms of citizens. Robeson explains, "I am not in any conspiracy. It should be plain to everybody and especially to Negroes that, if the Government had evidence to
back up that charge, they would have tried to put me *under* their jail" (67). Perhaps more so than any other witness, Robeson demonstrates consciousness of the hearings as ritual. He frequently took the Fifth Amendment and repeatedly referenced the second-class citizenship of African Americans as proof of the Committee's hypocrisy. The play concludes with Robeson's final exchange:

INVESTIGATOR. While you were in Moscow, did you say Stalin was a great man?

MR. ROBESON. I wouldn't argue with a representative of the people who, in building America, wasted the lives of *my* people. You are responsible, you and your forebears, for sixty to one hundred million black people dying in the slave ships and on the plantations. Don't you ask me about *anybody*, please.

INVESTIGATOR. I am glad you called out attention to that slave problem. While you were in Soviet Russia—

MR. ROBESON. Nothing could be more built on slavery than *this* society, I assure you. Can I read my speech?

THE CHAIRMAN. You have made it without reading it. The hearing is adjourned.

MR. ROBESON. You should adjourn this forever. (75)

By concluding his play with this particular testimony, Bentley is leaving his audience with the message that adjourning HUAC is the moral responsibility of a nation that supposedly prides itself on equality.

*Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been* was met with strong reactions from various directions when it premiered at Yale Repertory Theatre in 1972. In 1973, the play was produced
Off-Broadway, in Los Angeles and at Ford's Theatre in Washington D.C. Perhaps the most sensational reaction to the piece was by former witness Zero Mostel, whose testimony was included in the initial production. Mel Gussow describes the scene: "After the show, on the sidewalk outside the theater, occurred the most real—and alive—moment during a very disturbing evening. As a crowd gathered, Mostel ripped into the play and Lardner calmly declared that it was not theater or history" (Gussow 77). Mostel and Lardner were not the only former witnesses who objected to the play. After seeing the Los Angeles production, Edward Dmytryk spoke publicly about what he perceived as bias:

I found it inaccurate, one-sided, and unfair. During the second appearance before the Committee, the actor who played me came out with his tie half undone, and with a hangdog expression on his face. That is nothing like me. I guess he was trying to portray a guilt-ridden guy, but I felt exactly the opposite; I felt completely liberated. I object to taking hours of testimony and reducing it to a few minutes. Statements are taken out of context. (Farber 5)

Dmytryk continues by explaining the particulars of a sociopolitical context that he felt justified his cooperation with HUAC. He explains, "so many things get lost and perverted in history. Now no one chooses to remember that there was a Communist menace in 1951. That is completely ignored. When you country is in danger, you talk. That took more guts than remaining silent" (Farber 5).

A common complaint from theatre critics stemmed from the use of "documentary" sources as the basis for the text. Clive Barnes bluntly separates theatre from fact, "I am never too happy about this new form of documentary, the "theater of fact." Theater and fact make odd bedfellows" (53). Mel Gussow is baffled about how to approach this kind of production. He
asks, "Whose performance do you judge, that of the witness before the committee, that of the author as editor and abridger or that of the actor playing a real-life person (often an actor)?" (Gussow 77). While Julius Novick identifies some of the inherent problems related to this form of theatre, "The problem with Theater of Fact is that "the facts"—the raw data of history, particularly the verbatim transcripts of hearings and trials—seldom reveal the deep significance of historical events in a swift, vivid, and economical fashion" (D13). Clive Barnes concedes that the play "does at least remind us how easy it is for a governmental bureaucracy to vilify, damage and destroy people with an almost irrational vindictiveness," only to admit, "I would like to avert my eyes from these so-called facts" (53). Additionally, he complains that the play caused him to ponder difficult questions, "I could not help wondering how heroic they would have been or how heroic I would have been. That is why I found the play unlikable. I also found it smug" (53). Mr. Barnes is either indifferent or unaware that the playwright wished for the audience to contemplate just such a question; however, the smugness is another matter.

"The Fall of HUAC's Bastille"

By the time Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been premiered in 1972, HUAC was nearing its final adjournment in 1975. Bentley traces the Committee's collapse to the 1960s, when "a new generation came to life" (Thirty Years 950). However, this downfall did not begin with the "hippies," but instead when Women Strike for Peace emerged in 1961 and thousands of white middle-class women began to protest various escalations of the Cold War. Bentley describes Dagmar Wilson's hearing as the turning point that leads to public backlash against HUAC, particularly the candidness with which she addresses their questions. He describes this shift in power relations:
[Women Strike for Peace] was the fall of HUAC's Bastille. Whether or not the Committee and its unfriendly witnesses hitherto had "deserved each other," they had come to need each other as playmates in a game with by now agreed rules. It was smart to ask a question knowing that the witness would refuse to answer, and that you'd get him for contempt. How disconcerting, then, if the witness spoiled everything by answering the question and reversing the roles; playing cop to their robber, hero to their villain! (Thirty Years 951)

The Committee made a clear mistake by employing their tactics on a woman from a privileged segment of American society. Wilson's statement that she would not refuse membership to someone on the basis of CP affiliation was used to paint Women Strike for Peace as a Communist front organization. However, her forthright answers and refusal to cower before the Committee's threats and insinuations effectively superseded the testimony ritual.

If Women's Strike for Peace made much of the public question HUAC's legitimacy, the hearings following the 1968 Democratic Convention turned the established power relations on their head. When New Left activists Tom Hayden, David Dellinger, and Rennie Davis were brought before the Committee in October 1968, they demonstrated how committed activists could use HUAC as a public forum. Bentley suggests that these three activists "imposed their own rules of procedure, since there was nothing the Committee could do to stop them from talking, let alone to ensure that their vocabulary, syntax, and tone should be what Congressmen regard as proper" (Thirty Years 952). The 1960s generation of leftist activists had no apprehension to appear before the Committee and directly declare their opposition to the political establishment. For example, Tom Hayden does nothing to hide his contempt for the Committee during his testimony:
MR. CONLEY. All right. Now what jobs have you held in the political area, as you define it?

MR. HAYDEN. Well, I consider myself an organizer of a movement to put you and your Committee out of power, because I think you represent racist philosophy . . . that has no meaning any more in the twentieth century. (Bentley *Thirty Years* 882)

Tom Hayden's frank declaration, which would have been unthinkable in previous decades, effectively signifies the end of HUAC's power to intimidate an increasingly radical New Left. When witnesses like Hayden were able to successfully use the testimony ritual for their own purposes, the Committee was no longer able to achieve its goal of intimidation and red-baiting.

As I highlighted earlier in this chapter, the final phase of Victor Turner's conception of social drama involves either "the reintegration of the disturbed social group, or of the social recognition and legitimating of irreparable schism between the contesting parties" (*Anthropology* 75). I suggest that the resolution to this particular social drama came about through the acknowledgment of an unrectifiable division within American society. The New Left effectively undermined HUAC's authority by drawing attention to this split and declaring their dissent a legitimate aspect of the power relations within U.S. politics. By making the hearings a public ritual and vigorously pursuing anyone on the Left as if they were part of a Bolshevik plot, the Committee gave their opponents the means to undermine their position of power. Therefore it eventually became clear to the public that the red menace was largely a fabrication. As Bentley surmises, "I don't think they all believed their own mythology, which would have made Russian
spies of all their opponents, yet their invention of such a mythology proves how lively their hallucinations were" (Thinking 142).

In his various writings on HUAC, Bentley demonstrates a doubleness characteristic of his work throughout his career. On one hand, he expresses a sincere dislike of Stalinist Communism and the CPUSA, who he assigns much of the blame for the state of affairs during the McCarthy era. At the same time, he maintains a belief in democratic socialism and defends the right to hold unpopular political beliefs. His take on the conflict between Miller and Kazan is also indicative of his position in between the pro and anti Communists, in that he refused to make Kazan a Machiavellian villain and Miller an innocent hero. While his positions probably did not endear him to those on both sides of the conflict, his viewpoint demonstrates an awareness of the complexity of the situation. I believe Bentley's characterization of the hearings as a deliberately theatrical purification ritual is in keeping with the notion that HUAC operated through a complex web of sociopolitical forces, which included both official and unofficial channels, for the purpose of intimidating the liberal establishment into tolerating and even participating in the persecution of those deemed un-American. While he did not publicly come out strongly against the Committee during the height of its power, it is possible that works such as Thirty Years of Treason and Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been are intended to counterbalance his earlier silence. These later works illustrate how Bentley's perspective on the hearings changed along with broader sociopolitical currents, and perhaps were attempts to influence the historical narrative of HUAC.
In the summer of 1970, Eric Bentley published the script for his rock musical *The Red, White, and Black* in the New Left magazine, *Liberation*. The production of this play came at a significant point in his career as a public intellectual and theatre critic, as he recently decided to leave academia to pursue his playwriting ambitions. The general aesthetic and theme of the piece could be described as a musical review that incorporates features of *Hair*, the Radical Theatre Movement, and a living newspaper. Without linear plot or mimetic characters, the actors speak and sing directly to—or at—the audience, criticize "the Establishment," protest the Vietnam War, and question gender roles. Publishing the script in *Liberation* provided an opportunity to reach a broad audience in various performance contexts, which is evidenced in an ambitious suggestion for reader participation: "Our hope is that readers who want to try their hand at guerrilla theater will think about staging the play on campuses, shopping centers, churches, beaches, streets and wherever else people are this summer" (1). This is one example of how the play utilizes techniques associated with the Radical Theatre Movement—which pushed the boundaries of performance practice while making strong political statements on everything from race and gender representation to the militancy of the United States government—in order to resonate with what Bentley calls "today's collegiate, rebel youth" ("Letter" 42). The Students for a Democratic Society newspaper, *New Left Notes*, makes various references to "free-swinging, communal theatre groups in the US," which were considered a key element of the Cultural Revolution and were deeply involved in political protest (Gottlieb 6). Descriptions of student protests against draft laws, military recruitment, and weaponry research on campus often include...
"guerilla theatre" as one of the resistance techniques. Writings and performances from this era, including Bentley's, demonstrate an acute awareness of power relations and express desire for radical change. In many of his plays and other writings from the era, Bentley comes out in support of political and aesthetic radicalism. At the same time, he criticizes the artistic sensibilities of the Radical Theatre Movement and political tactics of Students for a Democratic Society. His pragmatic radicalism was not compatible with the avant-garde and political fringe of the era; however, it did not conform to the mid-twentieth century liberal consensus government or to popular aesthetic tastes either. This chapter examines Bentley's double position within the atmosphere of radicalism during the late 1960's, which was, but perhaps more importantly was not, in step with the New Left; in fact, he anticipated the movement's limitations.

"The Clamor of the World's Irrationality"

One of the first sentences in *The Port Huron Statement* (1962), a foundational manifesto for the student radical movement, declares, "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit" (1). This statement provides a succinct introduction to the background and general concerns of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), an organization made up of university students active on college campuses throughout the country during the 1960s. SDS members were largely white

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17 *New Left Notes* regularly contained a compilation of reports from local SDS chapters entitled "We Made the News Today, Oh Boy!" which described individual protests. For example, the 4 March 1969 edition contained descriptions of protests involving "guerilla theatre bits." See Gellen, Karen.
and middle-class, therefore economically and socially privileged; their radicalism was connected to a variety of domestic causes including war resistance, racial inequalities, and class struggle (Barber 8). New Left historian David Barber describes SDS as emblematic of white involvement in the New Left: "More than any other organization, Students for a Democratic Society . . . represented the trajectory of the white New Left and the white student movement of the 1960s" (4). This trajectory involved a rapid expansion throughout the 1960s as US involvement in the Vietnam War intensified. According to the figures provided in Kirkpatrick Sale's *SDS*, the organization began in 1960 with 250 members, then began a meteoric rise throughout the decade, peaking with somewhere between 80,000 and 100,000 members in June 1968 (663). A precipitous decline began after the high point of the 1968 Democratic Convention, which led to the eventual break up of the organization with some of the more revolutionary members forming the Weather Underground. The level of white, middle-class involvement with radical politics demonstrated by the SDS during the 1960s has not been duplicated in the United States since. This movement, SDS and the New Left at large, is imbued with the energies of a particular confluence of social and political energies unique to the era.

In the United States the term New Left is used to describe a broad coalition of groups and individuals who worked for a radical and sometimes revolutionary refashioning of the political, social, and cultural order mainly during the 1960s. The extensiveness of the movement leads to areas of disagreement in defining exactly who was involved in the New Left. In some histories, the scope of the movement is limited to the young white activists involved in the SDS.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{18}\) James Miller's *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron the Siege of Chicago* and Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, both published in 1987, are examples of histories that focus on privileged white student radicals as exemplar of the New Left.
However, this view overlooks the decisive contributions of disenfranchised minority groups and people of variant ages and diverse backgrounds. As New Left historian Van Gosse states, "it is highly problematic to make age, whiteness, and student status the defining characteristics of the New Left; however unintended, the consequence is to put those white youth at the center of the narrative, with other movements at the margins" (Rethinking 5). Young activists certainly played significant roles in the various groups; however, the Civil Rights Movement, for instance, involved the collective effort of individuals of a wide spectrum of ages and ethnicities. In short, the New Left was not a homogenous entity and one person's definition of the movement may differ greatly from another. Van Gosse's comprehensive definition of the New Left communicates the multifaceted demography of the movement. In "A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left," Gosse outlines his inclusive description of the New Left's composition. He identifies a "pluralist thesis of a "movement of movements," a framing once ubiquitous and since forgotten, requires investigating a constant efflorescence of sub-movements, temporary coalitions, breakaway factions, and organizational proliferation over several decades" (279). This conception of the New Left allows for a greater level of fluidity as far as who is included as part of "the Movement."

While this study is intended to situate the New Left as a diverse movement made up of a wide variety of people from varied circumstances, because of Eric Bentley's role as university professor a great deal of consideration will be given to student radicals and activists, especially those at Columbia University. This attention to SDS is in no way intended to minimize the contributions of other movements within the New Left or to place white student activists at the center of the broader narrative. This focus is based upon Bentley's presence on the Columbia University campus and his writings about the student protests. This chapter references
approximately a half-dozen of Bentley's essays written about the New Left during the nineteen-sixties and seventies, which tend to place the student activists at the center of the narrative. Through these essays, he offers advice for and critique of the movement based upon his experiences with leftist politics dating back to the 1930s.

The term New Left implies that the movement is defined alongside and in variance with earlier movements, the Old Left of the 1930s in particular. Both movements dealt with socialism, but in contrast to the New Left, the Old Left was particularly concerned with labor issues and support of the Soviet Union, which arguably led to its collapse. Cyril Levitt identifies reasons for this decline, "The economic success of capitalism, the passivity of the working class, Stalinist butchery, and the organized repression of McCarthyism . . . decimated the ranks of the Old Left and removed the question of socialism from the agenda in the West for more than a decade" (3). The economic dominance and enforced conformity in American society following World War II affected a decline in support for leftist politics; however, these same forces were also the roots of the New Left. John Patrick Diggins suggests that both the demise of the Old Left and the emergence of the New Left were precipitated by the failure of a political system. He writes, "The Old Left died when communist Russia failed to fulfill its prophecies; the New Left was born when democratic America failed to keep its promises" (238). Perhaps the most significant broken promise in the United States during the twentieth century was the legally and illegally enforced apartheid system that granted unequal right to citizens on the basis of race, gender, and sexuality, granting social and economic privilege to straight, white American men. In light of this, the New Left sought to fashion a democratic order based on what Gosse identifies as "the legally enforceable civil equality of all people" (*Rethinking* 4).
While it is impossible to gauge the exact influence black activism had on the white New Left, members of the SDS pointed to the African American struggle for civil rights in many of their writings and actions. The authors of *The Port Huron Statement* make reference to the Civil Rights Movement as an inspiring model of non-violent resistance: "In exploring the existing social forces, note must be taken of the Southern civil rights movement as the most heartening because of the justice it insists upon, exemplary because it indicates that there can be a passage out of apathy" (35). The SDS members applaud the increased focus on the African American vote; however, they also believe that by 1963, the Civil Rights Movement had "come to an impasse" (35). In this, the SDS adopts a paternalistic stance toward Southern African Americans by suggesting that this impasse could only be resolved through the assistance of Northern, and likely white, liberal activists. The wording of this section reduces the Civil Rights struggle to a skirmish in the internal conflict of the Democratic Party: "Linked with pressure from Northern liberals to expunge the Dixiecrats from the ranks of the Democratic Party, massive Negro voting in the South could destroy the vice-like grip reactionary Southerners have on the Congressional process" (36). This statement and others by the SDS reduce the struggle for civil rights to a tactical maneuver for removing segregationist Southerners from Democratic Party leadership.

While the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed primarily in service to the end of segregation and racial discrimination, the SDS often viewed the Civil Rights Movement as tributary to a broader cultural and political struggle.¹⁹

Regardless of how racial differences and conflict presented themselves within the SDS, what is perhaps most important is the fact that they were present at all. Challenges to racial identity as an inherent, objective, and universal aspect of human existence became an influential

¹⁹ For a detailed examination of the aims and actions of SNCC, see Gosse, Van 37-41.
part of the public discourse during the 1960s. It is quite possible that the young generation of white students during this era of United States history were the first to seriously interrogate the privilege afforded to them by their skin color. This racial consciousness became a significant part of the SDS culture. David Barber points to awareness of the constructed nature of race as a motivating factor for white involvement in the New Left:

White Americans began to understand themselves as racialized subjects and not as models for other, nonwhite peoples to emulate. For the first time, a core of whites in America began to examine critically that which they had always assumed as natural—their own whiteness. (Barber 7)

During the 1960s, what was arguably the most socially and economically advantaged generation in the country's history became alienated by the inequalities that supported their privilege. Once many young white suburban youths began to connect their affluence and privilege to the poverty and oppression of minority groups at home and abroad, their resentment of the socio-political mainstream only intensified. This alienation is perhaps one of the primary seeds of the New Left and counterculture movements.

In his 1968 essay, "The Night Is Dark and I Am Far from Home," Eric Bentley analyzes the various ways alienation is felt and expressed in American society during the mid-twentieth century. He includes himself in the ranks of the alienated, "What I have in mind is the feeling that many of us have of not belonging to the American Way of Life . . . It has alienated us, made us enemy aliens" (254). In this statement and throughout the essay he positions himself within

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20 See Greg Calvert's "In White America: Radical Consciousness and Social Change."

21 John Patrick Diggins suggests that the rebel youth movement was a reaction to the conformity and affluence of the early Cold War era (219).
the group of people alienated from the governmental and social establishment in the United States. Bentley was acutely aware of the simmering discontent amongst the student population at Columbia. Again, from the 1968 essay, "This is a civilization that lives by oppression at home and aggression abroad. It is when young people see this nightmare—a nightmare they do not invent but discover—that they become deeply alienated" (265). After two decades of political repression within the climate of HUAC Bentley felt license to voice his opinions—which at times verged on schadenfreude—that the dissatisfactions felt by many within the United States are a natural outcome of morally bankrupt social and economic policies characteristic of the dominant system. He attributes this situation to a reoccurring dialectic, "trends develop their own contradictions, and friends give birth, as it were, to their enemies" (264). In this and other writings, Bentley expresses that one does not have to actively participate in directly oppressive or militaristic acts to be part of the political establishment. One only has to be born into and benefit from privilege to be complicit with the domination of others at home and abroad, which he suggests is precisely why many of the privileged youth of this era became alienated and set out to subvert established systems of power through political activism and performance.

New Left historians Van Gosse and Doug Rossinow both frame the formulation of student discontent as a dialectic of alienation and authenticity supported by universities teaching existentialist philosophy. In The Politics of Authenticity, Rossinow writes, "Adopting an existentialist outlook, the new left came to argue that social and political arrangements caused inner alienation and that only radical social change would open the path to authenticity" (Rossinow 4). The existentialist poles of authenticity and alienation actively shape the politics of many groups and individuals—especially students and academics—within the New Left. The
Port Huron Statement opens with a reference to the building resentment many young people felt toward the American way of life:

As we grew, however, our comfort was penetrated by events too troubling to dismiss. First, the permeating and victimizing fact of human degradation, symbolized by the Southern struggle against racial bigotry . . . Second, the enclosing fact of the Cold War, symbolized by the presence of the Bomb . . . these were too immediate and crushing in their impact, too challenging in the demand that we as individuals take the responsibility for encounter and resolution. (1)

Those involved with SDS felt that the only way out of this disillusionment was to take action and realize "the ancient, still unfulfilled conception of man attaining determining influence over his circumstances of life" (2). This goal reflects an underlying existentialist belief that humanity had become alienated from its natural and authentic state of being. The statement praises university students for attempts at "breaking the crust of apathy and overcoming the inner alienation that remain the defining characteristics of college life" (5). They elaborate a belief that militarism, oppression, and capitalism impose alienation upon the individual, which is in opposition to the inherently positive nature of humanity. The authors give credence to an existentialist philosophy of individual determination, and a dialectic of independence and authenticity, writing, "The goal of man and society should be human independence: a concern . . . with finding a meaning in life that is personally authentic" (4). The Port Huron Statement is one of many other cultural expressions of the movement that alludes to a belief that established society alienates the individual from an authentic natural state of being. Reactions to this alienation are present in a wide variety of expressions of cultural revolt including the music of artists like Bob Dylan,
comics of Robert Crumb, poetry of Allen Ginsberg, writings of Tom Wolfe, and theatre collectives including the Living Theatre, the Performance Group, and the Open Theatre.

In the essay, "The Theatre of Commitment" (1966), Bentley offers his advice for how to use alienation to create politically committed theatre. This adaptation of Marx's literature of commitment is connected to political radicalism. He argues, "Relative to the general social situation, the literature of Commitment is radical. It is a literature of protest, not approval, or outrage, not tribute" (166). Bentley addresses a 1966 conference topic: Commitment or Alienation. He derides the "public relations men" who came up with the topic, describing it as a binary with the "Committed artist . . . publicly protesting against American policy in Vietnam" and "the Alienated artist . . . sitting the war out and waiting for Godot in sulky solitude" (161). He situates the concepts of alienation and commitment as causal, with alienation as a motivating factor in the development of political commitment. He states that "after being Alienated, and because one is alienated, one more readily commits oneself" (167). This statement may be viewed as positivistic in that it posits an evolutionary pattern of political awareness; the alienated adolescent develops into a politically committed activist. The youth culture of the sixties is mentioned as a source of hope for overcoming alienation, "The young people who are in eruption in America today are not stuck in front of television sets . . . they are on the streets outside, playing their guitars. These are the years that have even produced a theatre called Theatre in the Street" (181). In this essay, and in other writings, Bentley expresses optimism for the potential radicalism of young people and the opportunity for alienation to motivate commitment.

Bentley's advocacy of political commitment makes use of Marxist conceptions of alienation as a product of alienation, which are also echoed in discourse of the SDS and the New
Left at large. In 1953, the *Grundrisse*—and its detailed examination of the sociological and historical aspects of alienation—became available in the West for the first time and is referenced in various New Left publications. Many New Left scholars look to Marx's valuation of *The Grundrisse* as a sign that this work best represents a more fully developed Marxism. In "The Unknown Marx," published in *The New Left Reader* (1968), Martin Nicolaus states that *The Grundrisse* is "the only truly complete work on political economy that Marx ever wrote" (87). Marx outlines the fundamental alienation an individual has from society when money becomes an objectified relation of his or her labor, "In exchange value, the social connection between persons is transformed into a social relation between things; personal capacity into objective wealth" (49). Marx continues to expand alienation into a many faceted notion to explain the frustrated and marginalized desires of the individual in a capitalist society. This alienated exchange stems from the impotence of the individual within a society bent on transforming labor into exchange value, "Individuals are subsumed under social production; social production exists outside them as their fate; but social production is not subsumed under individuals, manageable by them as their common wealth" (50). Many within the New Left and SDS agreed with the Marxist view that much of the inequality in United States' culture is produced by the economic system. This alienation with capitalism would lead to experimentation with various social, political, and artistic expressions intended to affect radical change.

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*The Grundrisse* is a lengthy manuscript that covers a wide variety of subjects including alienation, capitalism, exchange, labor, etc. While completed in 1856, it was unpublished until 1941 and not available in the West until the Dietz edition was published in 1953. It has become a foundational text in the critique of capitalism.
Many members of the New Left self-identified as part of a broad "counterculture movement," which was characterized by rebellion against social norms, capitalism, and hegemony. According the Doug Rossinow, the counterculture movement "sought to displace the predominant "values" of industrial society with new values that would affirm and allow the full development of human potential and would end estrangement from repressed dimensions of human personality, and from other living beings" (249). This rebellion was carried out in nearly every aspect of the participants' lives and therefore based on the construction and performance of a specific kind of identity. Or, as Levitt explains, "At first the cultural revolt was confined to music, art, and literature, but it quickly went over to styles of dress, language, and sexual morality" (47). The "hippies" are arguably the best-remembered element of sixties counterculture, which, I believe, is a result of the commercial viability of their clothing, music, and culture. Additionally, the hippie lifestyle was directly influenced by African American culture, which, as Levitt notes, "had been "discovered" by white middle class students during their involvement with the civil rights struggle" (47). One can view this as either the appropriation of minority culture by privileged members of society, or as a successful collaboration between formerly segregated groups.

While Bentley praises much of sixties youth culture, he dislikes the "hippies" because of what he views as apolitical ideology, preoccupation with drug use, and cultivated Bohemian lifestyle, calling them "rebels against the Suburbs, and ambivalent rebels at best" (*Theatre of War* 250). He was certainly not into the "sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll" lifestyle, opting to support the more politically engaged elements of the New Left. His essay, "How D'You Feel About Vietnam?" (1967), contains a number of statements about sixties bohemians:
If the hippies didn't exist, they would be invented by men who live in Mamaroneck and work on Madison Avenue. They do exist, but are the sons of bishops and college presidents. One must not, of course, make them victims of the genetic fallacy: their origin would not matter if they had really pulled clear of it. But not only do they still live on the bishops' money, they haven't even given up God. Their allegiance is with society as it is, and the most conservative American is not Barry Goldwater but Andy Warhol. (251)

In this view, hippies are posited as fundamentally bourgeois consumers who do little to enact substantive change. Bentley criticizes hippie music, hairstyles, and clothing as consumer kitsch culture and believes members of the counterculture put too much emphasis on issues such as drug legalization, which pull focus from more pertinent issues such as the Vietnam War. He argues that "time spent arguing for Allen Ginsberg's right to take drugs would be more humanely, more intelligently spent today trying to save Vietnamese lives from American soldiers, all too many of whom already have their marijuana and even their LSD" (250). Despite Bentley's rejection of the apolitical Bohemian mores of the hippies, he recognized that fashion statements involving hairstyle and clothing could serve as personal challenges to the establishment. In the essay "Theatre and the Movement" (1970), he identifies long hair and outré dress as countercultural statements that "became symbols of more than just a life style: they became symbols of another life, and this the essential life of human beings, the life of their deep affectations and their cherished thoughts" (Theatre of War 408). However, he also views these symbols as empty if not connected to some sort of political action.

Bentley's criticisms of hippie culture are ultimately related to a perceived lack of commitment to a well-defined political movement. In contrast to the young freedom riders that
risked their lives in the name of racial equality, many of the suburban bohemians only rebelled in a superficial way. Bentley identifies the stakes of political commitment, "To be committed is not to favor the idea of Commitment, it is to make commitments and stand by them. The test of the authenticity of a particular commitment is whether you would stake your life on it" (Theatre of War 247). Many within the counterculture movement fell well short of this level of commitment; however, there were a large number of activists who risked their wellbeing in order to challenge hegemonic forces. At times, Bentley's criticisms generalize a large number of young people who identified as hippies. However, despite his denunciation of elements of the counterculture movement, the balance of his argument across a number writings from the era suggests that he was ultimately supportive of what the youth were doing during the 1960s. He ends the essay with optimism, "Finally: we are We. The first person plural, banned from the grammar of politics by Stalin and McCarthy, is back again. "Our" particular first person plural. It, too, represents a feeling—the feeling of fraternity" (253). 23 I believe that Bentley wished to offer guidance to members of the New Left and the broader counterculture movement, in hopes they would enact a shift in the established power relations.

Through their writings, various members of New Left movements express a belief that the establishment exerts power and maintains ideology to regulate behavior and perpetuate hegemony. New Left activists staged protests and participated in a range of subversive acts in order to undermine the authority of established power structures. In the 6 January edition of New Left Notes, SDS president Nick Egleson describes this newly discovered awareness of power:

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23 Bentley also uses the term "fraternity" when addressing homosexuality in his essay, "Men's Liberation" (Theatre of War 326-333). I address the role gay liberation played in Bentley's work in chapter four of this dissertation.
[Students] come to have, first of all, a better understanding of power. Or, even more basic, they come to see that power exists. Most people, even people in the movement, fail to see the power around them. We are apt to think that the failings in our own lives are either chance or our own fault . . . We fail to see the extent of the power operating to shape our existence. (Egleson 2)

In this essay and numerous other writings, members of the New Left express discontent over the controlling influence powerful institutions exert upon their daily lives. This awareness of power's influence is coupled with a distrust of dominant organizations such as governments, weapons manufacturers, university administrations, and the military. In this conception of power, individuals and institutions employ force and coercion to compel individuals to behave in a particular way. Power is viewed as a monological force, in which the dominators exercise control over the dominated. Many within the New Left advocate the forcible redistribution of power, where power is transferred from the establishment to "the people."

Eric Bentley expresses many concerns regarding power also conveyed through New Left discourse. His writings suggest that the concentration of power and influence in a small number of institutions is deeply problematic. In his essay, "Thoughts on the Student Discontents," he states his belief that "what most menaces the world today is neither communism nor imperialism as such, but the possession of so much power by so few men, be they "Communists" in Moscow or "imperialists" in Washington" (234). In this view, the public intellectual has a special ability—and perhaps duty—to identify and challenge abuses of power. He takes the pragmatic approach that the intellectual should "represent something other than the viewpoint that is, or even is going to be, dominant, and that one should ask how much he modifies the existing state of things, rather than what he would do if he were in power" (234). Bentley offers
commendation for the acts of intellectual resistance carried out by poets Yevgeny Yevtushenko in the Soviet Union, and Robert Lowell in the United States. His stated view of the intellectual as "the voice of reason amid the clamor of the world's irrationality" acquires a pronounced urgency as the sixties decade progresses (Theatre of War 235). Much of Bentley's writing from the era seems intended to function as a reasoned argument for changes in the socio-political power structure. In this view, power is cast as an oppositional force, with the "Establishment" on one side and radicals on the other; however, the intellectual is said to occupy a more evenhanded position unfettered by the "irrationality" of the debate at large.

Conceptions of power expressed by members of the New Left share similarities and differences with Foucauldian notions of power prominent in contemporary intellectual discourse. An examination of the contrasts between these views is valuable to this study in that I approach 1960s views of power from a Foucault influenced perspective. The omnipresence of power is one of the most significant aspects of Foucault's critical model, which suggests that "power is 'always already there', that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in" (Power/Knowledge 141). For Foucault, power is the playing field, where various groups and individual subjects engage in a multifarious and shifting network of relationships. He states that power relations are not a "massive and primal condition of domination, a binary structure with 'dominators' on one side and 'dominated' on the other" (142).

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24 Yevtushenko publicly criticized the Soviet trial of poet Joseph Brodsky, as well as the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia following the Prague Spring in 1968. Robert Lowell refused an invitation to the White House as a protest against the Vietnam War. Both men were public intellectuals and artists who took a stand against what they perceived as crimes committed by their governments.
They are rather a "multiform production of relations of domination" that is "interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality) for which they play at one a conditioning and conditioned role" (142). In this view, power loses some of its negative connotation and assumes a more utilitarian role. Resistances become a necessary part of power relations and as Foucault states: "To say that one can never be 'outside' power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what" (141). With this in mind, the multiple resistances of the New Left are integrated into global strategies, instead of being confined to static dominator/dominated binaries. I find this view preferable in that it facilitates nuanced readings of how individual subjects and institutions of all varieties affect power relations.

Performance is dependant on many of the same ideological structures utilized in the active expression of power relationships. Baz Kershaw goes so far as to define performance as fundamentally ideological in nature: "Performance can be most usefully described as an ideological transaction between a company of performers and the community of their audience. . . ideology provides the framework within which companies encode and audiences decode the signifiers of performance" (16). Since ideology is fundamental to the signification process that, for Kershaw, makes performance possible, performance maintains a unique position in the reinforcement and/or subversion of specific ideological frameworks. Kershaw identifies the potentials of performance, "Cultural institutions and products are clearly central to the maintenance of dominant ideologies. . . theatre and performance are major arenas for the reinforcement and/or the uncovering of hegemony" (21). Performance's capacity for ideological, social, and political engagement is not lost on those involved with New Left movements; many of the writings from the era identify protest as specifically performative in nature. The SDS and other organizations employed guerilla theatre tactics in many of their demonstrations and sit-ins,
while many performances of Radical Theatre Movement worked to subvert and challenge hegemony. This represents a confluence of power and performance both in artistic expression and political activism and oftentimes the line between the two is blurred. I believe Bentley was aware of this and as a Columbia professor and theatre critic had a front row seat for some of the most significant protest and performance events of the era.

"Boldly Bearing Witness"

Bentley was a Columbia University professor in 1968 when students and members of the SDS engaged in protests, strikes, and eventually the occupation of campus buildings. He publicly expressed his support for student protest as early as 1965 in his essay, "Thoughts on the Student Discontents." His encouragement for the students was coupled with criticism for the older generation’s inaction:

> When I am asked if I think our students are entitled to protest, I must not limit my answer to a patronizing yes, but must go on to congratulate the younger generation on boldly bearing witness at a time when so many of their elders were pussyfooting around discussing whether witness should be borne. ("Student Discontents" 235)

This kind of support for student radicals is seen throughout many of his writings from the era, especially during the early stages of the protest movement. His enthusiasm for the protests waned as the SDS became increasingly peremptory in early 1968, when Mark Rudd and a more radical faction of the SDS assumed control over the Columbia chapter from the established
leadership. Rudd's group, known as the "action faction," favored a confrontational approach to protest, while the established group, dubbed the "praxis axis," preferred dormitory canvassing, peaceful demonstration, and affiliation with the Progressive Labor Party. Given his politics and former affiliation with the Independent Labor Party in Britain, I believe Bentley had more in common with the praxis axis.

The various factions of student radicals were far from homogenous in their political beliefs, and their rationale for demonstrating was not always singular and coherent to the outside observer. The student uprising was partially in response to a number of university policies that supported military recruitment and research on the campus. The first major act of organized resistance related to university-military collusion was in the fall of 1966, when a group of students took the "quite unheard of step of marching into the administration building, to deliver a letter demanding the end of CIA recruiting" on Columbia's campus (Sale 431). After a week without a response from university president Grayson Kirk, a group of SDS students marched into Kirk's office, forcing a debate on university-military involvement (Sale 430-431). Over the following year, acts of resistance became increasingly frequent and confrontational, eventually peaking in intensity during the spring of 1968 under the controversial leadership of Rudd.

One of the more exuberant displays of resistance prior to the student revolt is known simply as the "pie incident." In early March 1968, Colonel Paul Akst, New York's Selective Service...
Service Chief, paid Columbia University a visit in order to speak to students about their obligations under United States' draft laws. Midway through the Colonel's speech, a group of SDS members dressed as a Revolutionary War era fife and drum corps burst into the back of the auditorium to create a diversion. In the following passage from his 1969 essay "Columbia: Notes on the Spring Rebellion," Mark Rudd describes the rest:

In the middle of his speech a mini-demonstration appeared in the back of the room with a fife and drum, flags, machine guns, and noisemakers. As attention went to the back, a person in the front row stood up and placed a lemon-meringue pie in the Colonel's face. Everyone split. (Rudd 293)

Rudd viewed this act as a prelude to the larger and more consequential actions that would occur in the coming months. He clearly felt that the performance of the pie-throwing was a symbolically potent act of defiance:

People understood the symbolism in the attack and identified with it because of their own desires, often latent, to strike back at the draft and the government. This was, in symbolic miniature form, the same dynamic of exemplary action by a small number and then mass identification which worked so well during the rebellion one month later. (Rudd 293)

Despite his somewhat self-aggrandizing description of the significance of the event, much of the student resistance adopted a similarly irreverent tone. While the pie incident was fairly comical and ultimately non-destructive, it serves as an example of the increasingly confrontational approach of the Columbia SDS, who utilized performance in events such as this to draw attention to their demands.
While opposition to the Vietnam War and military presence on university campuses were a major factor in the situation at Columbia, race relations were arguably the most significant catalyst for the dramatic events of May 1968. Two days after the assassination of Martin Luther King in April 1968, Rudd interrupted the university memorial service "in order to expose the fact that while Kirk and Truman were eulogizing King, their university was completely racist toward the community and toward its employees" (Rudd 293). The specific race-related university issues involved the underpayment of a predominantly African American custodial staff, as well as plans for the construction of a university gymnasium, which would require the leveling of blocks of apartments in a Harlem neighborhood, thereby displacing hundreds of African American residents. Adding further insult, the university responded to initial controversy by declaring that they would install a back door where Harlem residents would have access to a separate section of the facility.27

On April 23, the SDS and the Student Afro-American Society (SAS) held a protest against the gymnasium construction, which escalated when students tore down a construction fence and then occupied Hamilton Hall. However, shortly after the building occupation, the SAS asked the white students to leave, so that the action would be solely that of the African American students. In his narrative of the events, Rudd states his belief that through this decision, the black students "defined themselves politically as members of the Harlem community and the black nation who would fight Columbia's racism to the end" (Rudd 295). By leaving Low Hall, the SDS members signified their difference from the African American students and the Harlem residents, in some ways reinforcing the system of racial privilege they were rebelling against. While Rudd and the SDS were cast as socially and culturally separate from the African

27 See Barber 43; Sale 434; Rudd 294.
American students, they viewed this difference as somehow inspirational to their own actions. Rudd describes his perception of the black students as inspirational, "It was also this action that gave the whites a model for militancy and, on a broader scale, forced the whites to wake up to the real world outside themselves (i.e. become radicals)" (Rudd 295). He makes a similar statement later in the same essay, "The SDS occupation itself hinged on that of the blacks, and the overwhelming presence of the black students and Harlem itself in proximity forced us to keep the image of the real world . . . clear and bright in our minds" (Rudd 296). These references to African-Americans as human reminders of a world outside of privilege demonstrate the conflicted relationships between the SDS students and their own whiteness. The SDS students demonstrated awareness of themselves as racialized subjects, whose racial identity was as social construct and should not be the basis of privilege.28 Yet at the same time, Rudd and the SDS seemed to accept a degree of segregation between themselves and "the blacks." This sometimes took the form of emulation and the view that the black students militancy and resistance served as a model for the white students to follow. Unfortunately, this view worked to minimize the role of African American students in the SDS, relegating them to the role of inspirational other.

The morning after leaving the SAS occupied Hamilton Hall, the SDS students took over Low Library and then four other buildings over the next few days. Estimates vary as to how many students were involved in the building occupations; however, Sale places the number at nearly a thousand (437). The action was notable for both its size and militancy and the SDS was

28 See Barber 7. Throughout his work, Mark Barber examines race as an integral factor in the actions of the SDS.
quick to publicize its demands. The following list of formal demands was issued the day after the SDS and other students took over Low Library:

The students are demanding: 1) that Columbia permanently stop construction of a new gymnasium in nearby West Harlem; 2) that the University withdraw from the Institute of Defense Analyses, a consortium of universities which does counter insurgency and other research for the Military; 3) that amnesty be granted to all demonstrators; 4) that campus disciplinary proceedings be under the control of a student-faculty-elected group; 5) that University president Kirk resign from the board of IDA; and 6) that charges against six students previously suspended from anti-war actions be dropped. (New Left Notes 4/29/1968)

In these demands and in other statements, the students connected the university's racist policies toward the neighboring Harlem community to the exploitation and suppression of Third World countries through military strength.

Before dawn on 30 April, riot police stormed the occupied campus buildings, arresting nearly seven hundred students, with nearly one hundred injured (New Left Notes 5/6/68). News stories featured photographs of bloodied students, which had a sensational effect. Issues of race played a role in the handling of the situation, with the Columbia administration acknowledging, "special care was given to the handling of black students because there was a great fear that violent response would come from the Harlem community" (New Left Notes 5/6/68). Various narratives of the demonstrations include Harlem residents as active participants in the protests, especially during the "second battle of Columbia" on May 17th and 18th (New Left Notes 5/27/68). University administrators were likely weary of media images featuring riot police forcibly removing black students and Harlem residents from campus buildings.
While the demonstrations were in response to a number of issues ranging from weapons manufacturing to urban gentrification, for the SDS students these events were marked by a questioning of what David Barber refers to as "fundamental questions about the ideology of whiteness" (44). In many ways, the Columbia uprising represented a radical break from established societal norms. SDS students called for a wholesale rejection of the American establishment and all they felt it stood for. While the student resistance did not ultimately do away with hegemony, patriarchy, or the military industrial complex, its lasting effect was perhaps its symbolic resonance. Student groups, professors, university administrators, and members of the news media would make reference to "Columbia" to signify the radical possibilities of student unrest. Kirkpatrick Sale describes the Columbia unrest as emblematic of the student movement: "Columbia quickly became the symbol of all campus protest, and it energized the news media, angered the politicians, terrified the academics, and inspired the students" (442). The Columbia University protests were imbued with the social energies characteristic of the New Left era, which made the student protests a potent symbol that would circulate throughout the coming years through later protests, writings, and artistic expressions—including those of Eric Bentley.

Bentley addressed the Columbia protests directly in his writing and was quick to criticize the action and leadership of Rudd. Bentley's verbal support for student radicalism in general was coupled with criticism for many of the later actions carried out by the Columbia SDS in particular. Relatively peaceful war protests during the first part of the decade progressed into violent and confrontational forms of resistance as the SDS leadership became increasingly revolutionary over the following three years. Looking back on the event during a 2002
interview, he describes the precariousness of the situation and his reluctance to side with SDS leadership:

When the student revolt happened . . . there had been a great deal of quarreling and I was in an impossible, midway position. I was not at all in sympathy with the SDS, they were a lot of totalitarian louts . . . they were extremely sexist, misogynistic . . . there was division between whites and blacks—two separate revolts, which was quite ridiculous. (Nesmith Int. 98)

This condemnation of the SDS's segregation, heteronormativity and misogyny pointed to ways the SDS effectively reinscribed the values of the establishment they purportedly opposed. The inability of groups like the SDS to embrace feminism and gay liberation was a contributing factor to the Balkanization of the New Left. The SDS broke apart in 1969, with the Black Panthers, Feminists, Progressive Labor, and Worker Student Alliance factions moving in separate directions. A small group of revolutionary SDS members formed the Weather Underground, which gained notoriety after various bombings and arson attacks, followed by a deadly explosion at a bomb making facility in the basement of a Greenwich Village apartment. The SDS failed because it was unable to embrace a diverse and non-hierarchical membership in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and political commitment.

Bentley's criticisms of the "totalitarian" aspects of the SDS were coupled with support for the student movement in general. Various statements and writings from the era contain a great deal of encouragement for student political involvement, opposition to the Vietnam War, and advocacy of civil rights causes. The essay, "The Unliberated University" (1968) was clearly written with a student audience in mind and gives various pieces of advice to the would-be student radical:
In case anybody under twenty-five still wants advice from a man over fifty (and actually I know that many do) here is mine: "Be more opportunistic, at least in this respect: grab the education that you can get and that you or your parents are paying for. Understand that this education will have the limitations which, given the history of Western civilization up to this point, it must have. But seek out the exceptions and the freaks . . . Explode in revolt when you have to, but not when you don't have to . . . by all means exploit the university for your own purposes, but in the way in which it can successfully be exploited . . . concede that the unliberated university can still be of use. (282)

In this statement, Bentley offers the pragmatic recommendation that university students should utilize the resources at their disposal; that they should gain whatever they can within the power structure. His recommendations suggest a view of the system that is more nuanced than a dominator/dominated binary and an awareness of the positive effects power can exert through an institution such as a university. By utilizing the educational system while simultaneously engaging in acts of resistance, the students serve as an example of resistance that is created by a system of power.

While Bentley advises students to glean as much as they can from the established power structure within the university system, he also points toward an arrangement that he believes transcends power relationships: a "living humanism" (278). This adaptation of Marx and Engels' socialist humanism requires active opposition to the kind of atrocities perpetrated by the United
States military during the My Lai Massacre\textsuperscript{29} and the illegal firebombing of Cambodia.\textsuperscript{30}

Bentley stresses the importance of action to his living humanism in that it "exists as praxis or not at all and those who would keep it alive, or bring it back to life, must at all costs create such a praxis, if it does not already exist" (278). The concept of living humanism is reflective of a more traditional Marxist philosophy, as well as Bentley's involvement with the Progressive Labor Party in England; both influences were resisted by SDS leadership. Bentley's guidance was likely rejected by the student radicals—if it was even heard—which kept him at arms length from the Columbia protestors.

Despite his ambivalence about many aspects of the student protest movement, Bentley took opportunities to defend their actions to would-be detractors. In April and May of 1969, he and Robert Brustein engaged in a somewhat contentious public correspondence on the pages of The New Republic. At the time, Bentley and Brustein were two of the most prominent theatre critics in the United States and both taught at Ivy League universities. Brustein had recently taken a position as Dean of the Yale University School of Drama and used his platform to denounce student radicalism. In the April 1969 article, "The Case for Professionalism," Brustein begins with a quotation from Plato's The Republic warning against the pitfalls brought about by a

\textsuperscript{29} On 16 March 1968, an estimated 503 Vietnamese civilians were tortured, beaten, raped, mutilated, and murdered by a unit of the United States Army. See the "Congressional Report of the Investigation of the My Lai Incident" 15 July 1970, Library of Congress.

\textsuperscript{30} According to the Dictionary of Genocide, Operation Menu, "a covert United States military operation in 1969 . . . took the form of secret B-52 bombing raids on communist bases in Cambodia." When the bombing ended 1973, the U.S. estimated the deaths at around 700,000; however, other sources estimate the deaths at a "million or more" (320).
"state of democratic anarchy." In this essay, Brustein rails against the anti-authoritarian actions taken by Leftist college students and extols the virtue of professionalism—by which he means, "a condition determined by training, experience, skill, and achievement" (Brustein 16). He criticizes the politicized atmosphere in the current "intensely Romantic age" where "objective judgments are continually colliding with subjective demands" (Brustein 16). He believes that in such a society, where "the amateur is exalted as a kind of democratic culture hero, subject to no standards or restrictions," the likely outcome is the kind of tyranny Plato warned against (Brustein 16).

Much of Brustein's criticism was directed at the efforts of African American students to pressure the academic establishment to incorporate ethnic studies into various disciplines. Brustein describes this situation as "the problem of the black students, who are sometimes inclined to reject the customary university curriculum as "irrelevant" to their interests, largely because of its orientation towards "white" culture and history" (17). Brustein concedes that the accomplishments of African Americans should be included in the canonical historical narratives; however, he rejects the idea that courses should be specifically focused on African American perspectives. He voices his concern, "when black students begin clamoring for courses in black law, black business, black medicine, or black theater, then the university is in danger of becoming the instrument of community hopes and aspirations rather than the repository of an already achieved culture" (17). For Brustein, scholarship specifically designed to interrogate the established canon—or "already achieved culture"—undermines professionalism in the academy. However, he does not mention how the valuing of this kind of professionalism privileges the relatively affluent white male. He expresses a belief that post-colonial and ethnic centered courses "serve propaganda purposes, usually of an activist nature" (17). The corollary of this is
that canonical courses taught by "professional" members of the academy are not propaganda and do not serve activist purposes. The essay is a flat-out rejection of the counterculture movement and political radicalism and a fervent defense of the academic establishment.

In two letters published in *The New Republic* in May 1969, Bentley takes issue with Brustein's positions and publicly challenged a number of his claims. Bentley singles out the first sentence of Brustein's essay for analysis, "Among the many valuable things on the verge of disintegration in contemporary America is the concept of professionalism" (Brustein 16). This statement represents a position that Bentley labels "pure conservatism" (13). He objects to the idea that there was ever an idyllic moment in society preceding "disintegration," and that Brustein's claim otherwise is something "Dean-ship must have pushed him into," attacking what he sees as elitism (13). Bentley implies that as an administrator, Brustein places too much value on conformism and strict university policy. However, it is important to note that at this time Bentley was less than a year removed from leaving academia, which Brustein directly references in his reply, "The temptation these days to withdraw from the academy into private life is simply overwhelming; if I am not mistaken, Eric Bentley is yielding to this temptation himself" (14). Brustein seems to suggest that Bentley lost his right to critique the state of academia when he gave up his position at Columbia. The somewhat uncongenial nature of these statements may be more of a reflection of dissent within academia, as opposed to a personal dislike between the two critics.

Perhaps the foremost objection Bentley makes is that Brustein does not value the contribution political radicalism makes to academic discourse. Bentley casts himself as an unwavering apologist for radicalism, "Whether or not I am right about this, I would maintain that to abandon political radicalism in order to combat educational amateurism would be to empty out
the baby with the bath" (13). Bentley also makes a case for the actions and demands of reformist African American students. He describes the situation at Columbia University where "the Student Afro-American Society wants its undergraduate members to control admission to Columbia of all students with what is called black" (12). While he concedes that the demand of a student-controlled admission process is overreaching at best, he believes that within the hyperbole "there is a valid criticism of the old principle of admission involved, namely, that it confused cultural superiority with class superiority" (12). Perhaps the most tangible difference between the two positions rests on Bentley's willingness to see value in the provocative demands of the SAS and SDS, despite the fact that he may not completely agree. He suggests that radicalism itself should be seen as a valuable part of the public discourse: "Surely one can reject many things that the SDS has recently been doing without rejecting radicalism" (Bentley 31). While Bentley denied that his exit from Columbia was a result of the university's handling of the student protests, his exchanges with Brustein imply a broader dissatisfaction with the stances toward student radicalism taken by administrators throughout the academy. While he was quick to criticize what he perceived as mistakes in the movement, he also came to its defense and spoke to its potential contributions. I believe this exemplifies his liminal position in regards to the New Left and student radicalism in the 1960s.

"Theatre in Extremis"

Bentley expressed mixed feelings about radical theatre companies popular within New Left circles and situated as part of "the Movement." The 29 April 1968 issue of New Left Notes contains Saul Gottlieb's essay "Radical Theatre Ass'n," which enthusiastically endorses alternative theatre companies as valuable extensions of the New Left. Gottlieb venerates these
"free-swinging, communal theater groups" as effective anti-Establishment activists whose performance techniques offer valuable lessons for young radicals (6). The Radical Theatre Movement was comprised of dozens of individual performance companies existing in the United States—mostly in the Northeast and West Coast—during the 1960s and 1970s. The multifarious nature of the movement makes it difficult to arrive at a singular definition, especially in terms of aesthetic practice. For the purposes of this study, the Radical Theatre Movement denotes dozens of experimental, communal, non-profit (or low-profit) theatre companies that engaged with radical, countercultural, and New Left related social and political idioms. According to Harding and Rosenthal's introduction to Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theatres and Their Legacies, the mission of these theatre collectives generally "involved a direct challenge to the normative cultural values of bourgeois society, a challenge that overlapped with a tendency among all group theaters to question the traditional structures of mainstream theater and the authority of the literary dramatic text" (7). Individual companies varied greatly in terms of performance technique; however, most performance groups demonstrated concerns for physically immediate acting, direct connection between audience and performer, and oftentimes confrontational subject matter. Groups generally associated with the Radical Theatre Movement include: The Open Theatre, The Living Theatre, The Performance Group, Bread and Puppet Theatre, The San Francisco Mime Troupe, and various others.

Arthur Sainer's Radical Theatre Notebook offers a broad narrative of the movement, as well as individual profiles of specific companies and documents produced by the participants themselves. Sainer, who identifies as a member of the movement, points to what he believes to be the motivating factors for radical theatre. He writes, "We began to understand in the sixties that the words in plays, that the physical beings in plays, that the events in plays were too often
evasions, too often artifices that had to do not with truths but with semblances" (Sainer 12).
Sainer identifies ensemble, ritualism, the breaking-down of audience/performer barriers, and
environmental staging as significant elements of radical performance. He suggests that many
radical theatre practitioners should look to street performance as a source of immediacy and
relevance. He states, "There is no substitute for the passion of the street. The street is urgent, it
is capable of fear and cowardice; but even in its moments of hypocrisy the street is incapable of
essential falsehood" (Sainer 47). Radical theatre collectives looked to break down barriers
between audiences and performers by staging performances in nontraditional public spaces and
inviting active participation in order to reshape society. Or as Harding and Rosenthal suggest,
the groups believed that "the changes enacted in performances—especially those that blurred the
boundaries between performers and spectators—could be carried out into society at large' (8).
These idealistic collectives looked to performance as a countercultural tool for the reshaping of
society, politics, economics, and art.

Eric Bentley took an approach toward the Radical Theatre Movement that was in many
ways similar to his stance toward SDS and the student protests; a mixture of approval and
disapproval. His most strident condemnation was leveled at the Living Theatre in his 1968 essay
"Theatre in Extremis." He described their performances as a kind of monological indoctrination,
"If you keep drumming the same thing into my ears, what I think of is Brave New World, and my
reaction is: Go brainwash someone else" (352). His offense to their performances was clearly
felt on an immediate level: "Art is a seduction. The Living Theatre substitute is a rape" (352).
Throughout the essay, Bentley takes issue with the brazenly primal vitality of the Living Theatre
and objects to their authoritative and self-assured socio-political ideology. These criticisms
stemmed from the Living Theatre's overall tone, but not necessarily their radicalism. In a 1985
memoriam for Julian Beck, Bentley recounts his relationship with the Living Theatre and the Becks striking a somewhat conciliatory tone: "He did what he wanted to do: with his wife Judith Malina he created the Living Theatre, which, if it was not a new macrocosm, was a new microcosm. Now an ivory tower, however: a headquarters of revolution, a guerrilla theatre, though a pacifist one" ("Julian Beck" 247). Bentley notes the significance of Beck's contribution to radical theatre, and at the same time, reiterates his misgivings about the Living Theatre's methodology:

> I thought that the Living Theatre's tactics were going to "turn off" the very people they wanted to "turn on" . . . The aim was to stop the Vietnam War. Enacting "paradise now"—orgasms for all who could manage them on the stage of the Brooklyn Academy—did not seem to me to be the way. ("Julian Beck" 248)

The Living Theatre's approach was not accessible for mass audiences and consequently offered little assistance to organized opposition to the Vietnam War. Ever the pragmatist, Bentley favored a less brazenly avant-garde aesthetic for his politically committed theatre.

When Bentley decided to create his own version of radical theatre, *The Red, White, and Black*, he published the script in the New Left magazine *Liberation* before the rock musical was staged. In 1970, the magazine was a well-established vehicle for the discussion of anti-war, socialist, pacifist, civil rights, and other New Left related discourse. Founder A. J. Muste and other magazine contributors endeavored to allow a multiplicity of voices from varied backgrounds within the Left to exchange ideas and experiences on the pages of a national publication. *Liberation* was designed to "reach out and speak to wide circles of students, labor people, Socialists, former Socialists and Communists, farmers, peace workers, pacifists, progressive church people" (Muste 85). The readership and distribution of *Liberation* offered
Bentley an opportunity to make *The Red, White, and Black* part of the public discourse of "the movement" without taking the production on a national tour. It is highly likely that Bentley felt he could reach an audience of student radicals by portraying their culture and political beliefs through this play. Bentley uses the manifesto-like preface to *The Red, White, and Black* to prescribe meaning to the script and outline his vision for how the play should be performed. The following extended quotation from the preface to the play contains a description of the socio-cultural make-up of the players:

*The Red, White and Black* is a stage show for a rock group of 4 musicians and about 10 singing actors. Its form is not that of a drama (scenes of interaction between persons with spoken dialogue) but of a narrative poem. It tells the story of a collective dream, the collectivity that has had the dream being the performing troupe itself . . . In the main action the ten players present various images of the Establishment, as well as telling the tale which gives off these images. They do not themselves belong to the Establishment. They are today's collegiate, rebel youth. They are the readers of *Liberation* . . . By the same token they may well be the sons, daughters, nephews, nieces of the Establishment, the white ones at least. By the same token again, it is more certain that most of them are rebels than that they are revolutionaries. But a minority can be revolutionary; and a minority can be black; and these two minorities can overlap; this is the United States of America. (Bentley 4)

It is surely no coincidence that this description matches the target audience of *Liberation*, the SDS membership body, and a significant portion of the New Left at large. Bentley's interaction with "collegiate, rebel youth" at Columbia University surely played a role in the writing of the
The opening number—"Never Eat Shit"—is sung by the entire company and—like the play in general—is a defiant protest against the political and social establishment. In Liberation magazine the sheet music for the song appears opposite a photograph of Lyndon Johnson with his beagle on one page and a line of captive Vietnamese villagers on the other. The script gives quotations from Richard Nixon, J. Edgar Hoover, and Lyndon Johnson to be displayed on a newsreel during the song. After lamenting the establishment's attempts to maintain an ignorant populace, the performers sing, "We are not disenchanted or resigned; And our morale has not
been undermined; We won't eat shit, won't eat out of their hand; We're gonna take over this land" (11). This is followed by the spoken declaration, "We accuse the United States of America of aggression against the people of Vietnam; of the destruction of property and of the environment; of the destruction of a way of life" (11). The lyrics and message of the song call for direct action on the part of the young radical.

The play opened at La Mama to a decidedly unfavorable reaction from the critics. Gussow's 6 March 1971 review was relatively diplomatic: “There is a consistency to the author’s point of view, but also a predictability. Too often one can read the indictment before it is issued. Wouldn’t you know that AMA in Bentleyese stands for American Murder Association?” (20). Clive Barnes' review, published on 31 March, was far more condemning:

Mr. Bentley’s targets are easily chosen and, to be honest, easily hit. He writes well, of course. Yet he writes with a certain blank over-all awareness. His are the kind of opinions . . . that after 15 minutes’ exposure can surprise no one. I suppose it makes for propaganda, but it doesn’t really make for theater . . . The Red, White and Black does nothing but preach to the converted. It is difficult in such preaching to convey wit and style. What the revue did convey was hate. Mr. Bentley is a good hater, and this I respect. But cannot he see that such qualities as love and commitment are the very things that make hate and disaffection not only credible but useful. To dissent with humor is a valuable process. No amount of bile, anger and rabidly predictable discontent can replace it. (37)

I think that if Barnes found The Red, White, and Black to be utterly abrasive and humorless, he must have found the Living Theatre incomprehensible. Bentley's play displayed far less bile and
anger than many of the performances by groups within the Radical Theatre Movement and was likely designed to appeal to a wider audience than the work of more avant-garde companies like the Living Theatre. I believe Bentley's play was created with an eye towards both youth culture and the theatre establishment, targeting an audience that would include Mark Rudd and Clive Barnes. If Barnes' review is taken at face value, *The Red, White, and Black* did not achieve this goal.

It is impossible to ascertain the level to which *The Red, White, and Black* aided political radicalism. Bentley himself is unaware of any guerilla productions resulting from the plays publication in *Liberation*. Additionally, many New Left historians believe the movement was in rapid decline by the time of *The Red, White, and Black*'s performance and publication in 1971. Diggins characterizes the decline of the movement:

By 1970 the New Left was in disarray. Pressured on one side by Panther machismo and embarrassed on the other by yippie freak-out, it could no longer sustain an impelling vision or offer a viable program of action. Without a unified, broad-based organization, without a leader who could inspire more than a small band of faithful adherents, the New Left remained what it always had been—a mood in search of a movement. (Diggins 260)

If the movement truly had deteriorated to this extent, *The Red, White, and Black* came into being a few years too late. It is possible that the play never reached the right audience at the right time and in the right place.

In a personal interview in July of 2009, Bentley spoke about his changing perceptions of political theatre:
I didn't think of it as much as I would now in terms of the actual results a piece of political theatre has for the people who see it . . . Where political theatre is needed and where it would operate the way the author wants—it is banned. It can't be performed . . . This seems to be something political playwrights have not really thought much about. They just take the "right side" and then try to get it done. They don't think very much about the problems of where should it be done, where could it be done, and who would be there. Which I think are the real questions to ask. Otherwise it is not political theatre, it's just another show.

The Red, White, and Black could offer little resonance as performed in the East Village in 1971. However, the Columbia University campus in May 1968 would have offered a singularly appropriate context for a staging of the performance.

Bentley's ambivalence toward the countercultural movement, the New Left, and the Radical Theatre Movement is very much in keeping with his varied and sometimes contradictory positions toward a number of political, social, and artistic movements. He is vocally opposed to a Left that is not all-inclusive in terms of race, gender, and sexuality; therefore, he found the New Left too factious and divided. While he warns against the detachment and isolation that can accompany the alienation felt by many within capitalist society, he acknowledges that alienation can motivate a generation to greater political commitment. On one hand, he applauds radical theatre collectives for their ideals of using performance to support social, political, and economic change in the theatre and throughout society; on the other, he objects to what he sees as confrontational displays of pretentious art. However, despite his mixed feelings about the social and artistic radicalism of the 1960s, he consistently expresses belief in the significance of
making performance part of a broad social movement enacted throughout society. The New Left was marked by a renewed understanding of power and the collectives of the Radical Theatre Movement emphasized the role performance has in the exertion of power. Through his writings, Bentley demonstrates a desire to take an active role in these movements and encourages their challenge to established power relations, yet keeps himself at a respectable distance as he ponders the role of the intellectual in radical social movements. Perhaps this was the motivation for his choice to leave academia, as he denies that it was in response to the Columbia University's handling of the student uprising. Nevertheless, I believe the decision changed his position within the power structure and was possibly an attempt to disassociate from the establishment. His various actions during this era are part of his goal of being a "voice of reason amid the clamor of the world's irrationality."
CHAPTER FOUR

"Gay is Not Queer"

By the start of the 1970s, Eric Bentley comes out, leaves academia, and decides to seriously pursue his playwriting ambitions. It is during this time that homosexuality emerges at the forefront of his critical and dramatic writing, as evidenced in essays such as "Men's Liberation" (1972) and plays such as Lord Alfred's Lover (1981). Bentley states that he felt same-sex desire at an early age, and I believe it is possible to discern traces of these suppressed desires in writings published before he came out. His critical and dramatic works display a number of contradictions in regard to sexuality, which points to the undecidability of his sexual identity. Bentley identifies this instability in terms of doubleness, "The dualism characteristic of my life in general made my sexual experience and inexperience also ambiguous and contradictory" (Brecht Memoir 471). These ambiguities and contradictions are most directly evidenced by his contrasting experiences as a closeted husband and father and as an openly gay man writing about the politics of homosexuality.

In this chapter, I endeavor to illustrate how, through his writings, Bentley performs the action of closeting himself for decades, eventually coming out as a gay public intellectual and artist. Additionally, I believe his writings are imbued with the social and sexual discourses in circulation at the time they were created. As someone whose earliest homosexual impulses occur in the 1930s and continue throughout the century, his writings involve the conflicts and negotiations of sexual identity transpiring during the post-Victorian era, Cold War, Gay Liberation movement, and AIDS crisis. I believe social contexts play a significant role in how

31 See Bentley on Brecht (464).
sexuality is expressed, and are therefore influential in how Bentley views and expresses sexuality. In this chapter, I utilize gender studies and queer theory to examine sexual discourses at play in Bentley's critical and dramatic work.

"Prettily Vacuous Laughter"

Once Bentley begins to write openly about sexualities in the late 1960s, his work becomes increasingly forthcoming about his homosexual identity throughout the following decades. The expanding presence of discourse concerning sexuality in his writings, plays, and interviews has been referenced in recent critical examinations of homosexuality in his work. Daniel-Raymond Nadon's essay, "The Gay Man As Thinker: Eric Bentley's Many Closets," provides detailed analysis of the expression of homosexual desire in Bentley's plays and criticism. Nadon sets out to examine "the dynamics by which Bentley, for decades, closeted himself through indirect and coded expression and containment of his identity and then gradually came out in plays as well as essays" (288). In this view, Bentley's entire career functions as an extension of his suppressed desires, attempts at concealment, and eventual coming out. Nadon explains the extent to which he believes Bentley closeted himself:

As a critic, he could assume the pose of a figure more powerful than the vulnerable playwright. His posing allowed him to work within the status quo, within the political and social system. In doing so he was able to attain higher status, respect, and position. However, beneath these posings, one could find Bentley the artist, Bentley, the oppressed individual, angry, lashing out against an intolerant system. In his criticism, and increasingly as his repressed voice began
to be heard in his plays, he championed underdog characters and disenfranchised
groups and criticized the social order for being rigid and oppressive. (297)

Nadon posits Bentley as a tormented and closeted homosexual artist posing as an influential and
straight drama critic. I believe his view presupposes an essentialist notion of identity in that it
suggests Bentley was concealing his gay identity throughout the first half of his life and only
revealed his true self after coming out. In my way of thinking, this view of identity places too
little emphasis on the role sociopolitical discourses play in the construction of sexualities.
However, despite my criticism of Nadon's approach to sexuality, his essay identifies homosexual
discourses within Bentley's writings and will be referenced throughout this chapter.

In contrast to Nadon's ostensibly essentialist view of sexuality, I adhere to a
constructionist view of sexuality, which posits sexualities (homosexual, heterosexual, or
otherwise) as constructed within a specific social and ideological context. In short, one's
sexuality is produced according to the available social discourses. Queer theorist and cultural
materialist, Alan Sinfeld explains how sexuality is constructed through ideological networks:

 Sexual identity depends not on a deep-set self-hood (though it may feel
 otherwise), but on one's particular situation within the framework of
 understanding that makes certain, divers, possibilities available; which makes
 some ideas plausible and others not. This is the ideological network that we use
to explain our worlds. (Wilde Century 11)

Available ideological networks—or discourses—greatly affect the manner in which human
beings explain their sexuality. Specifically, I argue that Bentley's shifting sexual identity is
directly connected to changes in sexual discourses occurring throughout the twentieth century.
His coming out coincides with the Stonewall Riots, the rise of Gay Liberation, and other major
events concerning gay rights. Similarly, his writings from the 1940s and 1950s reflect a view of homosexuality in accordance with Cold War era sexual discourse. Throughout this chapter, I examine Bentley's writings on sexuality with an eye toward the mutable nature of sexual identity and its construction within specific social and ideological contexts.

Much of the discourse involving homosexuality throughout the past century deals with what is commonly referred to as "the closet." Closets are generally characterized by the related actions of concealment and repression, or holding back one's impulses and desires by adopting the poses of heteronormativity. While the closet mostly involves sexual desire, it may also include the concealment of various other aspects of one's identity. In his essay, Nadon equates Bentley's closeting of homosexual desire to his latent playwriting ambitions:

The act of criticism, instructing playwrights on how to write their plays effectively, creates in essence a closeted playwright. Bentley criticized the content, themes, structure, and character development of the best playwrights of the twentieth century. The passion and precision with which he criticized plays reveal his desire to rewrite the great authors. In the act of criticism, Bentley exhibited a hidden desire and subjugated identity. (Nadon 290)

According to Nadon, the closet characterizes Bentley’s entire personal and professional existence prior to the late sixties. Nadon associates the concealment of sexual impulses with the suppression of desires related to intellectual and artistic expression, all of which is related to a general concealment of the self that presupposes a denied essential identity.

While I believe there is validity to Nadon's assertion that the first half of Bentley's career was marked by "hidden desire and subjugated identity," I believe this closeting is possibly more indicative of a broader cultural epoch than a deep seeded identity. The dialectic of suppression
and disclosure are present within a multitude of discourses from the past century including artistic expressions, medical disciplines, and legal frameworks. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick relates the closeting of same-sex desire to broader issues of concealment within western society over the past century:

I want to argue that a lot of the energy of attention and demarcation that has swirled around issues of homosexuality since the end of the nineteenth century, in Europe and the United States, has been impelled by the distinctively indicative relation of homosexuality to wider mappings of secrecy and disclosure, and of the private and public, that were and are critically problematical for the gender, sexual, and economic structures of the heterosexist culture at large, mappings whose enabling but dangerous incoherence has become oppressively, durable condensed in certain figures of homosexuality. "The closet" and "coming out," now verging on all-purpose phrases for the potent crossing and recrossing of almost any politically charged lines of representation, have been the gravest and most magnetic of those figures. (*Epistemology of the Closet* 71)

The pervasiveness of suppression and disclosure throughout western society extends to the major figures of mid-twentieth century theatre in the United States, such as Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. Therefore, it is no surprise that Bentley's writings about these playwrights tend to focus on what is concealed beneath the surface, sexuality for Williams and politics for Miller. At the same time, much of his writing on earlier modernists—Ibsen, Shaw, Wilde—and various socio-political phenomena from throughout his lifetime deals with suppression as well.

It is precisely this confluence of the personal, social, political, and artistic closet that makes his experience emblematic of broader cultural trends.
Before moving forward with specific examples from Bentley's writings, I will examine various theories foundational to contemporary sex and gender studies in order to explicate my analysis of the sexual discourses at play within his life and work. Michel Foucault's generative study, *The History of Sexuality*, provides a compelling lens through which to view the constructed nature of human sexuality and is the basis for many contemporary approaches to sexualities. Foucault traces how contemporary notions of sexuality are brought about during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, deeply rooted in Victorian ideals and dependant on the concealment/disclosure duality. According to Foucault, sexual practices viewed by established scientific, psychological, and biological discourses as natural or biological are in fact products of discourse, language, and social frameworks. He describes his target as "that often-stated theme, that sex is outside of discourse and that only the removing of an obstacle, the breaking of a secret, can clear the way leading to it" (34). The mutable nature of discourse has resulted in differing conceptions of sexuality, rooted in specific times, locations, and social contexts. In this view, sexuality is not delivered from some deep-seeded essential self, but rather manufactured through social mechanisms. Foucault notes the complexity of operations involved in the production of sexuality, "We are dealing less with a discourse on sex than with a multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions" (33). This understanding allows for a nuanced examination of way in which Eric Bentley incorporated and produced sexual discourses, particularly through his writing.

This multiplicity of discourses contradicts what Foucault refers to as the *repressive hypothesis*, or the prevalent idea that sexuality has been primarily repressed during recent Western history. In fact, Foucault asserts that modern Western societies have produced an obsessive amount of sexual discourse when he states, "What is peculiar to modern societies, in
fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as the secret" (35). He outlines a timeline for the production of sexuality that coincides with the rise of modernism and industrialism. Instead of refusing to recognize sexuality, the capitalist, bourgeois, industrial society of the nineteenth century "put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it" (69). This machinery involves religious institutions, medical fields, legal frameworks, family relationships, and other social apparatuses. Eric Bentley's sexuality, like that of everyone else, is largely a product of this social machinery. His writings simultaneously conceal, reinscribe, subvert, and produce sexual discourse. In the following excerpt from a 1991 interview, Bentley expresses awareness of the role language plays in the construction of sexual identity:

> In the past there could be homosexual activity, but it didn't make the active person a 'homosexual.' And the change in language makes the past very hard to get at. If a naive modern person says, 'Where are the homosexuals in the past?' they are nowhere because the word is nowhere. (DiGaetani 89)

One might rightfully argue that same-sex desire—what we now refer to as homosexuality—existed well before the emergence of the classification "homosexual" in the late nineteenth century; however, contemporary gender studies argues that sexual activities were not used as the basis of identity. The notion that one should be defined by his or her sexual activity is a modernist discourse based upon a specific pathology.

In many of his writings from throughout his career, but particularly after he comes out, Bentley argues against reductive definitions of sexuality. In the 1981 preface to his play *Lord Alfred's Lover*, he remarks upon the limitations of words to act as signifiers for a sexual identity:
No heterosexual thinks himself defined by the heterosexual label, whereas we homosexuals are considered to be defined by nothing else: we are those strange yes, queer—people who, in bed, perform antics A, B, and C. The word gay is less clinical but hardly more flattering. While it conveys the salutary notion—to be elaborated below—that it is very important not to be earnest, it also, alas, comes down to us in an aura of curly blond hair, blue eyes, and prettily vacuous laughter.

This statement points to the reductive nature of using sexualities as the clinical basis for identifying certain activities as deviant. Bentley also hints at the ubiquity of sexual discourse, particularly the almost maniacal importance "heterosexualists" place upon defining, codifying, and reinscribing deviant sexual practices. Bentley describes the straight world's fascination with gay sex:

A heterosexualist world decides that nonheterosexuals, though to all appearances human beings, are to be defined purely by their sexual acts: they will be deservedly diminished by such definition. What, however, that same heterosexualist world really resents about nonheterosexuals is that they refuse to limit sex to what has been its primary physical meaning: procreation. (Lord Alfred's Lover 13)

This ability to define prohibited sexual activity and subsequently identify human beings based upon their performance of those sexual activities is an exercise of power. It involves pleasure related to sexual desire and to the power enacted through the control of sexual activity. In this sense, definitions of sexual identity have implications far beyond a simple identification of activities carried out behind closed doors.
Foucault examines the power exercised through sexual discourse and identifies the double impetus of the *pleasure and power* mechanism as the primary driving force behind the production of sexuality in modern society (45). These mechanisms exert power through the pathologization of activities deemed perverse; this exertion of power generates pleasure for individual subjects performing various roles in the process. Foucault explains the "perpetual spirals of pleasure and power," which aid the proliferation of sexual discourse:

The medical examination, the psychiatric investigation, the pedagogical report, and family controls may have the over-all and apparent objective of saying no to all wayward or unproductive sexualities, but the fact is that they function as mechanisms with a double impetus: pleasure and power. The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power (45).

It is important to note that pleasure and power do not serve an oppositional binary function, reducing participants into oppressor/oppressed roles. Foucault hints at the complexities inherent in these relationships: "Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement" (48). This view allows for a more nuanced investigation of how sexual discourse is produced by both the "sexual scientists" and their subjects.

While there are certainly countless examples of oppression on the basis of sexual identity, power is not monolithic or limited to negative and repressive actions. The act of creating discourse—naming sexual acts, preferences, and perversions—allows groups and individuals to
appropriate this language for potentially subversive ends. In the case of homosexuality, discourses produced over the past two centuries effectively repressed and exerted control over acts of "sodomy." However, it has also, "made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (101). The labels used by dominant socio-political forces to identify homosexuals as "perverts" may also be used by the homosexuals themselves to define pleasure, seek out other like-minded individuals, and resist oppression. From the Foucauldian standpoint, power is accessible to all players within the field of force relations, is far-reaching, but at the same time unstable.

Judith Butler employs Foucault's theories of sexuality to define sex itself, in addition to gender, as dependant upon a particular context. Instead of viewing sex as a natural or inherent fixture of biological identity, she suggests, "the body gains meaning within discourse only in the context of power relations" (Gender Trouble 117). Additionally for Butler, gender identities are produced by sexuality, which is "an historically specific organization of power, discourse, bodies, and affectivity" (117). This view of sexuality renders categories such as heterosexual/homosexual or male/female, which are seemingly discrete and inherent, as manufactured binaries with little actual resemblance to lived experience. Furthermore, Butler identifies gender as a "restrictive discourse" that wields "regulatory" operation that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption" (Undoing Gender 43). Sexuality and gender are present in all manner of discourse; however, theatre performance is particularly concerned with the public representation of sexuality. Bentley identifies a longstanding relationship between theatre and homosexual identity, "There was a homosexual
component in theatre long before there were plays about it, long before the term "homosexuality" (DiGaetani 89). He implies that throughout western history, theatre performance plays a key role in testing the limits of gender roles and sexual discourse. Later in this chapter, I use Bentley's theatre reviews as evidence of his awareness of theatre's position in the negotiation of sexual identity.

Butler identifies compulsory heterosexuality as a primary vehicle for the hegemonic regulation of identities that fall outside of the restrictive discourses of gender and sexuality. She rejects compulsory heterosexuality as an oppressive construction that renders homosexuality and other unsanctioned sexual identities as outside normative behavior. Butler describes the heterosexual norm as an impossible ideal:

Heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy. Indeed, I would offer this insight into heterosexuality as both a compulsory system and an intrinsic comedy, a constant parody of itself, as an alternative gay/lesbian perspective. (Butler 155)

This notion of heterosexuality as an intrinsic comedy is particularly useful from an artistic standpoint, in that much of the performance and literature considered sexually subversive is characterized by a satirical tone.

Butler entertains the question of whether or not the subversion of gender and sexuality is possible within the established power structure. She echoes Foucault's assertion that subversion must arise from within the present field of power relations:
If subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself. The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its "natural" past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities. (Butler 119)

This investigation of the radical potential of alternative gender and sexual identities relates to the broader subversion/containment question examined by Sinfeld and the cultural materialists. Butler's forward-thinking assessment of the future possibilities for gender and sexual identity addresses the primary research questions posed by Alan Sinfeld in *The Wilde Century,* "If deviant identities are produced by the dominant ideology in ways that police sexualities, containing dissidence, how is a radical lesbian or gay identity to arise?" (15). Perhaps the answer to this question resides in the inherent instability of power relations; no matter how dominant ideological formations may appear, they must constantly change and incorporate new discourses in order to survive. It is in this refashioning of power relations that subaltern identities may carve out identities and reconstruct sexualities.

Much of the contemporary criticism that follows Foucault's notions of gender and sexuality—Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, et al.—falls into the category of queer theory. Queer theorists set out to redraw sexual identities and call attention to the ever-shifting nature of power relations and gender discourses. Queer studies involve readings of various kinds of texts—including those not overtly concerned with sexuality—for traces of gender instability and undecidability. In "The Queer as Drama Critic," Charles McNulty describes the transformative potential of queer theory, which "doesn't wish to rebuild hierarchical structures, but raze them through an ever-present consciousness of their temporality and their political utility" (McNulty
18). Queer theory is particularly malleable in that it expands the scope of gender studies to incorporate post-structural inquiry and refashion hegemonic identities. A seemingly endless array of identities—which may or may not involve sexuality and gender—are the subject of queer analysis. McNulty describes the broad scope of queerness:

The term Queer is manifold; it seeks to encompass that which has been excluded, ridiculed, oppressed. Life caught in the margins. Sex yes, and sexuality, but also gender, race, class, and that which refuses easy taxonomy and suffers the fate of difference. A philosophy never fixed nor realized, but a politics of shared struggle, and a striving for community. (McNulty 12)

This description highlights the inclusiveness of queer theory, which is useful in examining the role of sexual identity within culture at large. While this study primarily focuses on Bentley's more overt expressions of sexuality, I adopt the queer position that stable identity is a construction and ultimately illusionary. Specifically, I suggest that the term queer, as it is used contemporarily, best describes Bentley's position as an outsider politically, socially, and artistically. His is an example of "life caught in the margins" of gay/straight, critic/playwright, and radical/establishmentarian.

The emergence of queer theory has been met with a degree of skepticism by many individuals who identify as gay and lesbian on the basis that it subverts the very identities many within the homosexual community fought to establish by labeling them as social constructions. If all sexual and gender categories are the unstable invention of power relations, all manner of individual and group identities are subverted. In light of this, resistance to post-structural queer theory is perfectly understandable. Alan Sinfeld describes this conflict: "A line is often drawn between lesbian and gay, which are supposed to be stuck in the old ways, and queer, which
cultivates hitherto marginalized or stigmatized practices—bisexuality, transvestism, transsexualism, sadomasochism" (*Cultural Politics* x). Bentley identifies himself as at odds with queer theory. When I spoke with him in the summer of 2009, Bentley articulated his misgivings about the word "queer" itself:

I'm of an older generation and cannot accept the word queer. It gives me a bad feeling. Even "gay" I didn't like so much in the beginning. I though it was based on an illusion that we're all gay in the classic sense: that we're all blonde and blue-eyed, sweet, and frivolous. But I had to accept it. There isn't a good word. Homosexual and heterosexual are all so ponderous and sound so scientific. I know I'm not answering your question, but I just haven't gotten used to the word. I don't want to regard myself as queer, or odd. My thesis is that gay is not "queer," it's the boy next door.

Bentley's opposition to the use of "queer" as a reclaimed word stems from its association with homophobic discourse; an association he is unable to overlook. Additionally, as someone who spent more than half of his life coming to terms with his sexuality, establishing an identity only after decades of struggle, his desire to explain that identity in his own terms is certainly understandable. As noted later in this chapter, he refers to himself as being bisexual at certain points in his life, but has identified as exclusively homosexual for more than the past forty years.

In spite of the seemingly oppositional relationship between queerness and identity politics, the inconsistencies between the two positions are not insuperable. One may utilize the investigative potential of queer theory without a wholesale rejection of identity, allowing for the importance of individual and group identities while acknowledging their constructedness. As Sinfeld notes, "To live without an identity, or even with a seriously conflicted identity, is
"The Worst of Crimes"

In the 1988 postscript to *The Brecht Memoir*, Bentley presents a narrative of his personal background that is very forthcoming about his early awareness of homosexual desire. He expresses a distinctly Freudian assessment of his childhood experiences, specifically the powerful male figure of a doctor removing lumps from his neck while his mother stood and watched. He describes the image from his memory, "The gestalt of this little scene was burned into my consciousness and my unconsciousness: one's self as infant in the baby chair, the all-powerful male Giant-with-the-knife poised for the fatal blow, and, in the background, the mourning mother . . . accepting impotence as her role" (464). While Bentley does not go so far as to pinpoint this moment as the root cause of his homosexuality, he identifies the memory as a powerful influence in his view of sexuality. He identifies his mother's presence as a significant element of the memory, coloring his awareness of power within gender relations. Similarly, he
describes his mother as possessing an early awareness of his feelings toward those of the same sex:

I don't know if she knew about homosexuals, but when I was fifteen or so I had a big crush on a boy in my class at Bolton School, and Mother went to consult the only woman teacher there. She was worried about us keeping company too much. We were not having sex. I had already played with other boys' genitals now and then, but I didn't connect those small events with the adoration I now felt for Derek. I would go to his home and instead of playing games or talking we would just lie together on the couch, touching but not carnally. I've seldom had more blissful hours than those. (471)

In terms of Bentley's narrative of his sexual awareness, this experience played a formative role in his understanding of same-sex desire. While he "didn't connect those small events" to his feelings toward his classmate, his mother and teacher's attention to the matter signified how his desire would be proscribed. These memories are early examples of how, in his view, authority figures would determine and proscribe acceptable sexualities throughout his life.

In his 1982 essay, "On Hating the Other Sex," Bentley recounts his experiences as a graduate student at Yale in the early 1940s and feeling attraction toward a male undergraduate student. While the only actions taken upon these feelings were glances, smiles and hellos, the extra attention from an older graduate student prompted the undergraduate student to complain to a university administrator. Bentley recalls the subtle wording of a letter from the Dean of Freshmen, asking him to cease giving the young man unwelcome attention:

Might the Dean suggest, then, that his ward Fred be spared such attention in the future? That was all. No accusation. No mention of the hovering crime against
nature. It is probably the mildest communication I have ever received on a non-mild subject, a masterpiece of gentlemanly tact, worldly wisdom, and WASP reticence. And it had the intended effect: it scared me out of my wits. (67)

Bentley points to this singular event as a consciousness raising moment, both in terms of his sexuality and the social prohibition against those desires. He attests to the lessons learned from the experience, "To love persons of the same sex was to lead the worst of lives. To give that love physical expression was to commit the worst of crimes . . . This much Yale had taught its star graduate student of that year" (68). In this incident, simple glances and brief verbal exchanges, by no means overtly sexual, are cast as the first step in a chain of events that might lead to prohibited homosexual acts. In his narrative of the events, Bentley suggests that he did not necessarily define his attraction to the young man as sexual—or homosexual—in nature, therefore the Dean's letter acts as a subtle accusation that both identifies and forbids certain unspoken desires.

Bentley's latent homosexuality came under close scrutiny when the U.S. Army drafted him shortly after he gained citizenship in 1942. He recalls going through a psychological interview while sitting in a military facility, stripped down to his "jockey shorts:"

When he asked if I was attracted to persons of my own sex, I thought it would be odd, as well as mendacious, to say no, even though at the time I was engaged to be married. My reply, however, made him very nervous, and he quickly turned me over to uniformed officers. One of them was aggressive, eager to check out if I was lying to evade the draft . . . he handed me over to a colleague delegated to try the opposite approach: coaxing and suspiciously androgynous, he seemed to
caress my shoulders while calling me Eric and asking if the sight of a good-looking young man gave me an erection.  (*Bentley on Brecht* 476)

This story is an example of a powerful institution simultaneously identifying, encouraging and prohibiting same-sex desire in an attempt to pathologize and control sexual behavior. Once Bentley acknowledges feelings of attraction to other men, the military authority figures coax further confession in order to impose sanctions. He describes the degradation felt during the experience:

I was released. I had, however, to be formally allowed through a military checkpoint where the clerk put a capital H against my name, while his friends, crowding around him to read his papers, cried: "Homo, another Homo!" I was staggering uncertainly as I left the building, and when I reached the sidewalk outside I had to lean on the wall for support. (*Bentley on Brecht* 476)

When he entered the building, Bentley thought of himself as a man who sometimes experienced attraction to other men, but was engaged to marry a woman and therefore in agreement with societal norms. Upon leaving the interview, he was derided as a "homo" and cast as a sexual deviant unfit for military service.

Despite his homosexual tendencies, Bentley was eventually useful to the U.S. military who brought him to Germany as part of the Berlin Airlift. He remarks on the irony of the event, "The same U.S. Army that on principle excluded homosexuals had actually let quite a few in and was now hunting them up so they could be "Cultural Officers" and run the culture of occupied Germany" (412). While the army did see fit for men who experienced same-sex desire to participate in active warfare, the perception of gay or effeminate men as artistically inclined
meant that they would be useful as cultural ambassadors. This episode is further evidence of the role powerful institutions play in the construction of gender roles and sexual identities.

Bentley's experiences at Yale and with the U.S. Army effectively defined the proscribed limits of sexuality within society. The social frame was established with a minimum of discourse—the letter from the Dean of Freshmen and the accusations of Army officer—yet Bentley's same-sex desire was quickly subsumed by the need to conform. He describes his decision to repress his homosexual tendencies:

> If Society let me, I could love members of my own sex. Society, I gathered, would not let me. But I was not at the end of my rope because I had also received a keen impression that I would love members of the "opposite" sex, and it seemed as if Society had given its stamp of approval to that in advance, had promised, indeed, to confer every kind of congratulation and reward upon proven and consummated heterosexuality. (The Kleist Variations 68)

With that, Bentley adopts the pose of heteronormativity for the sake of continued privilege. As Daniel Raymond Nadon remarks, "He discovered that to become successful, one must assimilate. This was the prevailing mode of living he adopted for more than thirty years" (289). He was labeled as a homosexual multiple times during his childhood and early life and such labels tend to have a performative affect, shaping the way a person defines himself or herself. Gender theorists such as Butler and Sedgwick have demonstrated that sexuality is produced by contextually dependent discourses, which implies that one becomes a homosexual when the label is designated. In the case of Bentley, a parent, a teacher, Yale, and the U.S. Army applied and reinscribed the label as part of his constructed identity. Bentley's writings on sexuality appear to reflect the changing cultural views of homosexuality; closeted and coded throughout the middle
part of the century and gradually coming out by the end of the 1960s. His writings are indicative of the shifting social frameworks concerning homosexuality, which include significant changes in the prohibitions against same-sex desire.

Much of Bentley's life in the closet was spent during the Cold War, an era marked by strictly enforced conformity. The perception of the ever-present threat of communism resulted in a demand for social conformism in a wide range of personal activities including sexuality. Alan Sinfeld remarks upon the politics of masculinity during the era, "The Cold War made it specially necessary to control sexual dissidence for, even more than battle conditions, it depended on the ideological—spiritual, moral—determination of U.S. people. They had to establish the superiority of "the American way of life" over communism" (Cultural Politics 41). In fact, McCarthy and the anti-communists pursued homosexuals to a degree rivaling their obsession with communists. Sinfeld explains the perceived threat, "queers (I use the word of the time) undermined family values and the frontier vision of the manly man" (Cultural Politics 41). The decades following World War II are marked by nearly constant harassment of homosexuals by government and law enforcement officials in the form of arrests, witch hunts, and bar raids, which were justified as a necessary measure for national security.

The perception of threat and subsequent oppression of homosexuality is largely based upon what R. W. Connell labels "hegemonic masculinity," which establishes its superiority through the subjugation of "various subordinated masculinities" (183). The projection of a hyper-masculinity—demonstrated throughout popular culture of the era, most ubiquitously through the frontier cowboy image—is a central element of the militaristic posturing associated with United States' foreign policy. In his 1972 essay, "Men's Liberation," Bentley names hegemonic masculinity as a societal ill, "The enemy is the Man, the supermale, John Wayne or
Spiro Agnew. There is no woman problem; there is only a man problem" (Theatre of War 329). Bentley was not quite as forthcoming in his opposition to hyper-masculinity during the previous two decades, which is understandable given the socio-political climate. However, his writings from that period, including his theatre reviews for The New Republic, contain a number of references to gender and sexuality.

In "Pathetic Phalluses" (1953), Bentley examines eroticism involving the male body in the plays of Tennessee Williams and William Inge. He suggests that the presentation of the sexualized male form is part of a broader movement, "The torn shirt of Stanley Kowalski is no mere fact in another author's story, it is a symbol, a banner, an oriflamme. It stands for the new phallus worship" (What is Theatre 72). Unfortunately, he does not offer a definition of phallus worship as a broader cultural expression outside of the theatre. However, his acknowledgement that signifiers of male sexuality are commonplace is significant. His attention to this overt display of the sexualized male body implies recognition of same sex desire, but does not go so far as to suggest that these representations undermine hegemonic masculinity. In fact, he criticizes the playwrights' for writing shallow characters defined by their physical prowess:

There is of course no denying that a hero has a body and that it is a male body. What is remarkable in certain plays of Tennessee Williams and William Inge is that so much is made of the hero's body and that he has so little else. The rose that, for Mr. Eliot, is rooted in so deeply and broadly human a garden blooms, for Mr. Williams, on the bared chest of quasi-primitive man. (What is Theatre 72)

This and other criticisms regarding the use of the sexualized male body also contain detailed descriptions of the performances. In his review of Julius Caesar, he refers to Marlon Brando as "the most beautiful man of the American stage," whose "handsome body" is an essential element
of his performance (What is Theatre 105). While Bentley finds fault with overt representations of male sexuality on stage, he simultaneously draws attention to it by making it a central topic of his criticism.

Doug Arrell examines anti-homosexuality in Cold War era theatre criticism in his 2009 essay, "'Let id prevail over ego!': The Specter of Gay Nihilism in American Drama Criticism of the 1960s." He suggests, "while many critics complained of the misogyny and dishonesty of gay male artists, among some there was a deeper concern that their work was profoundly anti-humanistic and posed an imminent danger to American civilization" (7). Arrell briefly references Bentley's criticism of the sexualized male body in the work of homosexual playwrights; however, neglects to acknowledge that Bentley was himself a closeted gay man at the time those reviews were written. He identifies Bentley's "Pathetic Phalluses" as an example of criticism that is dismissive of gay playwrights: "Like later critics also, Bentley suggests that there is something false or 'pseudo' about the masculinity portrayed by homosexual playwrights" (10). While I agree that Bentley takes issue with the many representation of male sexuality and homosexuality on stage during the mid-twentieth century, I do not view him as complicit in Arrell's hypothesis that homosexual playwrights were "profoundly anti-humanistic" or a threat to U.S. national security. If anything, Bentley was opposed to the sensationalism and voyeurism he perceived as part of these performances.

In his essay "Homosexuality" (1955), Bentley examines Ruth and Augustus Goetz's The Immoralist, which adapts André Gide's 1902 novel and shifts the focus of the play to homosexuality. The plot revolves around Michel, a newly married young man who struggles to contain his homosexual desires. The subject matter of the play was highly controversial when it was first produced in 1954. Bentley remarks on the play's sensationalism:
The Goetzes wanted to write about homosexuality. Who doesn't? It is the subject of the hour. Why? Is homosexuality spreading or are we simply more and more aware of it? Unanswerable questions! What we may more profitably ask is where any pronouncement on the subject stands in the evolution of a more rational attitude to it. (What is Theatre 149)

He continues by mocking the audience, who he believes to lack the political commitment to force social changes:

There is a kind of liberalism which is safely reactionary. If offers you all the soft and self-congratulatory emotion of reformism without demanding that you run the risks. The chief trick of the pseudo-liberal is to fare boldly forward toward the heroic goal, then slink quietly off at the last moment in the hope that no one is looking. (What is Theatre 150)

In reading his review of The Immoralist, one might have reason to suspect Bentley of having a personal stake in the greater acceptance of homosexuality. While the desire for a more equitable society is by no means an indication of same-sex desire, the passionate tenor of his argument suggests a perceived connection to the subject matter. At the very least, the representation of homosexuality is an ongoing theme in Bentley's criticism from this era.

In "Tennessee Williams and New York Kazan" (1955), Bentley examines homosexual themes within the original production of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. He disparages the play's focus on sexuality as the most important feature in the characters' lives and questions the notion that it advances progressive views of homosexuality. He writes, "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof was heralded by some as the play in which homosexuality was at last to be presented without evasions on the author's part. The miracle has still not happened" (What is Theatre 228). Bentley uses the
previous action of Skipper's relationships with Brick and Maggie as evidence of a limited view of same-sex desire. He points to Skipper's "arbitrary" decision to go to bed with Maggie in order to "prove his is not homosexual" and his resulting suicide as overwrought melodrama. He explains, "In the circumstances we can hardly be surprised that he proves impotent; yet he reaches the startlingly excessive conclusion that he is homosexual; and kills himself" (What is Theatre 228). The circumstances of the suicide lead Bentley to question whether Williams' view of sexual identity is overly simplistic. He asks, "Surely the author can't be assuming that a man is either a hundred per cent heterosexual or a hundred per cent homosexual?" (What is Theatre 229). In this review, Bentley acts as a voice for those with closeted same-sex desire who find themselves caught between the hetero/homosexual binary.

In this same essay—and others as well—Bentley expresses a particular fondness for director Elia Kazan that goes well beyond the usual level of commendation given to an accomplished director. He suggests that the successes of plays such as Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, A Streetcar Named Desire, and Death of a Salesman are due to Kazan's directing ability, "What Mr. Kazan is able to do with a bald head, a rumpled suit, and trousers that sit rather low on the hips, might almost, were the word not so inflammatory, be called co-authorship" (What is Theatre 227). In the essay "Camino Unreal," he lavishes perhaps his most generous praise of Kazan's work:

Mr. Kazan's most commendable quality is a simple one: he is a showman . . .

Even if I knew I was to witness a hateful interpretation of a hateful play, I would await any Kazan production with considerable eagerness. For Mr. Kazan's name in the program guarantees an evening of—at the very least—brilliant theatre work at a high emotional temperature. (What is Theatre 76)
Nadon goes so far as to suggest Bentley "was enamored of Elia Kazan," but that his "admiration for the director seems to have remained platonic and veiled behind professional flattery" (292-3). I believe that Nadon is participating in a bit of conjecture by making this claim. While Bentley clearly has admiration for Kazan as a director, and perhaps affection that could be described as homosocial, this does not necessarily imply homosexual desire. However, the fact that he was closeted at the time prompts one to view his writings in the context of the closet, thereby drawing such conclusions.

From the perspective of the closet, the fact that many of Bentley's plays examine themes related to concealment becomes particularly significant. Bentley's English language libretto for Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld* (1956), examines themes related to forbidden desire. In the notes to the libretto, Bentley frames the primary theme of the opera in terms of sexuality, "The opera presents, if not a complete survey of cultural patterns on Olympus, at least an exact account of what might be called the sex life of the human god" (33). Bentley's Orpheus wishes to forsake Eurydice in favor of Chloe, another married woman; however, his characterization is that of the queer outsider. Bentley describes Orpheus, "A wounded and sensitive soul, a poor and mixed-up kid . . . He is both the Common Man with all his captivating mediocrity and that wonderfully ambiguous Suffering Artist whose Suffering and Artistry we can despise and admire in delicious alternation" (34).

The image of the homosexual as a sad young man is often seen as present in a number of pre-modern narratives including Saint Sebastian and Orpheus. Contemporary artists and scholars often draw upon this kind of imagery in order to historicize same-sex desire. In "Bisexual Orpheus," John F. Makowski examines the role of homoeroticism within Ovid's rendering of the Orpheus myth. He argues, "Ovid's purpose here is to undermine the Vergilian characterization
of Orpheus by satirizing him as an effeminate, gynophobic pederast" (27). Bentley satirizes the Orpheus myth in his libretto, offering a parody of traditional monogamous marriage. In the resolution of the plot, Orpheus and Eurydice remain married, which might suggest a reinscription of heteronormativity. Nadon suggests that the play endorses the continuation of a closeted existence, "The lessons are clear. Self-control and self-restraint must prevail, the same as with the rules of the closet" (297). While the libretto's conclusion preserves an uncommitted marriage, Bentley implies that both characters explore sexuality outside of matrimony:

So the story has a new ending. Orpheus does not turn round, and does not lose Eurydice. On the contrary, she returns with him to Greece. Informed sources have it that she is with him to this very day, even though when Orpheus reaches over for her in the middle of the night she isn't always there to be reached. (34)

While the characters maintain the facade of a sanctioned marriage, they secretly pursue their hidden desires outside of public view. While this resolution tacitly endorses the concealment of subaltern sexualities, it also promotes the subversion of normative controls.

Bentley's 1960 English language version of Frank Wedekind's Spring's Awakening continues on the theme of subversive sexuality. In his notes to the published version of the play, he finds fault with the way past productions diluted sexual themes within the script. He explains, "Where a boy should kiss another boy, thus openly showing his feelings, an actor, in a

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32 When I spoke with him, I asked about his opinions on the 2006 musical adaptation, Spring Awakening: "They had lots of young audiences, which must have consisted of the sons and daughters of the affluent—they were paying the Broadway prices. . . . Teenagers seeing teenage sex on the Broadway stage, access to which provided and paid-for by their parents, validates that sex in a way not available to Wedekind."
production I saw, simply shared his cigarette with his partner, a gesture which incidentally made the characters seem much older than kissing would have" (xiv). Bentley's version of the play does not conceal or adulterate Wedekind's portrayal of adolescent sexuality or same-sex desire. In fact, he identifies the homosexual attraction between two of the boys, Melchior and Moritz as, "the finest relationship in the play" (xxviii). It is distinctly possible that Bentley's interest in Wedekind's play was at least partly based upon its treatment of homosexuality. By reintroducing Spring's Awakening—considered scandalous and banned at the time it was written—Bentley is able to contribute to homosexual discourse.

In 1968-69, Bentley recorded a 12" LP for Smithsonian Folkways entitled, "Eric Bentley sings 'The Queen of 42nd Street' and other songs by Jacques Prevert and Joseph Kosma," which I believe is a significant work in his reinvention as an openly gay man. The purple album cover features a photograph of Bentley juxtaposed with the title, of which the most prominent words read: "Eric Bentley—The Queen of 42nd Street." In the title song, Bentley sings a Prevert song written for a female singer from a male perspective. The lyrics are far from ambiguous in regards to sexuality:

This is the way I am. Yes, I'm just made this way
And when I want to laugh, why then, I laugh all day
I dig the guy that digs me, so how am I to blame
If the guy that digs me is not every night the same?
Well, that's the way I am, I'm made this way, you see
And what more do you want? What do you want from me?

"The Queen of 42nd Street" involves camp performance and interpretations of French cabaret songs with numerous lyrics containing thinly veiled references to same-sex desire. While
Bentley claims to not have intended to make the recording a public declaration of his sexuality, the aesthetic choices involved in the record are in keeping with popular ideas of homosexual behavior.

"The Passion of Fraternity"

Bentley's coming-out in the late-sixties coincided with a wide array of social movements, most notably the Gay Liberation Movement. In June 1970 he published his response to Carl Wittman's "Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto" entitled "Letter to the Movement: Beyond Defensiveness" in the New Left periodical *Liberation*. Wittman's manifesto appeared in the *San Francisco Free Press* on 7 January 1970 and addressed numerous sociopolitical issues faced by the gay community. The essay is essentially a "bill of rights" for the homosexual community, with the added goal of developing a unified political consciousness for the gay rights movement. Early in the essay, Wittman draws attention to the construction of sexual desire, "Nature leaves undefined the object of sexual desire. The gender of that object had been imposed socially" (158). He then relates the taboo against homosexuality to societal needs such as procreation, and then connects the ending of that prohibition to social problems such as overpopulation. Bentley also casts the taboo against homosexuality as based upon cultural norms, "We are against formalism, and hostility to homosexuality is nothing if not formalistic, being based on the feeling that what matters is the posture, the gesture, which protuberance is placed in which orifice on bodies of which sex, etcetera" (42). In this statement, Bentley aligns himself with "the Movement," or the broad coalition of radicals, anti-war protestors, and Civil Rights Movement activists that comprise the New Left.

33 See Dynes and Donaldson 157.
In "Letter to the Movement"—and in other places—Bentley attempts to draw a direct connection between the political Left and Gay Liberation. He offers radical socialism as a vehicle to reconstruct societal norms related to gender and sexuality: "In the socialist future, we are going to have sex-with-love but in a different definition of both. I shall not presume to write these definitions. They will be hammered out between the penis and the vagina, between the penis and the anus, and so on" (42). Not all homosexual activists—who often expressed distrust for any established political system—shared this correspondence between the Left and Gay Liberation. In his manifesto, Wittman describes gay activism as not connected to any particular political ideology, "We're not, as a group, Marxist or communist—we haven't figured out what kind of economic-political structure is good for us as gays. Nobody—capitalist or communist—has treated us as anything other than shit so far" (309). While Wittman's manifesto highlights many of the divisions within the New Left, Bentley's response makes a call for greater unity amongst the various factions. This is certainly in line with his other writings from the era, *The Red, White, and Black* 34 in particular. It seems one of Bentley's goals at this time was to promote unity and cohesiveness amongst socially progressive groups through the advocacy of radically socialist politics.

Beginning in the late 1960s, fraternity emerges as a prevalent theme throughout Bentley's writing. *The Red, White, and Black* contains numerous references to brotherhood with a number of the counter-cultural characters using "brother" as slang. His "Letter to the Movement" explains this view of fraternity, "All men are not brothers—not yet—but we are brothers; and rightly call ourselves so. That's where 'where it's at,' that's who and what we are. And this is why groups like the Gay Liberation Front and Women's Liberation are around—and are in the

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34 Chapter Three of this dissertation contains an extended analysis of *The Red, White, and Black*. 
Movement" (43). In this instance brotherhood is seen as a kind of identification between members of various groups within the New Left, which Bentley offers as a way to solidify homosexual activists as participants within a broader counter-cultural movement. In "Men's Liberation," he gives further explanation of his aspirations for brotherhood within society:

> At a time when monogamy and the nuclear family are disintegrating, it is possible that homosexuals have a mission, not only to themselves . . . but also to everyone else; for they would seem to be in a better position than the others to affirm fraternity and the centrality of friendship in the humanistic—the human—scheme of things. (Theatre of War 328)

In this essay, homosexuality is framed as a logical element of a humanistic view of brotherhood, with gay men as natural advocates for this kind of fraternity. He again states that "fraternity has been revived—in the radical movement" and identifies this as "the source of the movement's appeal" (329). Throughout this and other essays, fraternity and homosexuality are cast as positive forces throughout history—particularly in the Classical era—with benefits for a more equitable and peaceful future.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's premise of homosocial desire is useful in interpreting Bentley's advocation of fraternity within the radical movement. The homosocial is defined in the introduction to Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire. Sedgewick states, "Homosocial is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with homosexual, and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from homosexual" (1). Significantly, homosexual and homosocial relationships are placed on a continuum where neither exists independently of the other. Therefore, seemingly platonic same-sex relationships may
retain traces of homosexual impulses. Sedgewick remarks upon the implications of this view, "To draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire,' of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted" (1). Throughout modern history, socio-political frameworks have obscured the role of homosexual desire within seemingly platonic male relationships and much of the recent queer scholarship has worked to identify same-sex desire within "straight" culture.

Examples of cultural expression from Shakespeare's sonnets to John Wayne's films have been read to contain traces of the homosocial and Bentley seems to demonstrate an acute awareness of this in many of his writings. He posits desire as present to some degree in any friendship, "The life of actual fraternity is passion. Now if it is likely that any human passion will have an erotic element in it, it is surely unnecessary and perverse (a good word to use here) to try to exclude the erotic element from the passion of fraternity" (Theatre of War 332). This clever appropriation of discourse related to the repression of same-sex desire—perversion—is an example of power producing the tools for its own subversion. Bentley utilizes the logical strategies associated with hegemonic power to argue in favor of the acceptance of homosexuality. He maintains this by highlighting the role same-sex desire has in what Bentley would call the development of Western culture. He makes clear that what is "demanded of society is not tolerance of a perversion, permissiveness toward behavior that is seen as bizarre, ludicrous, unsavory, or immoral, but approval of liberation, endorsement of a positive development in human history" (Theatre of War 330). This insistence necessitates the inclusion of homosexual identity in the discourses of power, specifically the social frameworks, political institutions, and historical narratives.
Bentley includes homosexuality along with gender and race as social identities deserving of an equitable share of sociopolitical power. He draws various comparisons and points of agreement between Gay Liberation and the Women's Liberation movements. He specifically identifies heteronormativity as a common enemy. He states, "Heterosexuality, as we have known it, has in no way favored its female component. On the contrary. Any enemy of this heterosexuality is, potentially at least, a friend to women" (*Theatre of War* 333).

The equation of homosexuality with effeminacy is based upon sexist views of women in that it presupposes the female as subordinate. Bentley identifies the relationship between homophobia and sexism as an imperative for the radical movement. He uses the language of the radical movement to draw parallels between the oppression of women and gay men, "Our liberation into Manhood is, like woman's liberation into womanhood, liberation from the Man" (333).

Independence from "the Man," is a common theme within many of the movements within the New Left and Bentley is clearly drawing upon this commonality. In "Letter to the Movement," he identifies unity amongst various subaltern identities as a potential asset:

> I'm sorry, brothers and sisters, I cannot give you that enrichment of both sexuality and love that will come only in the transformation of our whole environment, human and otherwise, but take heart, because you have already provided yourselves with the best interim aid: the spirit of the movement itself. (43)

In this statement, Bentley once again frames sexuality within the current socio-political environment. During the early part of his life, his same-sex desire was spoken of in whispers and insinuations, while deep cloistering of his attraction to other men characterized the 1950’s Cold War era. Beginning in the late 1960s, his writings on sexuality employ discourses related to radical activism and fraternity within a community of marginalized identities. As his
homosexual identity becomes more established, he begins to examine the significance of the gay experience during his lifetime.

Bentley's 1980 play, *Lord Alfred's Lover*, focuses on Oscar Wilde's love affair with Alfred "Bosie" Douglas and the subsequent trial where he was convicted and sent to hard labor for "gross indecency." In the play, Wilde struggles to reconcile his homosexual desire and love for Alfred with the cultural expectations for a husband and father. In this version of events, Wilde's struggle to come to terms with his homosexuality—to essentially come out—is the primary conflict. This draws obvious parallels with Bentley's own experiences as a closeted gay man who struggled to identify as a homosexual. Bentley pointed out the correlation during our interview:

I was highly identified with Oscar Wilde in my own mind during that period in my life. I had been a married man who was also bisexual, so in many of the scenes I felt like I was writing my autobiography. I could easily live through the whole thing with him in my own imagination. This includes the timidity, cowardice, and weakness I think he showed at various points; and then, I hope, the gathering of strength to live, as he never intended to, as a homosexual. However, for Wilde, the real tragedy is that he was only able to do this as he was dying. (Personal Interview)

In *Lord Alfred's Lover*, the conflict is based upon Wilde's realization to identify as a gay man. A major aspect of this struggle for the Wilde character—and Bentley himself—was reconciling marriage and fatherhood with same-sex desire. In an interview with Gerard Raymond, he speaks about the particular struggles in coming out as a married husband and father:
It's not that you went into a marriage knowing for certain you were gay and deceiving your wife . . . You went into a marriage, typically, not being certain and thinking that because you like or love a woman, you will very likely end up totally straight. And you had every reason to wish to be straight in those days. No wonder that people misunderstood you. You hadn't understood yourself, and you gave out mixed signals. (*A Sage's Advice* 75)

For Bentley, Wilde's story is analogous to the struggles of countless homosexual men and women over the century following the infamous trials. He and others would follow similar patterns of denial, self-loathing, and repression, eventually followed by realization and identification. In this narrative of coming out, homosexuality is revealed as one's natural state through a great deal of introspection.

Many narratives of Wilde's homosexuality focus on the trials as the most important events in the outing of Oscar Wilde, Bentley chose to dramatize the events that transpired in private. In this version of events, state power was exerted behind closed doors as much as in the public courtroom and in the newspapers. Bentley explains his approach:

> The essential things did not even happen in the court. They happened in the smoke-filled rooms where the lawyers talked with their various clients. They happened off stage. To bring the essentials on stage, I would have to invent and show the struggles between Oscar Wilde and the establishment of Great Britain.

(Personal Interview)

*Lord Alfred's Lover* contains scenes between Wilde and his family that focus on the duality of his life. Bentley's devised scenes between Oscar and other homosexual men establish the gay identity of his Wilde character, while scenes involving representatives of the British government
work to illustrate the hypocrisy of the political establishment. These scenes involving private interactions are key moments that propel Bentley's underlying thesis that Wilde's experiences culminated in his self-realization of homosexual identity.

Scene one takes place in Oscar's living room and involves his wife, children, and Robbie Ross, another secretly gay man. Oscar and Robbie have an extended conversation about the secrecy and precariousness of a secret life of "sodomy." The viability of the "dandy pose" is discussed in the following dialogue:

OSCAR: All I can do to make good is adopt a tone that casts doubt on my veracity.

ROBBIE: The dandy pose.

OSCAR: And what is a dandy? . . .

ROBBIE: A dandy is a euphemism or what our detractors call . . . a sodomite.

OSCAR: \textbf{(blithely)} No! Dandies are accepted in society, and —what was the word again? \textbf{(making a mouth)}—sodomites are not. If one were a sodomite, and, accordingly, had to hide, one might well hide beneath the mask of a dandy: it would be congenial. It would enable one to employ some of the repertoire of the sodomite—the talk, the gestures—without going to prison for it. (27)

This scene posits behaviors related to homosexual identity as analogous to that of the effeminate dandy of the late nineteenth century, which implies the perception of effeminacy as correlative to homosexuality was firmly in place at this point in time.

Much of the contemporary scholarship concerning Wilde's sexuality focuses on the trials as an example of a power apparatus identifying, pathologizing, and prohibiting same-sex desire.
In *The Wilde Century*, Alan Sinfeld posits the trials as a significant moment in the establishment of contemporary images of the homosexual man:

The trials helped to produce a major shift in perceptions of the scope of same-sex passion. At that point, the entire, vaguely disconcerting nexus of effeminacy, leisure, idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism, which Wilde was perceived, variously, as instantiating, was transformed into a brilliantly precise image. (Sinfeld 3)

Before this event, the dandy was not synonymous with the queer. Sinfeld and other queer theorists view Wilde's trial as the moment where the image of the homosexual as the effeminate queen became commonplace. In the court, Wilde's crimes, which were described as too horrible to be named, were associated with his art and persona. As Jonathan Dollimore explains, "One of the many reasons why people were terrified by Wilde was because of a perceived connection between his aesthetic transgression and his sexual transgression" (Dollimore 67). Sinfeld, Dollimore, and others point to Wilde as the prototypical queer in western society. This analysis of Wilde, the trials, and homosexuality is based upon a view of identity as socially constructed and subject to the influence of powerful institutions.

As far as the trial is concerned, Bentley cautions against placing too much importance on the proceedings, despite their dramatic potential. He does, however, acknowledge that the trials were instrumental in publicly establishing Wilde as queer:

Taking the trial record as telling the story leaves so much more to be said. The scenes that play so well in the theatre are the ones where Wilde shows off his brilliance in front of the court and the lawyers. The audiences take this as evidence of Oscar winning. But, in fact, he was saying just what the lawyer
hoped he would. The lawyers tricked him into talking like a queen in front of a jury who would recognize the symptoms. (Personal Interview)

This statement points to the significance of the trial as a moment where aesthetic tastes were used as evidence of same-sex desire; however, Bentley seems to imply that the pose of sodomite preceded the events of the trial. The unanswerable question might be summarized as: which came first, the queer or the pose? Perhaps the best answer would acknowledge the identity as inextricably bound to the perceptions of behavior. While same-sex desire has existed throughout human history, the "symptoms" are specific to cultural perceptions. It is possible that the trial was a turning point in establishing the "symptoms" of homosexuality.

Various dramatizations of Wilde's life make his guilty sentence at the final trial the climactic in the narrative of events; however, in Bentley's play, the final climax comes much later. He expresses his intention to subvert the received narrative and audience expectations:

What you see in the court and later in the jail is the weakness of Oscar Wilde. I wanted to show Oscar Wilde defeated. While in jail, he collapses totally, claims to be heterosexual, and renounces the homosexual lifestyle. If I ended the story there, as many narratives do, the play could be called The Ruin of Oscar Wilde. I wrote a scene between Wilde and the gay Prime Minister of England that takes place in the jail and this scene leads to a series of realizations that we now call "coming out." (Personal Interview)

For Bentley, the climactic moment of Lord Alfred's Lover occurs well after the trial while Wilde is serving his prison sentence at Reading Goal. Wilde accepts his homosexual identity, as well as its connection to a specific set of poses, when he utters, "Posing as a sodomite"—the fateful phrase is libel now. I do not pose as a sodomite. I am a sodomite" (120). In many respects, this
moment dramatizes the emergence of the modern homosexual. Wilde accepts his same-sex desire as the quintessence of his iconic persona. His effeminacy, witticism, extravagance, and dandyism are rendered as aspects of his queerness.

It must be noted that Bentley holds a great deal of skepticism for post-structural and queer theory and would likely take issue with the notion that modern perceptions of homosexuality were invented during Wilde's trials. During our interview, he expressed a disinterest in queer readings of Wilde's work:

> What "queer theory" has to say about Oscar Wilde is of no interest to me. What Oscar Wilde says about anything is of great interest—even what he might have had to say about "queer theory." One is interested in him (so remarkable a human being) and in his art—in which, to be sure, homosexuality or "queerness" plays a role. (Personal Interview)

While this statement is in keeping with Bentley general caution against overreliance on theory, his allowance that "queerness" plays a role in Wilde's work suggests a willingness to entertain alternate approaches. Queer theory posits sexual identity as inherently unstable and renders any normative ideal illusory. In the following passage from *Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde entertains the notion of identity as unstable:

> He used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead. (Wilde 140)
I would not venture so far as to claim that Wilde precipitated post-structural notions of the self, yet this statement clearly entertains the notion that human identity is mutable and subject to social and cultural forces. These "strange legacies of thought and passion" and "monstrous maladies of the dead" may bear remarkable resemblance to the discursive forces at play in Foucault's field of power relations. Wilde's view of humanity as variable and subject to discrete forces presupposes a lack of essentialism, which is the basis for a post-structural notion of the self.

Bentley's most recent play is an adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's *Der Reigen*, entitled *Round Two*, reworks the original script through the added focus on homosexual as opposed to heterosexual relationships. The play follows the basic plot structure of the original, which is a series of two person scenes involving sexual encounters where in each scene a new character is introduced to replace a character from the previous scene. While Schnitzler's play involves straight couples, Bentley's focuses on same-sex desire. Despite the sexual nature of the play, Bentley made a point of not sensationalizing the characters' intimacy. He explains, "I wanted to write about the give-and-take of fairly typical, ordinary gay people in how they conduct their love life and to be perfectly natural and simple about it" (*A Sage's Advice* 75). To underscore the everyday nature of the encounters, Bentley integrates his experiences as a member and observer of the gay community in New York during the 1970s. He relays an anecdote concerning his inspiration for the opening scene:

All of the speeches that are not lifted from Schnitzler are lifted from life and not invented by me. There are plenty of expressions that are so American that I would never use them. In the opening scene, the Hustler makes a pass at the soldier and says: "Looking to score?" That was actually said to me on 42nd Street
by a hustler—I paused and his next speech was: "Ten inches, ten bucks."

(Personal Interview)

The play speaks to the experience of being gay in New York City during the 1970s and is very much grounded in that particular era. The permissive attitude towards casual sex expressed by the characters in the play is identified with the pre-AIDS era.

When the play was performed in 1991, it received some criticism from the gay community for promoting promiscuity in the midst of the AIDS crisis, which prompted Bentley to add the subtitle, *New York in the '70's*. There have been various interpretations as to how the play treats sex ranging from celebratory to cautionary; however, Bentley insists that his intent is to show "the give-and-take of fairly typical, ordinary gay people" (*Sage's Advice* 75). In an interview with John Louis DiGaetani, he rejects the sensationalism of the gay experience demanded by various audiences:

In certain company a homosexual is acceptable only if he camps it up, uses the good old limp wrist, imitates Marlene Dietrich. There's a straight public for flaming queens and for pretty boys, especially if the latter are dying of AIDS. What the public won't take is that someone on 92nd street, not particularly good looking and not all that youthful, is not straight and not dying. (90)

While Bentley perceives difficulties in writing gay characters for straight audiences, when I spoke with him, he explained the pitfalls of writing for a gay audience:

I hate the idea of writing for a purely gay audience because they pick up jokes in their own special way and it's embarrassing . . . We had nearly a hundred percent gay audience on Christopher Street and they would laugh at things I had never intended to be funny, which was irritating. Straight audiences probably wouldn't
have made the same mistake because they would have seen the bitterness that was in some of the characters. The play was produced in Los Angeles and San Francisco as a celebration of gay sex. This is why I wrote in the notes for the published edition that I regard much of the sex in the play as rather sad and miserable. The idea of celebrating just because it's a fuck is a crude and philistine notion. Haven't they ever heard of bad sex? (Personal Interview)

Despite the audience and expectations, Bentley takes issue with using sexuality as the basis for character identity. However, many of his later plays deal with sexuality as a major theme, which presents somewhat of a conflict. While *Round 2* openly addresses sexual identity and makes homosexuality a central theme, he identifies his objective of presenting everyday people who happen to be gay. Perhaps most significantly, the play involves nine characters that may or may not identify himself or herself as homosexual having particular experiences of same-sex desire. The variety of characters and experiences underscores the diversity within the homosexual community, and may be seen to hint at the constructedness of such identities. In *Round 2*, Bentley actively works to undermine queer stereotypes and subvert sexuality as a defining characteristic.

In many ways, Bentley's life is emblematic of the homosexual experience in the United States throughout the twentieth century. His earliest awareness of same-sex desire is defined in terms of the pathologies developed during the late 19th century, as evidenced in his Freudian description of the doctor standing over him as a child. The indignity he faced during and after his interview with the Army doctor represents the humiliation officially and unofficially metered out against homosexuals throughout society. His mid-life experiences involve closeting
rewarded by continued privilege, which is characteristic of the suppression mandated during the Cold War era. However, as a theatre critic and "straight" public intellectual, he was able to use his platform to call for candid representations of homosexuality on the professional stage. By the late sixties, his expression of sexuality incorporates discourses of sexual liberation. In each of these eras, Bentley's sexuality is produced according to available discourses. Much of his life is marked by a confluence of the personal, social, political, and artistic closet; nevertheless, his refashioning as an openly gay man is indicative of the mutable nature of sexual identity and the possibility of social change. While Bentley expressed conflicting opinions about many political, social, and artistic movements throughout his life, for the past forty years he has been anything but ambivalent about continued gay liberation.
CONCLUSIONS

The cover of the February 2008 issue of *American Theatre* places Eric Bentley's face alongside Robert Brustein and Stanley Kauffmann on a Mount Rushmore of prominent twentieth century theatre critics. This image seems to suggest that the three men are the "founding fathers" of contemporary American theatre criticism. The accompanying article, "The Critic As Thinker: A Discussion at the Philoctetes Center of New York City," essentially a transcript from a 2007 public roundtable featuring the three critics, is a celebratory discussion of Bentley's legacy. While I agree that their work is foundational in the realm of theatre criticism, the implications of the image and article reinforce notions of the intellectual author as an autonomous figure who exerts a singular influence over a particular discourse. Additionally, the Mount Rushmore metaphor, perhaps unintentionally, celebrates a hegemonic patriarchy of mid-century American theatre criticism. This image and article are celebratory and posit these critics as iconic monoliths both literally and figuratively. While I agree that Bentley is an influential tastemaker, I believe his critical view is inextricably interconnected with a number of social energies at play within the sociopolitical context. In this respect, his writings are cultural productions reflecting a number of social and political discourses from throughout the twentieth century including Marxism, anti-Communism, the New Left, the counterculture movement, and queerness. In these final pages, I will juxtapose my concluding observations with statements from this recent article, which addresses issues related to the nature of criticism and Bentley's legacy in particular.

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35 A video of the discussion is available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb823S5iVBg
While the Philoctetes Center discussion featured three iconic critics, Bentley's generative influence quickly became the prominent topic of conversation. While watching the video of the discussion, I was struck by Bentley's apparent discomfort with the forum, which possibly stemmed from both the format and content of the dialogue. It appears that he was not at ease with being cast as an icon. Early in the discussion, moderator Roger Copland addresses his view of the impact of *The Playwright As Thinker*:

> It seems to me that this great book, first published in 1946, is indisputably the great study of postwar drama, and arguably the greatest book about drama written in the 20th Century. I don't want to put words into Bob [Brustein] 's mouth or Stanly [Kauffmann] 's mouth, but I suspect they'd agree with me that it's hard to think of another book that did more to create the climate in which serious American drama and theatre might have thrived—to the extent that it did—in the second half of the twentieth century. (31)

In this statement, Copeland certainly does not hold back his admiration for Bentley's work and probably could not gauge its importance any higher. By suggesting that Bentley aided "serious drama" by creating a climate receptive to such work, he makes two significant implications. In the first place, by labeling one kind of performance as serious—the criteria for serious drama is not elaborated—he implies that other kinds of performance are less serious or even frivolous. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, by saying that Bentley's work "created the climate" for serious drama, he conveys the impression that the critic exerts supreme influence over the performance context. I agree that in the instance of Brecht, he played a significant role in advocating Brecht's work in print and on stage. And through their correspondence, Bentley may have prompted Brecht to write some of his best-known critical essays. Despite this, the
reception of Brecht's work was—and continues to be—different than what Bentley intended. His dismissals of "Brecht-ism" and "the cult of Brecht" discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation point to the impossibility of creating a climate that receives artistic work in a determined manner.

In contrast to Copeland's view, I set out to investigate the complexities in the interplay between the author and the field of power relations involving specific social and political discourses. My desire within this study was to draw attention to cyclical nature of these exchanges, how Bentley impacted and was affected by these climates. This objective is indebted to the theoretical writings of Marx, Foucault, Derrida, Greenblatt, and others referenced throughout the pages of my work. However, I return to a specific moment of reflection near the end of Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*:

As my work progressed, I perceived that fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions—family, religion, state—were inseparably intertwined. In all my texts and documents, there were, so far as I could tell, no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity; indeed, the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society.

(*Renaissance* 256)

I began my study with an eye toward the interconnectedness of texts, discourses, institutions, and individual subjects. I believe it is possible for an author, however, to be dependent upon available discourses, yet still impart lived experience and understandings through his or her writings, performances, or other mediums, despite the limitations of ideology.
Given Bentley's interest in the relationships between theatre performance and sociopolitical events, I would like to look back to another of Greenblatt's comments. In *Practicing New Historicism* he and Gallagher write:

> If an entire culture is regarded as a text, then everything is at least potentially in play both at the level of representation and at the level of event. Indeed, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a clear, unambiguous boundary between what is representation and what is event. At the very least, the drawing or maintaining of that boundary is itself an event. (*Practicing* 15)

In terms of my study, this observation leads to readings of Bentley's critical and dramatic works as both representations and events. Throughout his career he wrote with an eye toward the social and political significance of theatre performance and never shied away from addressing topical issues in play reviews, critical studies, and eventually in his own plays.

Perhaps Bentley's ability to argue both sides of an issue and reluctance to affix himself to a rigid ideology contributed to my reading of his work as both singular and collectively produced. I believe his contradictions and reversals are precisely the moments of conflict that point to transitional moments in culture and performance. In his 2007 appearance, he suggests that conflict was at the heart of his criticism:

> I did want to attack what was the establishment in the universities, in drama departments, and so on, plus what was the establishment in New York, of the more highbrow end of Broadway—you know, the Maxwell Andersons. They were the enemy as far as I was concerned. (32)

This anti-commercial impulse came from an interest in Marxism and socialism, an ideology that defined much of his work throughout his career. He was however somewhat of an outsider in
Leftist politics, simultaneously anti-Communist and anti-capitalist. I believe that this very conflict of discourses was what made his early works unique and engaging.

This tendency towards conflict is also present in Bentley's collaboration with Brecht. On a personal and political level, Bentley had a number of conflicts with Brecht's circle. Most of which stemmed from his nonacceptance of Soviet Communism and criticisms of Stalin. While Ruth Berlau and Helene Weigel dismissed him as hopelessly opposed to revolutionary socialism, Bentley surely did more to advocate Brecht's works in the United States than anyone, thereby ensuring that his political message would reach a wider audience. This serves as an example of Bentley working with oppositional discourses, East German Communism and American Capitalism, so that he might advance public awareness of a particular kind of theatrical expression. If he were a committed Communist, he would probably not have been able to make an effective case for Brecht in America. If he were a strict democratic capitalist, he would not have been interested in Brecht's work in the first place. His middle position made him the ideal person to collaborate with Brecht and advocate for his work in the West. In terms of theatrical practice, he continually challenged the playwright to elaborate his theories through essays such as "A Short Organum for the Theatre," but more so by putting them into practice in performance. Bentley's ability to engage with and synthesize various theatrical, political, and social discourses aided Brecht in immeasurable ways.

He was once again in a halfway position during the midcentury era of HUAC and McCarthysim. Despite his dislike for the CPUSA and self-description as an "anticommunist," he opposed the persecution and political grandstanding of the Anti-American Committee Hearings. In this instance, his reservations about taking sides in a political conflict might have kept him silent while people were harassed for their political beliefs. However, he did make his
opposition known in the early 1970s upon the publication of *Thirty Years of Treason* and the performance of *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been*. One could criticize this for coming nearly two decades after the height of the proceedings, but that would run the risk of overlooking its contribution to the historical narrative of HUAC as an oppressive entity. Additionally, by labeling the hearings as a ritual, he drew attention to the performative nature of the proceedings themselves. His doubleness was also evident in his treatment of Arthur Miller and Eli Kazan's dealings with anti-Communism. While he opposed HUAC, he criticized Miller's artistic and political reactions, while defending Kazan, who was a friendly witness. Despite these seemingly contradictory positions, he was consistent in calling for open and direct discussion of issues related the anti-Communism throughout the life of HUAC.

In regard to the New Left—and the Radical Theatre Movement connected to it—Bentley was simultaneously encouraging and ambivalent, enthusiastic about renewed interest in leftist politics, but weary of unfocused radicalism. His writings and actions from this era employ familiar texts and ideas from his background in Marxism and socialist politics; however, he also attempted to engage with student radicals and the counterculture, which is evidenced in *The Red, White, and Black*. This is also balanced by his position within the establishment as professor at Columbia University, a position he would abdicate in 1968. Despite his role as academic, intellectual, and member of the University authority the students rebelled against, he took opportunities to undermine the power structure, which is evidenced in his exchanges with Brustein and support of student pacifism. Bentley's uneasy position between the student radicals and the University establishment serves as another example of his tendency to incorporate seemingly opposed discourses. If he was an ideological product of the field of power relations, he represented the conflict between the establishment and radicalism characteristic of the era.
While sexual discourse is present throughout his body of work, homosexuality emerged as arguably his primary focus during the later part of his career. He spent decades in the closet, which is clearly a position of ambivalence in regard to homosexuality. Closeting of homosexual desire was endemic to the social context of the 1940s and 50s. His coming out and identification as an openly gay man coincided with the emergence of Gay Liberation as a force in the field of power relations during the 1960s. In this respect, Bentley expressed his sexuality through available discourses that dictate what is and is not allowed. The fact that his coming out more or less coincided with the 1969 Stonewall Riots, suggests that broader social movements had affected the way he constructed his identity. On the other hand, his decision to come out contributed to climate of sexual liberation. Again, his writings from throughout his career are imbued with the sexual discourses that were prevalent at the time of their writing. His reviews of the plays of Tennessee Williams and William Inge address the existence of homosexual desire in their work from the perspective of someone with repressed homosexual desire. Many of his later critical writings and plays such as *Lord Alfred's Lover* and *Round Two* openly address homosexuality, which corresponds to sexual attitudes during the late twentieth century. I believe his shifting sexual identity serves as a marked example of how an individual subject constructs his or her identity according to available discourses.

In my analysis of Bentley's works, I endeavored to trace the complex interactions of social discourses, as they are visible within various texts. Additionally, I set out to construct my own narrative of how Bentley engaged with these same discourses in his lived experiences. In effect, I wrote a critical and social biography. My interest in cultural energies and the interconnectedness of power relations allowed me to follow threads leading away from my primary subject. I believe this brought about an appreciation of how Bentley's texts are consonant with
political and social movements of the twentieth century. Such an examination of his work points to the interdisciplinary potential of theatre studies, in that it engages with a number of cultural energies and may involve other forms of critical analysis. I am of the opinion that my analysis of Bentley's work is useful for scholars and practitioners in the arts and in cultural studies who are interested in how their work speaks to sociopolitical currents running throughout society. While often frustrating, Bentley's contradictions and propensity to argue both sides of an issue make his work engaging and complex.
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APPENDIX

Personal Interview with Eric Bentley, 10 July 2009

[Note: In the process of completing this transcript, Bentley was given the opportunity to revise his statement for the sake of clarity and content. Ellipsis mark where parts of the conversation are omitted from the transcript. Our interview was underway for a short while before we began recording. In the following passages, Bentley addresses the efficacy of political theatre. I had just asked him about his thoughts on the 2006 musical adaptation of Spring Awakening.]

EB: Political theatre has to be thought of in terms of the audience that it actually reaches—not some theoretic audience that the playwright never reaches. When you saw this Wedekind on Broadway it was adjusted to the present New York audience, particularly the younger end of it. It was intended for a twenty-first century audience, and as such they had to make a lot of changes. I think the play can still be produced in its original form, if not on Broadway. My translation of the play is fairly literal. It makes few deliberate departures from the original. Some of it even has to be explained in footnotes, which is not very practical in the theatre.

TS: Do you think that the changes lessened the play's political impact?

EB: Well, I think that it did have an impact from what I know of the Broadway production and its audiences. They had lots of young audiences, which must have consisted of the sons and daughters of the affluent—they were paying the Broadway prices.

Think of the Clinton scandal—that was political theatre. The result? A whole new generation thinks oral sex is okay. If you can do it to the President in the Oval Office it's certainly not a sin if done to someone else, somewhere else. Teenagers seeing teenage sex on the Broadway stage,
access to which provided and paid-for by their parents, validates that sex in a way not available to Wedekind.

TS: I suppose the ubiquity of sex in popular culture dulls Wedekind's impact on American audiences.

EB: This is where I come to my thesis about political theatre. Where political theatre is needed and where it would operate the way the author wants—it is banned. It can't be performed. Generally; not just every once in a while. If Wedekind could have presented these shocks to the people in 1890, that would have been something.

When I wrote about political theatre I didn't think of it as much as I would now in terms of the actual results a piece of political theatre has for the people who see it. Or even those who didn't see it but feel some of the results. This is of course often quite different from what the author had in mind. Brecht's plays against fascism would only be dynamic in a fascist society. But a fascist society would not allow them to be performed, so we're involved in a contradiction. His play about Hitler was not done, even abroad, until after the war was over and Hitler was dead. This seems to be something political playwrights have not really thought much about. They just take the "right side" and then try to get it done. They don't think very much about the problems of where should it be done, where could it be done, and who would be there. Which I think are the real questions to ask. Otherwise it is not political theatre, it's just another show.

Plays that have created a sensation for some social reason, for example A Doll's House, often give quite a misleading impression of what the playwright is doing. Ibsen didn't think he was telling wives to leave their husbands. Another example is Hochhuth's play The Deputy; about the Pope that didn't protest against Hitler's death camps.

TS: Yes, you edited The Storm Over the Deputy . . .
EB: When the play was done in New York City, the American Nazis did a protest outside the theatre—now that in a way was the real political theatre—real politics came into it. They were demonstrating to say: "They playwright is lying about us—the Nazi's. There never were any death camps." These were not people who were seeing the play that were protesting. The police had to come in on horseback to deal with them. And a violent confrontation resulted from political theatre! Unique in my experience.

TS: Who was Hochhuth trying to reach?

EB: He was trying to reach Catholics who were anti-Nazis and thought the Pope should have done more, but he was not too successful. Cardinal Spellman said—without even reading it—that Catholics should not see the play.

I'm going now into the ins-and-outs of actual political theatre. It was a protest against the Pope and thus against the Catholic Church. And what is it supposed to do for an audience? It's supposed to alert people who weren't aware of this specific interpretation of the past. It's supposed to create indignation and possibly future action. It certainly produced an uncommon number of reviews!

Today I'm trying to analyze the relation of what intends to be political theatre to its actual audience in the theatre. I didn't do much of that when I wrote on the subject. I was thinking more about the point of view of the playwright and the performers and not so much about the audience.

Brecht would say often that he wanted to make audiences think—that was all he intended to do. He did not believe in trying to get audiences worked up, getting them over excited in a way that dies down quickly. Who was he trying to make think? On Marxist grounds he wouldn't expect people on the other side of the class war to think along Marxist lines. So his plays must be
directed either at people who are already Marxists and want a bit of encouragement—preaching to the converted—or people who are uncertain and might be won over to that way of thinking.

TS: What about recent staging of Brecht's plays? *Mother Courage* was done at the Public Theatre in 2006.

EB: Yes, Tony Kushner was picked as the adapter because he writes political theatre much like the political theatre done during Brecht's time. What does it do? America is at war and this is an anti-war play. But then a vast section of the public particularly in New York is against that war and some of them are against all war, so the play has nothing new to say. Insofar as it only depicts war as hell—which someone said it did—it's not really adding to the sum of human wisdom or action at the present time. As political theatre it is ineffectual.

TS: Are there any contemporary plays that you think have a political function?

EB: A few years ago there was an off-off-Broadway show *Guantanamo* that came from London. This is a very rare example of the theatre being ahead of the news. It said things about Guantanamo not conceded until last year; not until Obama said we should give up torture.

TS: However, it took a British theatre company to make that statement.

EB: I think the British news was ahead of the American anyway, so the play probably was not as novel in London as it was here. However, if we go further to analyze along my present day lines and ask: who saw it? It was off-off-Broadway in a theatre that likely seats around two hundred with a limited run. Who were the few thousand people who saw it? They are people who all along thought this way about Guantanamo. It didn't reach Washington or the White House. So, I think it's operation in terms of persuading, or shocking, or surprising was nil. But they deserve a good mark for being ahead of even our liberal politicians here in America.
TS: Would this have been more effective if it had been performed in the streets? Maybe outside the Republican National Convention? Or somehow inside?

EB: Well the Republicans obviously would never have invited them in. We're back to square one on that: the really needed propaganda is forbidden. So it was with Shaw. Early on he said that the aim of his writing was to change the public's mind. Towards the end of his life he said: "I've been telling the world what to do for seventy years, but they haven't done it. Why do I go on?"

TS: Do you think it's possible for a play to have political impact in some different context or situation? An example would be the performances of *Waiting for Godot* done after Katrina in areas of New Orleans neglected by FEMA. In this context, does the play take on a political function?

EB: I don't think there would be a reason to call that political. It would just have a certain special interest. Susan Sontag famously directed *Waiting for Godot* in the former Yugoslavia at the time they were in their deepest troubles. She considered that to have some sort of political significance, but I wasn't sure I understood what that was supposed to be. I see what Beckett can stand for in the midst of the fighting between the Bosniaks and Croats, but I don't see that it's directly political. I would seem to me in a way very un-political. Defining the impossibility of the situation and not wrestling towards any solution makes the moral assertion that if it is impossible to continue, you continue anyway. I don't think people go to see a Beckett play just because it helps them to continue.

TS: So, you don't think a play like *Waiting for Godot* could be considered political in any context?
EB: There is a short play by Harold Pinter that is clearly against torture [One for the Road], which is relevant again because of Guantanamo. But without Guantanamo that play would still be what it is and that's a detestation of the cruelty that is in a lot of human beings. Early on, Shaw, before he developed a taste for the dictators, wrote for a magazine called The Humanitarian. He preached a philosophy of humanitarianism, which meant that the basic quarrel in human life is between the cruel will and its opposite: love really. I think that Beckett is a voice against the cruel will. However, he doesn't predict the success of its enemies. The cruel will may well win out most of the time.

[...]

TS: Are any current playwrights doing a particularly good job of addressing current events such as our two wars or the economic crisis?

EB: I think that a lot of these current events are more effectively handled by good journalistic accounts than they are by the playwrights including me. In terms of comedy and satire, something like a Maureen Dowd column is superior to anything a playwright is likely to come up with. If we view Sarah Palin as a comic character, the real thing on television is going to be better than anything a playwright could come up with.

[...]

TS: What have you been reading currently?

EB: I tend to read history and philosophy. I don't read plays—I've always preferred to see them, except for Shakespeare and a few others. One of my "big reads" of the last couple of years had been the collected works of George Santayana. You will find scattered references to him in my books. He might have been there much more, but I wasn't quite sure that I grasped it all. Now that I'm in my nineties I've been able to read longer works. Some of them I read in my own
fashion, which is not to read consecutively. I read all over a book. I devour it. I read the end first and then I jump about. Take a book like Santayana's *The Life of Reason*, I can open it to almost any page and read on for quite some time. People read the Bible this way; only they're superstitious about it. Santayana was an atheist.

I find that as my own brain develops the deficiencies of old age, that I nevertheless don't like light reading. I like to read in terms of learning something or making the case for a controversial opinion. I stay awake if I read that way. Light reading puts me to sleep.

Otherwise I have been reading a lot of biographies with an eye towards writing something more. I've been on several trails that may lead me to a good result. I was going to write something on Dr. Kevorkian and assisted suicide. I read two books about him as well as a lot of journalism; you can do a lot of reading on the computer these days.

TS: Were you writing a dramatic piece about Kevorkian?

EB: I could see drama in it and I was very well informed on the facts, but I couldn't find a dramatic pattern for them. If had been younger, I would probably have written biography or a very long essay about him. I wanted to write a play, but I couldn't find the elements of the struggle that would make it work as a drama. I'm very simple minded as a playwright. I look for the crucial encounter; who is fighting whom. A model for that is in Schiller's *Mary Stuart* where the two Marys meet in Hyde Park. The confrontation of the two queens is the essence of drama as I see it. There has to be a protagonist and there has to be an antagonist. I couldn't find anything nearly that clear-cut the Kevorkian story. I agreed with his positions; however, I don't think he behaved right. He would make an interesting psychological study, but that's not a drama.
Lord Alfred's Lover is an example of how I like to write a play. I could see the dramatic elements as I read and became clear on the history. I thought at first that I would just be doing a documentary of his trial, so I got to know the trial record very well. Then I thought that this is not enough; this is not even intelligible or right. The essential things did not even happen in the court. They happened in the smoke-filled rooms where the lawyers talked with their various clients. They happened off stage. To bring the essentials on stage, I would have to invent and show the struggles between Oscar Wilde and the establishment of Great Britain. This establishment included a gay Prime Minister, whom I partly invented and partly based on fact. Then I would have to invent what they said to each other because, like the two queens in Schiller's play, in real life they never met. The great scene in that play is the confrontation of the two Marys; the scene he invented. So, I had to imagine the great conflicts between Oscar Wilde, these individuals, and the whole establishment in British society. I didn't invent any characters out of whole cloth, but I did give them attributes that helped tell the essential story.

I love to do the homework when I write a historical play. In the course of reading about these people, I picked out various things I could use. I felt very happy about what I was able to do with the Wilde material. I wasn't able to do the same thing with the Kevorkian material, so I gave it up.

TS: You mentioned that you didn't feel that the trial transcripts wouldn't be enough for a script on their own. I'm curious about your views on a work like Moises Kaufman's Gross Indecency, which uses the court transcripts and other documents as the basis for a more documentary-like style of performance.
EB: Writers who take the famous De Profundis letter to be completely true are ignoring the fact that at that point Wilde was very sick mentally. A lot of what he says about Lord Alfred Douglas is not true. You can figure this out if you read a lot of the other documents.

Taking the trial record as telling the story leaves so much more to be said. The scenes that play so well in the theatre are the ones where Wilde shows off his brilliance in front of the court and the lawyers. The audiences take this as evidence of Oscar winning. But, in fact, he was saying just what the lawyer hoped he would. The lawyers tricked him into talking like a queen in front of a jury who would recognize the symptoms. What you see in the court and later in the jail is the weakness of Oscar Wilde. I wanted to show Oscar Wilde defeated. While in jail, he collapses totally, claims to be heterosexual, and renounces the homosexual lifestyle. If I ended the story there, as many narratives do, the play could be called The Ruin of Oscar Wilde. I wrote a scene between Wilde and the gay Prime Minister of England that takes place in the jail and this scene leads to a series of realizations that we now call "coming out."

TS: Did you hope your audiences would connect Oscar Wilde to gay rights in the later twentieth century?

EB: Oh yes. But let me tell you what happened. There was a two-week run in a small off-off-Broadway house and the audiences were probably ninety-nine percent gay. I could see that they were and I could hear that they were by what made them laugh. They all missed the point of the trial scene because they all thought Oscar was winning because he came up with all his epigrams and jokes. I've since rewritten the play in order to prevent this sort of misunderstanding in performance.

TS: Did your personal decision to "come out" play a role in how you viewed the play's subject?
EB: I was highly identified with Oscar Wilde in my own mind during that period in my life. I had been a married man who was also bisexual, so in many of the scenes I felt like I was writing my autobiography. I could easily live through the whole thing with him in my own imagination. This includes the timidity, cowardice, and weakness I think he showed at various points; and then, I hope, the gathering of strength to live, as he never intended to, as a homosexual.

However, for Wilde, the real tragedy is that he was only able to do this as he was dying. In the New York production, the actor who played Wilde and was a close friend of mine was also dying of AIDS. Yes, this "political theatre" was also extremely personal, couldn't have been more so, because I was dramatizing my emotional constitution.

TS: Returning to our previous discussion of political theatre audiences: do you feel that with *Lord Alfred's Lover* you were speaking to the already converted?

EB: [laughs] I hate the idea of writing for a purely gay audience because they pick up jokes in their own special way and it's embarrassing. I also ran into that with *Round Two*. We had nearly a hundred percent gay audience on Christopher Street and they would laugh at things I had never intended to be funny, which was irritating. Straight audiences probably wouldn't have made the same mistake because they would have seen the bitterness that was in some of the characters.

The play was produced in Los Angeles and San Francisco as a celebration of gay sex. This is why I wrote in the notes for the published edition that I regard much of the sex in the play as rather sad and miserable. The idea of celebrating just because it's a fuck is a crude and philistine notion. Haven't they ever heard of bad sex?

TS: In your notes, you speak of *Round One* as being a comedy, but you don't make the same claim for *Round Two*. What do you see as the difference between the two?
EB: I didn't have this discussion in mind when I wrote *Round Two*, so I don't know if I made it deliberately different. I would like the two plays to be given on the same day or in one long evening so that you'd be aware of what in *Round Two* is held over from *Round One* and what is different. Much more is held over than people expect. There are even quotations of the same dialogue and repetitions of the same stage business.

*Round Two* is documentation. All of the speeches that are not lifted from Schnitzler are lifted from life and not invented by me. There are plenty of expressions that are so American that I would never use them. In the opening scene, the Hustler makes a pass at the soldier and says: "Looking to score?" That was actually said to me on 42nd Street by a hustler—I paused and his next speech was: "Ten inches, ten bucks."

[...]

TS: Are you familiar with queer theory, and if so, what are your impressions?

EB: I'm of an older generation and cannot accept the word queer. It gives me a bad feeling. Even "gay" I didn't like so much in the beginning. I thought it was based on an illusion that we're all gay in the classic sense: that we're all blonde and blue-eyed, sweet, and frivolous. But I had to accept it. There isn't a good word. Homosexual and heterosexual are all so ponderous and sound so scientific. I know I'm not answering your question, but I just haven't gotten used to the word. I don't want to regard myself as queer, or odd. My thesis is that gay is not "queer," it's the boy next door.

I also think that in contemporary education there is too much theory, or talk of theory. Truth, said Brecht, is concrete. The arts are praxis. What "queer theory" has to say about Oscar Wilde is of no interest to me. What Oscar Wilde says about *anything* is of great interest—even what he
might have had to say about "queer theory." One is interested in him (so remarkable a human being) and in his art—in which, to be sure, homosexuality or "queerness" plays a role.