RETHINKING THE WASTELAND:
COLD WAR HISTORY, THEATRE SCHOLARSHIP,
AND THE CHALLENGESPOSED BY
THE LIVE TELEVISION DRAMA OF THE FIFTIES

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by
Joseph Francis Fahey, M.A.

* * * * *
The Ohio State University
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Master’s Examination Committee: Approved by
Dr. Thomas Postlewait
Dr. Alan Woods

Thomas Postlewait
Adviser
Department of Theatre
VITA

August 24, 1968 .................. Born, Wheeling, West Virginia

1990 ............................. B.A., History, The University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio

June 1990 - August 1990 ...... American Conservatory Theatre, Summer Training Congress

September 1990-February 1991 . Internship, Movement Coaching, American Repertory Theatre and the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard University

1993 ............................. M.A., Comparative History, Brandeis University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field ......................... Theatre
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The fifties were captured in black and white, most often by still photographers; by contrast, the decade that followed was, more often than not, caught in living color on tape or film.¹

This distinction, chosen by David Halberstam to launch his recent analysis of American society in the 1950's, reinforces a view of fifties culture as staid, conformist, and monochromatic. This view has often been presented, and numerous examinations of the cultural forms of fifties America, such as early television, have supplied the evidence to support it. But such a convenient packaging of fifties culture does not survive close scrutiny. As Antonio Gramsci theorized was the case in any hegemony, the hegemony that governed American culture during the fifties was subject to many contradictions and fissures. Locating these fissures and sites of resistance is the first step in


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exploring the underlying dynamism that existed in American society during that decade. To his credit, Halberstam illustrates that many of the social movements of the sixties had their roots in the fifties. Among these, he includes the sexual revolution, the civil rights movement, and the profound shifts in American leisure and entertainment. However, he, like many other historians of the Cold War, examines fifties television as a force of conformity rather than as an agent of social change. To be sure, many Cold War historians have provided compelling evidence to support Halberstam’s interpretation of television’s role in the Cold War, but they have ignored television’s most consistent contribution to undermining the hegemony of the fifties, the many plays presented for the live dramatic anthology shows. Analyzing these television plays as a form of American theatre history offers two benefits. First, the theatre scholar encounters many works of high quality and enormous popular appeal. Second, these plays offer a unique opportunity for the theatre scholar to conduct a more sophisticated examination of the conflicting social forces at work in fifties society. By examining a representative sampling of the scripts of the live dramatic anthology shows of the early fifties, highlighting the works of two of the most successful and least studied television playwrights, Reginald Rose and Rod Serling, I hope to demonstrate that
these television plays deserve a place in the American theatrical tradition. I also hope to illustrate the various means by which live television drama challenged the hegemonic structures of American society at the height of the Cold War.²

Live television plays, in terms of their scripts, production elements, corporate sponsorship, and audience response, epitomize the tensions, contradictions, and conflicts of fifties Cold War ideology. Ironically, these plays represent both a means of resistance to cultural hegemony and illustrate the awesome power of hegemonic structures to mask, sublimate, and coopt challenges posed to them. The live television play served as a battleground upon which network executives, corporate sponsors, 

²To provide a theoretical framework for this study, I am drawing largely on Antonio Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony and its application to theatre studies as advocated by Bruce A. McConachie. Gramsci’s theory holds that subtle but pervasive influences (language, common sense, and belief systems) reinforce cultural norms and that the contradictions of conflicting belief systems allow for the constant reformulation of a new consensus. McConachie, working primarily with nineteenth century melodrama, has attempted to demonstrate how this theory can be applied to a new understanding of the means by which an audience identifies with the message of a particular play or playwright. The same basic concepts serve to frame my discussion of the challenges posed to American society in the fifties (a period in which the forces reinforcing cultural hegemony were very close to the surface) by the television plays under consideration.

For a detailed description of this application of Gramsci’s theories, see McConachie’s "Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony to Write Theatre History," Interpreting the Theatrical Past, eds. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989) 37-58.
blacklisters, actors, and playwrights fought to determine which image of American society would be presented to a rapidly growing, primarily middle class, audience. The successes and failures of these playwrights in this regard offer much valuable information for assessing the parameters of cultural hegemony and Cold War ideology.

Not surprisingly, these playwrights were most successful at challenging Cold War hegemony when the challenge was muted or symbolic. These playwrights employed several strategies with varying success. For example, while criticizing the shortcomings of his fellow citizens, Reginald Rose extolled traditional liberal American values which he framed in patriotic themes such as the freedoms espoused in the Bill of Rights. He also appealed to the sense of fairness he felt was part of the common perception of the "American" character. By contrast, Rod Serling took a decidedly different approach. He often placed his protagonists in an ambiguous position, so that they faced dilemmas in American society, such as the evolution of a new ethical standard in corporate America or the loss of individuality to "the system." But these protagonists did not represent a single - and potentially unpopular - solution to these dilemmas. Serling's most controversial dramas ended with a question mark whereas Rose's ended with an exclamation point.
Conversely, these playwrights were least successful when their challenges were directed against the sponsor system or when they attempted to address issues, such as racism and the anti-communist crusade, which the television sponsors found too controversial. While they wrote plays about uncompromising ideals and the triumph of the individual, the writers often compromised their views and artistry, bowing to the pressures of the television industry. Both the ways in which they softened their messages, abandoning their original stories, and the criticisms they levied against the industry are vital to understanding not only the peculiar dilemmas of television dramatists but also the ways hegemonic processes operated in the fifties.

Some of these television dramatists, Paddy Chayefsky, Tad Mosel, and Gore Vidal, for example, used techniques similar to Rose and Serling or disguised their messages in symbolism, small-town settings, working-class environments, and seemingly commonplace scenarios. In addition to the messages of these playwrights, their chosen medium must also be considered. These playwrights were writing for a medium of instant communication. Live performances connected the audience to the action in a way that film could not. Most of these stories were far more quickly written and produced than film or Broadway theatre (scripts were often rehearsed and performed in less than ten days). In this way live
television drama was uniquely suited to reflect the pulse of American society. These plays were often based on current events, were reviewed in the next day's paper, and became the subject of discussion around the office water cooler the following morning. The rapid pace of production, permitting fewer editors to dissect these scripts, made these plays less susceptible to compromise than their counterparts in film and live theatre. At the same time, however, the nature of television as a mass medium made its artists especially vulnerable to sponsors' and network executives' fears of alienating any segment of their audiences. The obstacles faced by these playwrights and the strategies they employed in their attempts to examine American Cold War values provide an excellent window through which the researcher can see the tensions gripping American society during the 1950's.

While the limitations of fifties television reflect the hegemonic forces of that decade, these playwrights demonstrate the numerous challenges that television could pose within American culture. They challenged the thematic and structural conventions of most television, film, and theatre of the fifties. This is especially true of television playwrights like Paddy Chayefsky. Chayefsky chose to focus exclusively on working class characters, finding in television a forum wonderfully suited to exploring intimacy in characterization and plot. These
playwrights also attempted to challenge the network executives and corporate sponsors who often had the final say regarding acceptable and unacceptable references within their plays. They challenged their audiences to examine the darker sides of American life, including racism and prejudice, youth rebellion, and the breakdown of family order and traditional values. They challenged their fellow artists to accept television drama as a legitimate art form, and they challenged the television industry to surpass the expectations of its audiences, to reward the risks taken by its writers, and to recognize television's potential contribution to American culture. Such challenges, whether successful or unsuccessful, define the period of American cultural history that has become known as "The Golden Age of American Television."

This "Golden Age," dating from the late forties to the end of the fifties, has been lauded by the artists of the time, television reviewers, and cultural historians such as Erik Barnouw, as a period of great artistic achievement for television. The artistic showcase of the networks during these years was the live dramatic anthology show. These shows, Kraft Television Theatre, Studio One, Goodyear Television Playhouse, Robert Montgomery Presents, U.S. Steel Hour, Playhouse 90, and a dozen others, ran throughout this decade, reaching the height of their popularity in the mid-fifties. They typically presented a live performance of a
different play each week, many of which were original works. Although praised for their artistic quality, the dramas presented on these anthology shows have not received recognition in two areas of American cultural history. First, these plays have not been accorded their deserved place in the American theatrical tradition. Second, the challenge that many of these plays posed to American values of the fifties has not been adequately assessed by cultural historians of the Cold War. The student of American theatre is likely never to have read or been exposed to the work of this prolific theatre. At the same time, the student of American Cold War history is likely to be presented with a monolithic view that television served exclusively to reinforce the cultural hegemony that had been forged to face the Soviet threat. This single-minded depiction of early television as a standard bearer of Cold War values of the fifties (conformity, consumerism, deference to authority, clearly defined family roles, etc.) demonstrates a lack of knowledge of the best television plays. Most of the plays I shall present in this study call for a more sophisticated understanding of television's role in the Cold War than is currently allowed by the typical television models espoused by Cold War historians such as J. Ronald Oakley and Stephen J. Whitfield. A careful reconsideration of the television plays of these Cold War years forces us to redefine the parameters of American Cold War hegemony and to reexamine
television's role in creating and reinforcing that hegemony. Many of these plays posed challenges to the American conscience by raising questions about Cold War conformism, American institutions, and American ideals. By acknowledging their artistic merit, but dismissing their messages, these historians have painted an oversimplified picture of Cold War culture.

Likewise, the scholarship of theatre historians - ranging from general histories (e.g., Oscar Brockett, John Gassner) to specific appraisals of American theatre at mid-century (e.g., Thomas Adler, Gerald Weales) - has failed to acknowledge the contributions made to American theatre by these early television plays. An appreciation of television as a cultural force and artistic medium has instead come from cultural studies and television studies. Yet, these disciplines are ill suited to ask many of the questions of these theatre texts that will benefit theatre scholars.

Considerations of characterization, social issues or class status are made subservient to a discourse focused upon demonstrating similarities rather than isolating unique thematic elements or challenges posed to a society by a particular playwright. Furthermore, research in these two fields has demonstrated little appreciation for the contributions of scenic designers, producers, and directors that are essential to constructing an accurate portrait of our theatrical past.
The traditional willingness of theatre scholars to dismiss this drama is somewhat mystifying. Live television drama borrowed its form, structure, personnel, and often its content from the live stage. As a result, the conventions that governed live television drama were not far removed from those of traditional American drama. The length of most plays written for television was shorter than the that of the typical stage play, but no shorter than the many one act plays that have received the attention of theatre scholars. Although the television play is distanced from the spectator by several conventions, including the commercial break and the electronic apparatus, scholars of theatre and performance studies readily accept the intermission in live drama, allow for the mediation of live performances through aural and visual interpreters, and incorporate audio amplification or distortion and artificially-achieved visual effect into their studies of theatrical performance. Furthermore, theatre historians

3Indeed, one of the recent trends in American theatre, at least in terms of the commercial musical, is to provide as much distancing as possible between performance and audience through artificial means (consider recent musicals such as Cats, Tommy, and Beauty and the Beast). This electronic distancing also applies to the staging of plays such as The America Play, and the work of contemporary directors like Anne Bogart. Furthermore, although theatre/performance scholars have not yet taken up a large scale reconsideration of live television drama, the issue of video mediation and its effect on performance has been heatedly debated for some time: see Josette Feral, "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified," Modern Drama 25 (1982) 170-81, and Philip Auslander, "Going With the Flow: Performance Art and Mass Culture," TDR 33
who accept the work of artists from vaudeville and other theatrical forms, but deny the validity of these same artists when their performances (often, in fact, the same routines or plays) are mediated through a television screen create an untenable position for themselves. If theatre scholars deny the theatrical validity of the live dramatic anthology show, they close their eyes to some of the most prolific, exciting, and widely-seen theatre of the mid-twentieth century.

Coupled with Cold War studies, theatre scholarship can offer a valuable perspective in the study of television's role in reinforcing or undermining the cultural hegemony of American society in the fifties. From this perspective, theatre scholars can reconsider the arguments of many Cold War historians regarding American consensus during this decade and the role of television in forging that consensus. Such an examination offers researchers at least three possibilities. It provides a more sophisticated understanding of the fluidity of cultural hegemony as defined by Gramsci. It offers the historian new insights into the cultural mechanisms that bridged the gap between the commonly-cited complacency of the fifties and the social upheaval of the sixties. Lastly, it suggests a means by which resistance to Cold War hegemony in the fifties, usually relegated by historians to small groups of outcasts

or intellectuals, was expressed - often in more subtle or muted forms - on the popular level. 4

In the following chapter I will provide a historical context for the live dramatic anthology show. I will then examine the current perception of fifties television's role as servant of Cold War ideology. In turn, I will explore the unwillingness of theatre scholars to consider the television play as a significant form of theatrical expression. In Chapter Three I will examine specific examples from a cross-section of scripts from the live anthology shows, analyzing this material as it challenged American Cold War conformity, institutions, and ideals. Chapters Four and Five are devoted to an analysis of two of the most outspoken television playwrights of the fifties, Reginald Rose and Rod Serling. After my concluding remarks, I offer a representative list of published scripts from the live anthology shows to aid researchers in further study.

4 As evidence of this tendency to categorize such resistance as irrelevant, consider George Brown Tindall's treatment of the Beat poets: "For all their color and vitality, the Beats had little impact on the larger patterns of postwar social and cultural life. Nor did most of the other critics who attacked the smug conformity and excessive materialism they saw pervading their society." America: A Narrative History (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988) 1303-04.
CHAPTER II
HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Historical Context: Fifties Television and Television Plays

In the early post-war years, there was no blueprint for television programming. The studies and predictions of almost everyone, from the industry insiders to the television set owners, echoed one common sentiment: "Television is a clean slate. A chance to do something new and decent."¹ For many, live drama appeared to be a way to capture the immediacy and excitement of the new medium and a chance to take the cultural high road. However, this was by no means a unanimous decision or a foregone conclusion. Lee De Forest, who pioneered television analysis with his 1942 study Television Today and Tomorrow, argued that live television was simply not feasible. Foreshadowing the arguments used by television executives to supplant live television drama in the late fifties, De Forest wrote in 1944 that "The motion picture film alone can make Television

economically profitable."² Most network executives adopted DeForest's philosophy by the late fifties, but in the intervening years, a combination of factors, including the availability of professional stage artists due to the location of both the television industry and the professional theatre industry in New York City, the explosive growth of a national audience, the openness of an unexplored medium, and the financial resources of advertisers, provided the means to develop a national theatre that was both enormous in its scope, and intimate in its setting. Once a sponsor system was established, live television drama quickly became a centerpiece of each network's programming. These shows consistently achieved high ratings and were singled out for critical praise. During the age of live drama's prominence, the number of television viewers grew at an astonishing rate. The number of television households in America increased from 9% of the population in 1950 (less than 4 million households) to over 87% by 1960 (over 45 million).³ To put this in terms of a theatre audience, in 1952, the television viewing audience in the United States was estimated at 15,300,000 homes (or


34.2% of the U.S. population). Assuming, conservatively, that one household is equivalent to one theatregoer, a Broadway show would have to play a 1000 seat house for 15,300 nights (or about 42 years) to reach that same potential audience. In the 1951-52 season, Fireside Theatre averaged a 43.1% share of the viewing audience while Philco TV Playhouse averaged a 40.4% share. From their broadcasts alone, there was an audience of six million people for a theatrical event twice a week. Clearly, although it was mediated through an electronic device, more people were seeing live theatre in these few years than ever before in the history of American civilization. Something truly remarkable was happening on the American cultural scene.

This does not mean that all television programming was a cultural achievement. A number of television historians, most notably William Boddy, have warned against constructing a myth of a "golden age" when everything that spewed forth from the television was touched with an artistic glow. Indeed, many of the artists and critics working at that time

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4Steinberg, 142.
5Steinberg, 168.
admitted that there was a great deal of worthless material. The TV editor for Time magazine claimed:

during the height of the season, the TV networks fill the nation’s screens with more than 200 dramatic shows a week. [. . .] The majority of these shows - whether live or filmed, whether made in Hollywood or Manhattan - are dreadful.  

Yet, despite the mediocrity and banality that existed in much of American television programming, skillfully crafted television scripts, especially those written for the live anthology shows, received growing recognition as works worthy of artistic praise. A small number of television writers became national celebrities, the ratings for the best anthology shows rose steadily throughout the fifties, and a group of highly esteemed reviewers, led by Jack Gould of The New York Times, assured that standards of television quality would be established, even if these standards were not always met. Such advances in television drama led Paddy Chayefsky, the most widely acclaimed television playwright of the period, to argue that "television, the scorned stepchild of drama, may well be the basic theatre of our

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7 Robert McLaughlin, "The Season in Television," The Best Plays of 1954-1955 ed. by Louis Kronenberger (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1955), 59. Because many of the texts cited in this study include ellipses by the author (especially the television scripts), in all quotations ellipses that have been added are bracketed.
Despite the significance of the live television dramas in television programming, their widespread popularity, their effect upon a rapidly growing national audience, and the artistic achievement they represented, most historians have failed to explore live television drama in their analyses of fifties television.

One of the reasons cited for the limited nature of television studies of the fifties is "the difficulty of access to the great majority of television's programming past." Regarding the best plays of the live anthology shows, this assertion does not hold true. Many of the best scripts from these shows have been published in collections and are readily available for use in studies or courses in American theatre or American history. Many more are available in private, public, and university collections. A wide range of scripts remain, from the very best and most popular, to the least well known and amateurish. To facilitate further research in this area, a brief bibliography of a few of the published collections is available at the end of this study.

Certainly, the best of this work deserves to be preserved and incorporated into our understanding of American theatre history. Thousands of original scripts

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were produced for these shows, yet the writers of even the best of these works are nowhere to be found in our canon of great American drama. A few, Paddy Chayefsky and Horton Foote, for example, are accepted as theatre artists because of later stage and film work and because well-known stage adaptations were made of their television plays. But many others, including Reginald Rose, Rod Serling, Tad Mosel, Robert Alan Arthur, and Alvin Sapinsley are undervalued or unheard of in the history of American theatre.\textsuperscript{10}

Historians of the Cold War have chosen to examine several popular types of fifties television programming as a means of reducing fifties television to an ideological prop of the Cold War. These historians have avoided serious consideration of the television play, leaving many

\textsuperscript{10}Except for Gertrude Berg, the playwrights I have chosen to focus upon are all white males. The predominance of this group in this medium, as in most forms of American theatre, is another dynamic of the cultural hegemony that governed fifties America. Few playwrights in this group were women, but many women found acting roles on the live anthology shows. Furthermore, a surprising number of African-American theatre artists found work in the live television drama of the fifties. With a few notable exceptions, Lorraine Hansberry included, African-American playwrights were not among those individuals afforded opportunities to contribute their talents to the live television drama. Three valuable sources for assessing the contributions of African-Americans to live television drama are: Hatch and Abdullah's \textit{Black Playwrights, 1823-1977: An Annotated Bibliography of Plays} (1977), Arata and Rotoli's \textit{Black American Playwrights, 1800 to the Present: A Bibliography} (1976), and Mapp's \textit{Directory of Blacks in the Performing Arts} (1978). Of these, the last source is especially useful, as it covers actors, singers, dancers, critics, and playwrights, categorizing and dating their television work.
unanswered questions regarding the nature of television's role in fifties hegemony. In this chapter I will consider these historians' various strategies and question their exclusion of live television drama. Likewise, theatre historians have failed to consider these plays as a legitimate facet of American theatre history. The resulting bias is, in part, a legacy of the search for academic respectability in the discipline of theatre in the late 1950's. I will trace this bias in theatre scholarship to the debates which took place in the two developing academic theatre journals of the late fifties. I will then present the current effects of this bias. First, I will examine two representative theatre histories of the fifties; then I will analyze three recent approaches to uniting theatre and television scholarship. Lastly, as an alternate approach to appreciating the live television drama of the fifties, I will examine this drama as a forum for interaction between the television and theatre industries of the period.

Cold War Scholarship

Many Cold War historians have repeatedly attempted to assess television's impact on the American populace in the early 1950's without accounting for the controversial issues addressed in many of the live dramatic anthology shows. Frequently, the result is an oversimplified and overstated evaluation of the medium's role in supporting the ideology of the Cold War:
Coming along when it did, TV abetted the Cold War psychology by its power of instantaneity, its distortion of perspective, the selectivity of its programming and the conforming cowardice of the commercialists who controlled it.\textsuperscript{11}

There is evidence to support each of these claims, but when they are not counterbalanced by a discussion of the challenges presented to American society by television dramatists, these historians perpetuate an incomplete picture of television's role in Cold War America. Unfortunately, many historians have seized upon the connection between Cold War attitudes and television's influence on American society in the fifties without sufficient consideration of the many teleplays that challenged Cold War values. Several of these historians' analytical strategies provide the basis for the current understanding of fifties television as Cold Warrior.

Three basic strategies serve to support most Cold War historians' assessments of fifties television. Examining the game show (or quiz show) and the scandals related to it is a favorite strategy for Cold War scholars. One such scholar, Richard Tedlow, asserts that within a few months of programming such a show could create a large new consumption community, uniting the country in its desire for material

\textsuperscript{11}Carl Solberg, \textit{Riding High: America in the Cold War} (New York: Mason & Lipscomb, 1973) 197.
goods. In this way television is depicted as a means of affirming and supporting American consumerism and thus American capitalism. In constructing this picture, these historians draw upon the commentary of numerous critics from the game show era such as Robert Lewis Shayon. Shayon's collection of essays, Open to Criticism, published in 1971, contains an essay from 1955 in which he spoke out against shows like The $64,000 Question. Presenting its isolation booth as representative of America's ills, Shayon railed against "the sinister corruption that lives behind the window where no sound comes save the riddle of the Manufacturers Trust Company."

Although different historians isolate different aspects of television programming as representative of the medium, nearly all major works by cultural historians of the period cite the game show as an index of fifties television programming. These works include Geoffrey Perrett's A Dream of Greatness, David Halberstam's The Fifties, Laurence Wittner's Cold War America, J. Ronald Oakley's God's Country: America in the Fifties, and Stephen J. Whitfield's The Culture of the Cold War. By combining the game show strategy with other

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evidence from fifties television, Oakley and Whitfield each represent a different approach that leads to the same reductive conclusions.

In *God’s Country*, J. Ronald Oakley points to the variety of television programming in the early fifties, but he focuses almost exclusively on the negative impact of television on the American viewer. He examines television advertising and the mid-fifties debate on the inanity of most television programming, summarizing all of the currents of fifties television in one passage:

Through its programming, television taught many subtle lessons: that blacks existed only as manual laborers [. . .] that men held the real jobs while women were scheming and scatterbrained housewives [. . .] sexy but wacky secretaries [. . .] or old maid school teachers [. . .] that guns and other weapons settled disputes between adults [. . .] that Americans were screaming, greedy idiots [. . .] that Americans could and should [. . .] aspire to own many products that they could not afford and often did not really need. Television taught all of these things, and at the time encouraged a homogeneity of interests, tastes, opinions, and consumption all across the country.14

Within his scathing critique of fifties television, Oakley does acknowledge the artistic merit of the live anthology shows, but he does not address these works as challenges to the hegemonic culture of fifties America. When he does briefly explore the controversy engendered by a small sampling of these shows, he does so only to affirm a fifties consensus, pointing out the sponsor’s eagerness to edit or reword texts so as not to hurt their products or ruffle any feathers.\footnote{Oakley, 105. Oakley provides several amusing anecdotes in this regard. American Gas Association, sponsor of \textit{Judgement at Nuremberg} on Playhouse 90, insisted that a reference to "gas ovens" be removed due to the negative connotations for its product. Another show, sponsored by a cigarette company, complied with numerous guidelines including the restrictions that disreputable characters never smoked and that no one ever coughed.} Unfortunately, Oakley ignores the controversial messages that fueled many of these disputes and that were frequently expressed in the live anthology shows.

Stephen J. Whitfield’s \textit{The Culture of the Cold War} illustrates a different approach to fifties television, but one that leads to the same all-encompassing conclusions. Whitfield illustrates the bias in press coverage presented on fifties television and extends this to serve as the pattern for all television material. Along the way he examines a selection of different television forms including the game show, situation comedy, soap opera, thirty minute cop show, and weekly religious program. Based on this
evidence, he concludes that television in the fifties was "a medium consecrated to reducing the friction of politics, to amusing audiences rather than presenting ideas."\textsuperscript{16} Along with his omission of the live anthology scripts, Whitfield, like many other Cold War historians, isolates Edward R. Murrow's \textit{See It Now} attack on Senator McCarthy (March 9, 1954) as the one significant challenge that television presented to American conformity in this period:

this particular exposure of McCarthy became in retrospect the most important single show in the history of television, saving from utter disgrace a medium that had evaded the central issue of fear that he engendered.\textsuperscript{17}

Laurence Wittner's \textit{Cold War America} echoes this sentiment:

Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly stunned the television industry [. . .] as television had never

\footnote{\textsuperscript{16}Stephen J. Whitfield, \textit{The Culture of the Cold War} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) 169. Whitfield's chapter on television, "Boxed In: Television and the Press," presents a withering attack on the medium that he claims became "a custodian of the cultural Cold War, [through which] its viewers were boxed into a tight consensus."(155) Although he argues convincingly that such consensus building left the American audience unprepared for the divisions of Vietnam (162), one wonders how his critique would have been altered were he to consider the live anthology show.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{17}Whitfield, 165.
before dared to challenge the Anti-Communist Crusade.\textsuperscript{18}

Perhaps television had never before challenged this crusade so blatantly, but a number of the anthology show scripts to be considered in this study demonstrate television writers' willingness to challenge the intolerance, blind conformity, and ruthlessness that were the foundation of McCarthy's attacks. Instead of considering these scripts as sources of confrontation with American ideals, Cold War historians have subscribed to an oversimplified model of fifties television as unquestioning vehicle of conformity (with Murrow as the lone exception).

Beyond these basic strategies, Cold War historians have used several other approaches to arrive at the same monolithic account of fifties television as a tool of conformity. For example, they have emphasized the function of television in organized religion's efforts to confront communism. In Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture, Jon Lance Bacon devotes little time to American television. Within that brief discussion, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's early fifties TV series Life Is Worth Living - the same religious program used by Whitfield - figures most prominently. Both Bacon and Whitfield use Sheen's program "that combined lessons in morality with attacks on Communism" to epitomize

\textsuperscript{18}Laurence S. Wittner, Cold War America: From Hiroshima to Watergate (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974) 121.
television's function as a weapon of the religious right.\textsuperscript{19}

David Caute's \textit{The Great Fear} represents a second approach; he presents television as a conformist medium through a detailed examination of the blacklist's effect on television artists.\textsuperscript{20} Yet, surprisingly, Caute does not consider that one reason television featured so prominently in the campaigns of the blacklists was that so many television artists were identified as liberals or were considered potential conveyers of a message that would challenge American conformity. Such an assertion can be supported by two of Caute's observations. First, the television and radio blacklist, affecting an estimated 1500 people in 1954, was much larger than either Hollywood's or Broadway's.\textsuperscript{21} Perhaps this suggests a greater awareness of suspected communist infiltration in the television and radio industry, or a pressing desire to control the new medium of television. In either case, the potential threat of television as a conveyer of messages that challenged

\textsuperscript{19}Jon Lance Bacon, \textit{Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 72.

\textsuperscript{20}David Caute, \textit{The Great Fear} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978) 521-35. Caute provides a chilling description of the effectiveness of the blacklist, charting the development of racketeer-style blacklisting agencies in the late forties and early fifties. The two most prominent groups, American Business Consultants (publishers of \textit{Counterattack} and \textit{Red Channels}) and Aware, Inc., used innuendo and intimidation to construct these lists, then offered to remove listed artists for a fee or some promotional service.

\textsuperscript{21}Caute, 530.
American cultural hegemony was plain to see. Second, Broadway artists were much more effective in combating the pressure of the blacklist, remaining "the thorn in the flesh of the professional show-business blacklists operating in New York." Television actors, directors and other artists moved freely between Broadway and the New York television studios. Therefore, many of the artists who worked to maintain this freedom on Broadway could appear before Broadway audiences and American television viewers simultaneously. Caute points out that Actors Equity adopted a more liberal policy than the unions representing television artists, but he fails to recognize that during the early fifties many of the same artists were working in both art forms. The blacklist certainly affected television artists, but if historians surmise that the artists who found work in television were more conservative than their Broadway counterparts (if such a distinction can be made at all), they erect a false wall between these two modes of expression.

In a third analytical strategy, historians use the TV Western as a model of American television in the fifties. Actually, the Western was a Hollywood phenomenon transplanted to the television screen. During the McCarthy era, the Western was unusual in television programming. The Lone Ranger and Hopalong Cassidy were popular shows in the

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22Caute, 535.
early fifties, but these were the exception, targeted primarily for children.\textsuperscript{23} The transportation of the Western from Hollywood films to television did not begin until half way through the decade, after the darkest days of McCarthyism:

In 1955, the peak year of the decade for Western movies, Western TV series constituted 4.7 percent of prime time hours [. . .] From 1955 to 1957 that share rose to nearly 15 percent, and in 1959 to slightly over 24 percent.\textsuperscript{24}

In fact, the inexpensive Western, along with other filmed products from Hollywood, led to the decline of the live dramatic shows by the late fifties.

At least one historian of American television from the Cold War period has acknowledged the ideological significance of the live television plays. Erik Barnouw, in Tube of Plenty, devotes a considerable portion of his discussion of fifties television to the dramatic anthology shows. He presents evidence of their popularity, citing a 1954 survey that placed four of these shows in the ten most popular television offerings.\textsuperscript{25} He also argues that their emphasis on realistic characters struggling with difficult,

\textsuperscript{23}Oakley, 99.


\textsuperscript{25}Erik Barnouw, Tube of Plenty (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) 164.
often insoluble problems, challenged the desires of television advertisers. Barnouw argues that TV advertisers were selling magical solutions to consumers' problems, while these plays - specifically Paddy Chayefsky's dramas - maintained that there were no quick fixes or simple answers to life's dilemmas. Advertisers sold glamour and material signs of success. Barnouw concludes that by presenting "lower-level settings and people," the focus of these plays on the "'marvelous world of the ordinary' seemed to challenge everything that advertising stood for."

Through his discussion of television advertisers, Barnouw presents a strong case for the challenges these dramatists posed to the American Cold War values represented by network sponsors:

Quite aside from the revulsion against lower-level settings and people, advertisers often felt uneasy about political implications. Such settings had a way of bringing economic problems to mind. And some writers kept edging into dangerous areas.

Instead of exploring the controversial messages of many of these playwrights, Barnouw focuses on the sponsors' and network executives' efforts to bring their shows in line with "American values." However, he does present a compelling discussion of Reginald Rose's ability to

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26Barnouw, 163.

27Barnouw, 163.
circumvent advertiser censorship in his 1954 play Thunder on Sycamore Street. Barnouw's reading of the live television dramas suggests that most historians have oversimplified fifties television's role in Cold War culture. These plays must be considered in new ways before they can be integrated into a more sophisticated understanding of the hegemony of the fifties. Once we have reconsidered these plays, we can begin to reevaluate television's role within that hegemony.

Theatre Scholarship

Just as most cultural historians of the Cold War have failed to assess adequately the role of the live anthology show in fifties television, most theatre scholars have presented an incomplete picture of modern American theatre by ignoring these works as dramatic texts. Surveys of theatre history as well as studies that focus on post-war American theatre rarely mention this popular dramatic form. Indeed, no one has published a scholarly study analyzing this body of television work as a form of theatre. The authors of current theatre histories have been unwilling to acknowledge the work of these television artists as legitimate theatre. Such a disregard of this body of work is a legacy of a widespread bias against television plays

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28 Barnouw's treatment of this play will be further addressed in Chapter IV.
that can be traced from the academic journals of the 1950's to the current scholarship on the American theatre.

Until very recently, the authors of most academic journal articles in theatre went to great pains to distinguish between high art and popular art. This effort reflected a debate on high and low culture that Lawrence W. Levine argues has been central to American cultural dynamics throughout the twentieth century. Levine focuses upon nineteenth century America's reception of Shakespeare, and he considers the forms of popular entertainment (movies, vaudeville) of the early twentieth century. Although he does not directly address television's influence, his rethinking of our cultural distinctions forces us to ponder the rigid distinction between television drama and "legitimate" theatre:

because the primary categories of culture have been the products of ideologies which were always subject to modifications and transformations, the perimeters of our cultural divisions have been permeable and shifting rather than fixed and immutable.\(^{30}\)

\(^{29}\)For an analysis of the high-low cultural divide and its effect on American scholarship, see Lawrence W. Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

\(^{30}\)Levine, 8.
Levine questions the very nature of a cultural hierarchy and confronts those who see this rethinking as a prejudice against "cultured" expression.

This traditional distinction between high and low culture was hotly debated in the 1950's. In many ways, the 1950's was a defining decade for modern American culture. New York replaced Paris as the cultural center of Western Civilization, American culture was rapidly spreading throughout much of the free world, and the centuries-old effort to weigh the merits of popular art and high culture was central to American thought. At the heart of this debate were many television playwrights, including Paddy Chayefsky, and many prominent American intellectuals, most notably, Dwight Macdonald.\(^{31}\) Chayefsky and other television writers attempted to rethink traditional cultural distinctions as they espoused the value of television drama's intimacy, accessibility, and social sophistication. Macdonald and many of his contemporaries distinguished highbrow and lowbrow culture from middlebrow culture - or "Midcult" as Macdonald called it - while reinforcing a rigid hierarchical paradigm of cultural forms. Macdonald expressed this sentiment when he wrote:

So let the masses have their Masscult, let the few who care about good writing, painting, music, architecture,

philosophy, etc., have their High Culture, and don’t fuzz up the distinction with Midcult.\textsuperscript{32}

Due in large part to a rejection of the medium by the intellectual and academic communities, television became trapped in its "midcult" status. Four decades after Macdonald wrote these words, former FCC chairman Newton Minnow pointed to these sentiments as a significant hinderance to American television’s development as a respected cultural form:

One of the things wrong in the country is that the academic community and the intellectual community have turned their nose away from (sic) television. They regard television as beneath their importance.\textsuperscript{33}

By the early 1960’s, when Minow was appointed FCC chairman, Chayefsky and his fellow writers had lost the debate over television’s contributions to American culture and drama. As television networks moved away from New York and away from the live dramatic anthology shows, many of television’s best artists left the medium. In the years to come the success of television artists - writers, actors, directors, etc. - was continually measured by their ability to move

\textsuperscript{32}Macdonald, 73.

\textsuperscript{33}Newton Minnow, Interview, Fresh Air. National Public Radio, WHYY, Philadelphia, 12 July 1995
beyond the medium of television. Such a cultural hierarchy, as it affected theatre circles, encouraged a differentiation of television drama from "legitimate" drama.

The academic theatre community of the late fifties encouraged this distinction in its efforts to forge a separate discipline for the study of theatre. Embracing television drama ran counter to the perception that theatre, as an academic discipline finding its own way, needed to take the cultural high road to demonstrate its respectability. Evidence from two of theatre's academic journals started in the 1950's supports this assertion. In 1955, Robert W. Corrigan of Carlton College in Minnesota, organized and published the first issue of The Carlton Drama Review in order to, as he put it, fill the "need for a journal devoted solely to the publication of articles on dramatic criticism - both as a source for new researchers in dramatic literature and as an outlet of publication for those people working in the field of dramatic arts." The journal was renamed when Corrigan changed universities, published in its third issue as The Tulane Drama Review.  

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34Take, for example, the artistic merit accorded to the careers of Gore Vidal and Paul Newman, artists who moved beyond television, as compared to that of Rod Serling, Alvin Sapinsley, or William Shatner, artists whose careers remain associated with their television work.


With roughly the same mission statement, this publication became a staple of dramatic criticism and theatre discourse, eventually shifting again to New York University, and presently published as TDR. Of the 157 articles published in its first four volumes (1955-1960, the last years when live television drama was commonly seen on American television screens), none examine the plays represented by the live anthology show, the most widely-seen dramas of their time, as a form of theatre worthy of consideration.

At the end of the decade Modern Drama, edited by A.C. Edwards, was launched at a conference held at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association. Although recent memory was rich with the work of these dramatic programs and several live dramatic shows remained on television, the contents of this journal offer little evidence that this theatrical venue existed. Of the over one hundred articles published in this journal between 1958 and 1961, only three addressed television drama in any meaningful way. One author complained that the mundane "portraiture" of television drama was beginning to "infect" the legitimate stage.3 A second commented on the success of widening theatre audiences through broadcasts of plays on radio and television. Unfortunately, the author was referring to events in Denmark, and made no mention of the American stage.

except to comment that American plays do well on Danish stages.\textsuperscript{38} The third, James T. Nardin, evaluated television drama as a vibrant force on the American theatrical scene, a force that could lead to a potential renaissance of American drama. He cites the abundance of talented artists, an audience eager for quality, and the available financial resources in the form of a sponsor system. Unfortunately, some of his predictions, including the rapid demise of the TV Westerns and resurgence of live drama, did not hold true. However, Nardin’s arguments are sound, his examples valid, and his article appears to have challenged all conventional theatre scholarship of the day. It would appear that at least one scholar (and perhaps the scholars who approved his article for publication) was open to incorporating television drama into the study of American theatre. Yet, sadly, Nardin’s article met with a resounding silence in the subsequent issues of \textit{Modern Drama}.\textsuperscript{39} No other author shared his appreciation of television drama or even offered a response to his argument for a reconsideration of its impact on American theatre. There is no evidence of a debate engendered by this seemingly controversial article nor does there appear to have been any discussion of the validity of Nardin’s assertions. It is likely that many of


these academicians did not view American television drama as worthy of serious discussion. The ongoing struggle to define the discipline of theatre scholarship as one worthy of merit appears to have muted any discussion of this "low-brow" form of theatre.

A number of articles from these early issues of Modern Drama present a picture of a discipline in search of scholarly respectability and a sense of identity. One component of this effort was manifested in the first M.L.A. conference on Modern Drama on December 29, 1959. In his report on this conference, R.J. Kauffmann urged his fellow academics to respond to two needs of the profession. The first was to define a theatrical canon "in favor of increasing professional seriousness in scholarly-critical work in the field of modern drama." The second was to "make very clear our current, loose, confederative status as a group [and] our desire for a more explicit, tightly ordered regularizing of our standards and purposes." The timing of this debate could not have been worse for television drama enthusiasts. This debate came on the heels of a steady decline in the quality of television programming, and, at least as important, a decline in the public's perception of television as a cultural achievement. Shortly after the MLA conference, Newton Minow, Chairman of the

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Federal Communications Commission, made his famous comparison of television to a "vast wasteland." The programming decline of the late fifties, Minow’s speech, and the subsequent campaign against television inanity represented a nadir in early television’s reputation.\(^{41}\) In this context, it is not surprising that theatre scholars rejected, implicitly or otherwise, any drama associated with television.

Within the past twenty years, the high-brow, low-brow debate in theatre has shifted slightly with the explosive growth of performance artists, performance art pieces, and performance art venues. Now the debate seems to center on the distinction between theatre as defined in the traditional - primarily Western - sense (proscenium arch, finite theatre space, etc.) and newly recognized forms of

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\(^{41}\)Newton Minow, Equal Time (New York: Antheneum, 1964), 52. Excerpts from Minow’s speech to the National Association of Broadcasters, a pivotal moment in television history, have been reprinted in virtually every work regarding American television from this the period. The most often quoted passage is the following:

I invite you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air and stay there without a book, magazine, newspaper, profit-and-loss sheet or rating book to distract you - and keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland. You will see a procession of game shows, violence, audience participation shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, Western badmen, Western goodmen, private eyes, gangsters, more violence and cartoons. And, endlessly, commercials - many screaming, cajoling and offending. And most of all, boredom.
theatre to be found in sporting events, communal rituals, and the other domains of performance studies. While this new awareness clears the way for a more open, interdisciplinary exploration of theatre, a performance studies approach represents two disconcerting trends in theatre scholarship. The first is the philosophy that everything can be perceived as a form of theatre, thus making the term meaningless. In this paradigm, accepting these television plays as a form of theatre becomes moot. The second danger, reflecting a general trend toward the new and obscure in theatre scholarship, is that the avant-garde work represented in the performance art scene dominates theatre scholarship. Often academics find their most fruitful ground in the avant-garde work that only a tiny fraction of the traditional theatre audience might witness. It is still vital to our understanding of American theatre to continue to grapple with the dangers of confining one's scholarship to New York, to new plays, or, in the case of live television drama, to plays presented before an on-site audience.

In defense of the merit of truly popular theatrical forms, Alan Woods has made the compelling assertion that the avant-garde has been over-emphasized in theatre research to the near-exclusion of the mainstream theatre. Woods contends that "without the context provided by popular theatrical forms . . . experimental work loses much of its
point; the avant-garde can appear merely quirky and idiosyncratic." He goes on to argue that:

the popular forms of theatre generally provide the base both financially and in terms of audience support, on which the avant-garde depends. It seems an absurdity to ignore that base while stressing the exotic offshoots of experimentation. . . . Histories of theatrical practice must include the popular theatre. It provides the only form of theatrical entertainment for the vast majority of the audience."

One can extend Woods' line of argument to decry the lack of attention given to the theatrical scripts from the live anthology shows of the early fifties. By omitting these scripts and related materials from theatre texts, journal articles, and course syllabi, American theatre scholars have refused to acknowledge the importance of a theatrical venue, unique to the twentieth century, that produced more original drama than a hundred Broadway seasons and played to nightly crowds in the millions. Such omissions adversely affect our current accounts of American theatre history and the

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43 Woods, 175. (ellipses added)
approaches we use to evaluate television drama."" Very few theatre scholars have attempted to integrate television theatre from this period into a discussion of American theatre history. Most of the standard student text books on theatre history make no mention whatsoever of the rich body of work occurring during this period. From reading two theatre texts produced by Oscar Brockett within the past five years, a student of American theatre could conclude that no theatrical activity occurred on television in the period between 1940 and 1968. Survey texts are

"Integrating the television drama of the fifties into our understanding of American theatre could serve to provide many new insights for theatre historians. For example, the two most common explanations for the rise of residential theatre companies in the U.S. during the 1960's are the growth of subsidies for these companies and the demise of The Road. It is plausible that the rapid expansion of these residential theatre companies across the United States also may have been aided by the accessibility of live television drama in the fifties. Perhaps television plays served to educate a new audience and to develop an appetite for theatre among a broad cross-section of the American population. Such residential theatre companies would have benefited greatly from a large, eager, theatre-literate audience for their season offerings.

'Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theatre, 6th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991) 570-78. and Oscar G. Brockett and Robert Findlay, Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Drama Since the Late Nineteenth Century, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991) 333-40. Admittedly, Brockett is attempting to cover an enormous amount of material in a few pages, but the omission of television theatre is questionable when we consider one of his reasons for including Ellen Stewart's efforts: "By 1969-70 LaMama alone produced more plays than were seen on Broadway that season." (573) If quantity is a criterion for consideration, it is difficult to explain the omission of a venue in which thousands of original plays were produced in the span of a few years.
easily criticized for lack of depth, but the omission of television drama's contribution to American theatre is endemic in theatre discourse. Consider Thomas Adler's recent work *American Drama, 1940-1960: A Critical History*. Adler briefly mentions two television playwrights in a chapter entitled "Other Voices of the Fifties: Marching to a Different Drummer." These two playwrights, William Gibson and Paddy Chayefsky, are mentioned only because they went on to write plays for the legitimate stage, and their television plays are not addressed as part of their career.46

As a result of this scholarly disregard, live television drama is seldom considered by the student of American theatre. If it does reach this student, it appears in the form of one of three models, the traditional theatre model, the English/literature model, and the television studies model. Three texts represent these models in operation: John Clum's *Paddy Chayefsky*, H.H. Anniah Gowda's *The Idiot Box*, and *American History/American Television*, edited by John E. O'Connor.

Several traditional theatre scholars have written about television playwrights who then went on to the legitimate stage. These few tributes display an inherent bias against television work. One such study, John Clum's 1976 text on

Paddy Chayefsky, provides an example of this bias at work, even while the author presents an insightful analysis of the playwright's work from the perspective of the traditional drama critic. Clum praises Chayefsky for his versatility, noting that he "has been celebrated for his work in three media," including, of course, the legitimate stage. Yet, throughout the study, Clum implies that Chayefsky's work on the legitimate stage has made him worthy of consideration, and that his television material should be briefly considered as background. The structure of Clum's study further supports this reading of his text. Although far more people saw Chayefsky's television plays than his Broadway work or his movies, his substantial body of television plays receives twenty pages of attention in a 150-page text. Furthermore, much of this television drama is treated as "preparation" for his later (and presumably, more important) work in other media. Although Clum appreciates the work of this television playwright, Clum's study represents an implicit bias on the part of theatre scholars against the early television work of theatre artists who later succeeded in the "legitimate" theatre. This bias, and the lack of serious attention paid to the many highly skilled television playwrights who had only limited success on the traditional stage, represents the

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unwillingness of theatre scholars to accept scripts written for live television drama as a valid and worthwhile part of the American theatrical tradition.

H.H. Anniah Gowda’s *The Idiot Box: Early American Television Plays* represents the less common English/literature model of scholarship on live television drama. In this 120-page text Gowda analyses the television plays of five playwrights and offers some passing commentary on several others. Gowda’s analysis of these scripts is insightful, the points are well supported by close readings of the material, and the objective, to reveal the literary merit in these early plays, is laudable. However, Gowda’s work is of limited value for the theatre scholar wishing to integrate television drama into the American theatrical tradition. Since the objective is a literary appraisal, Gowda provides no production context or play history. Instead she performs a script analysis only. Also, the introduction presents a division of plays into four distinct types: stage, radio, film, and television.

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To conventional or academic thinking it may seem patently absurd to suppose that any literary merit exists in work publicized on a medium as puerile as television is generally conceded to be. This skepticism, however, derives more from snobbery—always nursed upon ignorance [sic] than from sound historical observation.(20)
To counter these charges, Gowda offers the example of the Elizabethan stage, and the popular base of Shakespeare’s works that flew in the face of neo-classical standards.
Gowda constructs a four part model, emphasizing the differences between the four media. Although asserting that "[s]tructurally the television play stands considerably closer to the stage play than does the motion picture film," Gowda resolutely maintains the media distinctions.49
Television drama is further distanced from the stage by Gowda's assertion that it grew out of the short story instead of American drama.50 Gowda's text leads us to surmise that literary analysis of this genre, while providing insights into individual scripts, offers no support for integrating this body of work into the current perception of American theatre.

The third approach, the television studies model, presents a different obstacle for the theatre scholar. Television scholars often distinguish between theatre and television drama in their efforts to assert the value of a separate scholarly discourse on television. Take, for example, Kenneth Hey's article on Chayefsky's Marty in American History/American Television. Although Hey acknowledges the roots of television drama in "legitimate-stage work," he repeatedly attempts to distinguish between television drama and the American theatre of the fifties:

Whereas television adopted stage tactics in matters of presentation, design, and acting, it altered the

49Gowda, 14.
50Gowda, 18.
overall messages to fit the audience that watched television. [.. .] Theatre drama tended to criticize society (social comment) while original teleplays examined individual conflicts (moral comment) created within a larger society. [.. .] Overall, stage drama tended to describe a guilty society [.. .] Teleplays, on the other hand, satisfied the postwar social, economic, and even psychological makeup of their middle class audiences. [.. .] Stage plays featured a visceral reaction to general human conditions, while the teleplay demanded an empathetic response to specific human problems.\(^5\)

In the following chapters, I hope to show numerous exceptions to the distinctions Hey is making. Like theatre scholars in the fifties, Hey reinforces (and perhaps constructs) distinctions between these forms to validate television studies as a separate discipline. Upon reading television studies that follow Hey's model, a student of American theatre history would have no reason to connect the stage to its illegitimate half-brother, live television drama.

Still worse, contemporary research in television studies is more likely to dismiss live television drama in favor of examples that support current models of television

viewership developed by theorists like John Fiske. These models evaluate "potential meanings" as evidence of:

attempts to control and focus this meaningfulness into
a more singular preferred meaning that performs the
work of the dominant ideology.\footnote{52 John Fiske and John Hartley, Reading Television (London: Methuen, 1978) 1.}

If finding commonalities or seeking programming that conveys the singular message of the dominant ideology is the sole agenda of this strain of television studies, then it seems unlikely that the research methods employed will isolate novel or controversial television material. An appreciation of live television drama as either a meaningful component of American theatre or as a means of challenging the dominant ideology of Cold War America must come to us by other means.

The impressive number of theatre artists and institutions that crossed over from the New York acting community to the television studios links television drama with the American theatrical tradition and challenges the scholarly prejudice against early television drama. These crossovers are catalogued in several television histories, including Frank Sturken's \textit{Live Television: The Golden Age of 1946-1958 in New York} and Max Wilk's \textit{The Golden Age of Television: Notes From the Survivors}. Many actors became Broadway crossovers, including: Audrey Hepburn, E.G. Marshall, Maureen Stapleton, Eileen Heckart, Helen Hayes,
Tyrone Power, John Forsythe, Maurice Evans, Judith Anderson, and Ed Begley. Hundreds of other performers who were well known to Broadway audiences (or would be in years to come) made up the ranks of television actors in the years of live drama. Established playwrights, including Elmer Rice, Clifford Odets, and Robert Sherwood, were actively involved in original television productions. Directors and producers also found an artistic venue in television drama, including Joseph Papp and Norris Houghton. Houghton produced the CBS Television Workshop, which ran for fifteen weeks in 1951. In his autobiography he reflects on the challenge of working for television:

All of this was "live": it was long before the day of tape. For actors, cameramen [. . .] director and assistant, and producer [. . .] the tension of that half hour was electric, for everything had to be totally controlled; nothing could go wrong while on the air, although so many things might. It took strong nerves.  

As theatre historians deny the enormous body of theatre work by these individuals and others merely because it appeared before a television audience, they create a false barrier between intricately linked aspects of these far-reaching careers.

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In recent years some theatre historians have recognized the need to expand beyond the rigid genre distinctions they have imposed on modern American theatre history. One area that has merited recent attention is the role Hollywood played in the careers of many of America's great theatre artists. Thomas Postlewait has called for a re-examination of theatre historians' perceptions of the influence of Hollywood and the film industry on the prominent theatre artists of mid-century. Using the autobiographies and personal manifestos of Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Lillian Hellman, Lee Strasberg, John Houseman and others, he asserts that Hollywood was a positive factor in launching the careers of a number of these theatre artists, that film techniques and aesthetics contributed to the plays of many of these playwrights, and that theatre artists often used film awards and credits as measures of their success. He also suggests that our eagerness to distance the theatre from Hollywood is at least in part due to an exaggerated effort by these artists to look disdainfully upon Hollywood in their own writings. Finally, he argues for a re-evaluation of the dichotomy theatre historians have established between the two art forms:

Quite simply, then, the history of the theatre since the 1930's cannot be separated from the history of
Hollywood [. . .] It's time we attend to this history in our study of American theatre.\textsuperscript{54}

As of yet, this call to action has not expanded to a consideration of live television drama. Because, compared to film, live television drama is a genre closer to "legitimate" theatre in style, form, and content, theatre historians would be well-served to utilize the television theatre of the fifties in their research. There are also several other reasons for this reappraisal of mid-century American theatre.

In addition to the many prominent theatre artists who worked in television, prestigious theatre institutions were involved in television productions. These included The Actors' Studio, The Theatre Guild, the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA), and The Playwrights' Company. ANTA regularly published material about its television ventures and commented on the art of television producing, writing, directing, designing, and acting in Theatre Arts.\textsuperscript{55}


\textsuperscript{55}For an excellent example of this openness to television work, see Theatre Arts 35:2 (1951). In this issue from February 1951, articles were solicited from several artists who had worked in both television and theatre (including Vinton Freedley, who was the honorary president of ANTA at the time, Max Wilk, Walter Hart, and Otis Riggs).
The producers of live anthology shows also eagerly sought material from the classical theatre repertoire. From the late forties, high quality performances of stage classics were attempted on the anthology shows. These included a Studio One production of *Julius Caesar* during the 1948-49 season, *Hallmark Hall of Fame* productions of *Hamlet* in 1953, *Richard II* in January 1954, *Macbeth* in November 1954, *Shaw's Man and Superman* in 1956, and many daring adaptations of classics from Ibsen, O'Neill, and others.\(^5^6\)

In the early fifties entire Broadway productions were transported from Broadway stages to television studios. By far the most successful of these was the March 1954 presentation of the Broadway musical-comedy version of *Peter Pan* starring Mary Martin:

> After closing, the Broadway production was moved almost intact to television with Fred Coe [the most celebrated television producer of the time] taking over the production reins. More than anything else the show was a great personal triumph for the celebrated actress,
Mary Martin. The reviewers outdid themselves with praise.⁵⁷

Pat Weaver, the innovative force behind NBC's programming for much of the fifties, revived it yearly as a network holiday "spectacular." Peter Pan became an American favorite due as much to the incredible exposure that television afforded as to any other factor.

Yet despite the high rate of crossover from the New York acting community, the active participation of numerous artists, playwrights, and theatrical institutions, and the veritable transportation of entire theatrical productions from Broadway to television, for four decades theatre scholars have failed to acknowledge television drama as a significant theatrical force in mid-century American theatre. Recognizing this theatre work as theatre should benefit scholars of American theatre, American culture, and American history.

⁵⁷Sturken, 72.
CHAPTER III

THE LIVE ANTHOLOGY SHOW: CHALLENGING THE FIFTIES

Historians like Halberstam, Oakley, and Whitfield have identified a number of ideological props of American Cold War values. Television playwrights challenged at least three of these, American conformity, American institutions, and American ideals, as they served the Cold War effort. In their attacks on Americans' willingness to praise conformity, many television playwrights targeted mob psychology and the prejudice borne of a desire to protect one's own. In particular, television playwrights directed their attacks on American institutions toward the military, corporate America, and the family. They also challenged American ideals, including equality and opportunity under American capitalism, the American masculine ideal, and the belief in progress. Although most of these playwrights sought happy or sentimental resolutions to their stories, or succumbed to the pressures to bend their scripts to sponsor censorship and veil their references to taboo subject matter, the challenges they posed were no less valid, and may, in fact, be more remarkable for the limitations within which they were forced to work. Taking into account these
limitations, I will present evidence from fifteen television plays that called into question the ideological props of the American Cold War effort.

**American Conformity**

Television drama challenged American conformity in two ways: by attacking the mentality of the mob (and implicitly challenging the anti-communist crusade), and by attacking prejudice (challenging the racism associated with it). Two plays represent these challenges, *The Gallows Tree* and *Noon on Doomsday*.

In March of 1952, more than a year before Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* premiered on the New York stage, the CBS Television Workshop presented Hallsted Wells' *The Gallows Tree*, an investigation of the Salem witch trials. Although the quality of this work was far below the level of television's best playwrights, it is surprisingly candid in the challenge it presents to the anti-communist crusade. The play centers upon several of the events surrounding the 1692 trials, particularly the fate of Martha and Giles Cory in the face of a group of conspiratorial children and several over-zealous church leaders. From the beginning of the play, the persecuted are depicted as the heroes and the authorities are seen as ignorant demagogues or opportunists. Many allusions are made to the atmosphere of fear and suspicion spread by the McCarthyites and their counterparts in the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). In
a script written to run less than thirty minutes, Wells quickly sets out to describe the perceived menace from the eyes of a community leader:

When we first set out to clean the witches from our village, we found them to be women slack in morals, beggars, not members of the church. But now, alas, I dread to say it [...] Now we have discovered that the devil has, with his terrifying power, been able to mask himself as one of our own congregation and for years sit slyly among us.¹

This speech, couched in terms of suspicion and contagion, mimics much of McCarthy's political rhetoric.

Wells uses the relationship between Giles and Martha Cory to present the dilemma of honest citizens who defer to authority:

GILES: If God's servant in Salem, and three judges from Boston all say Yes, who am I to say No?

MARTHA: I had hoped you loved me more. But that's asking too much - what all the world believes, I can hardly expect love to doubt.²

The playwright also makes clear his attitude toward the conformists and accusers by using stage directions that


²Wells, 46.
colorfully describe these individuals as "a no-good bum" and "measly, scrawny, long-nosed," while actors are encouraged to present these scenes with "zeal [. . .] horror and bigotry."³

In the final scenes, the narrator offers an account of informing that had obvious parallels to the anti-communist crusade in 1952:

this terror spread throughout New England. Anyone who was accused of being a witch and denied it was immediately condemned. But if you admitted it, then you were released. [. . .] In order to save their lives, many people admitted. Then they were pressed to give the names of other witches they knew. And in order to save themselves, they gave the names of anyone they didn’t like or didn’t agree with.⁴

Coupled with this attack, Wells leaves the American audience with a stern warning:

MARTHA: If we belie ourselves, who then will there be to stop this? [. . .] Let this wind blow our righteous hatreds away. And let this moment endure as a warning to all to live in charity one with the other.⁵

Wells attacked Cold War values more directly than most television playwrights, but if we can excuse some of the

³Wells, 56, 15.
⁴Wells, 63-4.
⁵Wells, 64, 66.
limitations of the television play, including time restrictions, sponsor censorship, and the artificial search for a happy ending, then we find many challenges, some veiled more than others, to aspects of the American ideological system erected to fight the cultural Cold War.

Reginald Rose repeatedly questioned American values of the 1950’s. Two of his finest television plays, Thunder on Sycamore Street (March 1954) and Twelve Angry Men (September 1954), vehemently attacked conformity, prejudice, and racism. In each a lone figure confronts the group (an angry mob and a heated jury) and emerges victorious. Rose’s plays, which will be considered in the following chapter, present a search for shared responsibility, weigh the oppressive values of fifties America against the traditional liberal values of pre-war America, and explore the sociological causes of modern American problems.

Rod Serling also repeatedly confronted American television audiences, encouraging them to examine the conformity of the period. Serling’s greatest success came after the premiere of Patterns (January 1955), followed one year later by Requiem for a Heavyweight (October 1956). Between these two theatrical milestones, another Serling play targeted conformity as manifested in group prejudice. As Rose did with many of his plays, Serling developed Noon on Doomsday (April 1956) from a contemporary event, fictionalizing it in a different context as a means to
challenge the conformist attitudes that led to that event. *Doomsday* was inspired by the death of Emmett Till in 1955. Till, a fourteen-year old African American from Chicago, was lynched in a small southern town for allegedly whistling at a white woman. The woman's husband and a friend were arrested and tried, but both were acquitted by a jury of their white peers. This case was frequently discussed in national newspapers, leading many to question the racism inherent in American justice and American society. Several historians, including Whitfield, have used this case to illustrate the extent to which racism was a part of Cold War America. Despite Serling's choice of an old Jewish man as the murder victim, the play created a storm of controversy. Although he clearly intended to comment on bigotry and small-mindedness, Serling acted surprised by the controversy that news of the play engendered. In fact, he attributed the connection of the play to the Till debate a miscommunication between himself and a reporter:

In news stories, the play had been erroneously described as 'The story of the Till case.' Earlier [. . .] I told a reporter [. . .] the story of *Noon on Doomsday*. He said 'Sounds like the Till case.' I shrugged it off, answering, 'If the shoe fits . . . .'

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This is all it took. From that moment on *Noon on Doomsday* was the dramatization of the Till case.7

Serling came under enormous pressure to alter the contents of his story, facing the threat of a sponsor boycott by White Citizens Councils and similar groups. This pressure led to several changes, including the generalization of the victim's description to that of an unnamed foreigner, the transportation of the setting to a small New England town, and the deletion of the word "lynch" as well as any words thought to connote Southern life. Serling later condemned the altered script as hopelessly flawed, amounting to "striking out at a social evil with a feather duster."8

While it is unfortunate that Serling compromised his original message, the alternative to acquiescence was the presentation of no television play - and, hence, no challenge - whatsoever. Thus, while many artists in other media were avoiding these issues completely, Serling was at least partially successful in challenging an American conformist mentality based on prejudice and questionable loyalties.

*Noon on Doomsday* begins with the end of the trial in which John Kattell, the murderer, is found innocent, much to the delight of the townspeople and the horror of several

8Serling, *Patterns*, 23.
outsiders. These outsiders, the daughter of the victim, a New York newspaper reporter, and Frank Grinstead, an ex-judge and the father of the defense attorney, each voice their displeasure over the town's ability to form a consensus behind a killer who is "one of their own." In a heated exchange between Grinstead and his son Rodney, whose legal skills served to free the murderer, the defense attorney attempts to justify his own version of conformity:

all I know is that there are times when you have to run with the pack - even if you don't happen to approve of where the pack is running. You run with them because you belong to them. 9

In the play's climax, a town celebration of Founders' Day, Frank Grinstead goads Kattell into an act of physical violence, forcing the crowd to turn away from him. Grinstead's speech to the townspeople, although diluted by the limitations of sponsor censorship, is still an effective challenge to prejudice, and by extension, racism:

If you condone killing a man because he speaks a different tongue, then the extension of that logic is to allow killing a man because he is shorter than you, or a man is taller than you, or a man is fatter or thinner than you. [. . . ] So what you've let go free is not a neighbor - he's a monster. I call this boy a

monster - because what he's done is the extension of your own prejudice. He's the trigger finger for all your hatreds - for all your narrowness. He belongs to you because you spawned it, and you spawned him.\textsuperscript{13}

It can perhaps be argued that the setting of a small town would have allowed the television audience to distance itself from the message being presented.\textsuperscript{11} However, if television was the sterile, vapid, value-reinforcing medium that Cold War historians have outlined, then this message should not have appeared there at all. Serling claims that he was dealing with "the need for human beings to have a scapegoat to rationalize their own shortcomings."\textsuperscript{12} In accomplishing this objective he posed a clear, if limited, challenge to American audiences' prejudice and conformity.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10}Serling, \textit{Noon on Doomsday}, 345-46.

\textsuperscript{11}Interestingly, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee also presented their mid-fifties challenge to conformity, \textit{Inherit The Wind}, in a small town setting. Certainly this was due to the historical events of the Scopes trial, but it is conceivable that a small town setting allowed these playwrights, as it allowed several television playwrights, to safely comment on larger, more controversial societal issues.

\textsuperscript{12}Serling, \textit{Patterns}, 20.

\textsuperscript{13}In a commentary on the play, Serling points out the many flaws of the piece, tracing most of them to a form of self-censorship and the censorship conducted by the sponsor. He concludes this commentary by describing his efforts to rewrite the play as he had originally envisioned it, as a racial issue. He claimed that he rejected two film offers for the play, having already sold an option to the Theatre Guild, believing that only in the legitimate theatre would the play not succumb to the pressures of censorship. The Guild responded that "although they liked the play's writing
American Institutions

Numerous historians have recounted how American institutions were mobilized to fight the Cold War. The military was seen as a manifestation of the nation's resolve to withstand, and if necessary, obliterate the communist menace. Corporate America was held up as the ideal of American capitalism in action. This presented a picture of fruitful productivity under a free market system in contrast to forced labor under the reins of communism. The American family, closely allied with Judeo-Christian values, was seen as the bulwark of American moral superiority and was the symbol of a nation pure at heart. Many television plays called upon American audiences to question these simplistic assumptions.

Cold War scholars have typically cited Victory at Sea, news coverage of atomic bomb tests, or other patriotic and

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considerably, they were not disposed to risk the necessary financing for such a highly controversial subject."(359) This rejection calls into question the assumptions by contemporary theatre historians that the fare of the legitimate theatre, as well as the pressures on production, were far removed from those of television drama and that legitimate theatre was more daring in the handling of controversial social issues.

In addition to the scholars analyzed in Chapter II, a number of recent works have focused on this phenomenon as it continued into the eighties and beyond. Two of these include Matthew S. Hirschberg, Perpetuating Patriotic Perceptions: The Cognitive Function of the Cold War (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1993) and James Schwoch, "Cold War, Hegemony, Postmodernism: American Television and the World System, 1945-1992," Quarterly Review of Film and Video 14.3 (1993) 9-24.
nationalistic material as the standard television treatment of the military during the fifties. A number of television plays presented a more carefully considered representation of the costs of war. An early play to question the unerring loyalty behind the military machine was Maurice Valency's *Battleship Bismarck* (October 1949). Valency explores the motivations of his German characters, endowing many of them with noble qualities instead of painting them as caricatures of an enemy. By setting his military characters on Germany's ill-fated flagship, Valency could question the service of men in an effort that had as its sole aim the destruction of human lives. Any claim that Valency was attempting to comment on the ultra-militarism of post-war America is questionable, but by depicting the men of the Bismark as fallible, human, destructible beings, he did have more to offer American television viewers than blind patriotism. H.H. Anniah Gowda describes the playwright's aim as such: "So much waste, Valency seems to say, has seldom been witnessed, so much heroism, loyalty, intelligence, even sensitivity bound in chains to a hellish doctrine."\(^{15}\) Other plays focused on the American military, depicting the horrors and even the foolishness of war. These included Rod Serling's *The Strike* (June 1954) and Gore Vidal's *Visit to a Small Planet* (May 1955).

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The Strike centers upon the moral dilemma faced by a commanding officer who has to sacrifice twenty of his men to save a regiment of five hundred others. Serling presents his soldiers at a low moment in the Korean War when they are suffering from battle fatigue and the dehumanization of weeks of winter combat. Several officers protest this "crazy war" and the Army, threatening, half jokingly, to refuse to pay their taxes.¹⁶ Serling's protagonist, Major Gaylord, endures an intense psychological battle over the fate of these men and in the process condemns a system in which men decide how other men should die:

these gold leaves give me the power of God - to give, take and trade lives. And tonight I'm trading lives, twenty boys across the river - for all of ours [. . .] That's militarily sound [. . .] But deep inside my gut I'm going to ache from this second on.¹⁷

The play concludes with the fatal airstrike and the retreat of the regiment, while the major is reassured by his subordinates that he did the right thing. The audience, however, is not left to bask in the glow of an American military victory. They are forced to question not only the sacrifices called for in war, but also a power structure that considers human life in terms of strategic advantage.


¹⁷Serling, The Strike, 189.
In *Visit to a Small Planet*, Gore Vidal combined science fiction, humor, and social commentary to question the American (and human) propensity toward war. In this fantasy, an alien, Kreton, lands in a suburban neighborhood, summoning the U.S. military and other civilian authorities to discover its intentions. The military, represented by General Powers, is constantly misinformed, bungling, and utterly ineffective. Kreton is determined to help the planet by running things from behind the scenes. He is intent on ensuring a continued succession of wars because, as he tells a member of the World Council: "secretly you want one. After all, it's the one thing your little race does well."\(^{18}\) Vidal uses his alien character to define military conflict in terms of savagery:

> Why your deepest pleasure is violence. [. . . ] It is the whole point to you. [. . .] You are savages. I have returned to the dark ages of an insignificant planet simply because I want the glorious excitement of being among you and revelling in your savagery.\(^{19}\)

Kreton compels the U.S. military to destroy a number of foreign cities, which presumably leads to military strikes on U.S. targets. The play is resolved when a second alien appears, informs the suburbanites that Kreton is an escaped


\(^{19}\)Vidal, 240-41.
child, and restores the action to slightly before the first landing. Although presented as a comedy, Vidal's play depicts the U.S. military in a derisive manner, and equates war with savagery.\textsuperscript{20}

Several television playwrights wrote works depicting the oppression or corruption of the individual by the American corporate machine. The Sound Machine (February 1952), an early television play, presents a protagonist who is oppressed by the American workplace. In this play a middle-aged bookkeeper invents a device to hear sounds at an ultra-high frequency in an attempt to escape his mind-numbing occupation:

I'm a bookkeeper, and there are thousands of me. We go to work, and we work and we come home from work; we work by rote, we work by rule and by schedule. [. . . .]

You don't know what happens to people like me. I've been disqualified from learning new things. My horizons have been pulled in until they're as close as those walls. At my age I can't get new training, earn a new kind of living.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20}It is also interesting to note that only after its television debut did Vidal's play find its way to Broadway. In the 1957 season a Broadway version of Visit to a Small Planet ran for 388 performances. Glenn Meredith Loney, Twentieth Century Drama, vol 2 (New York: Facts on File, 1983) 304.

After a failed attempt to find comfort through his invention, the protagonist finds the beauty in the everyday work world. This ending may have allowed the audience to maintain an appreciation of the American workplace, but the desperation of this character is an emphatic expression of the worker trapped in repetitive, dehumanizing tasks. In a limited way such expressions in television drama brought to an enormous audience the ideas writers like David Reisman were articulating in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and other serious contemplations of shifting American values and environments. These plays also preceded more influential attacks on American conformism and institutionalism such as William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956).

Another television play, J.P. Miller's *The Rabbit Trap* (February 1955), openly challenged the ethos of corporate America. In this work, the Vermont vacation of the Colt family is disrupted when Eddie Colt is called back to work by his employer, Everett Spellman, to complete a project at his engineering company. Amid the complaints of Eddie's wife and son, we discover that the family has had far fewer vacations than their counterparts in the company, and Eddie has been passed by for several promotions despite his eight years of reliable service. Eddie faces a dilemma when his son realizes that the rabbit trap they set in Vermont was left unattended. If they do not return to free any

Ohio State University, 13-15.
potentially trapped animals, Eddie will have broken a promise to his son not to have harmed any rabbits. Eddie initially chooses to break this promise rather than risk his position, but the following day attempts, unsuccessfully, to explain the situation to Spellman. That evening Eddie, who has for years been totally obedient to his employer and the company's system, shatters the symbol of his faithful employment, an award in the shape of a drafter's "T" square presented by Spellman to "Ever Steady Ready Eddie Colt." 22 The following day, Eddie confronts Spellman. Spellman threatens to fire him; he submits again, and is about to return to his drafting table when he sees a caged rabbit labeled "Eddie." The rabbit, which Spellman had purchased for Eddie's son, becomes a symbol of Eddie's predicament in the corporate machine. Eddie leaves the office, accepting that he will be fired, and returns with his family to Vermont to check on the rabbit trap.

In The Rabbit Trap J. P. Miller pits family values against corporate values, and the family emerges victorious. The need to keep faith between father and son triumphs over the need to acquiesce to the corporate world. Although Spellman admits that he is proud of Eddie for defying him, the economic future of this family remains uncertain. Their removal from the corporate world allows for a reconciliation

between father and son and between wife and husband. Additionally, Eddie, whose masculinity has been questioned by his wife throughout the play, is permitted to serve as the protector again (enfolding her in his arms) only when he is removed from the corporate world, even though this is the point when he is least able to provide economic support.\textsuperscript{23}

Rod Serling's \textit{Patterns} (January 1955) presented the most effective challenge to corporate America attempted by the playwrights of the dramatic anthology shows. \textit{Patterns} propelled Serling to national fame. As with much of Serling's material, this play dramatizes how individuals are ground down by institutions. In this case, the institution is corporate America. The men are Andy Sloane, from the old school of corporate ethics, and Fred Staples, from the next generation of corporate executives. Sloane ultimately suffers a fatal heart attack defending an outdated vision of American business that protects individuals as much as it protects profit margins. Whether this form of American business ever existed is questionable, but the negative implications for the future of American business are clear. Staples is co-opted into the new form of American business ethics represented by the company's ruthless executive, Ramsey. In the final scene the two men enter into an uneasy alliance, agreeing to challenge each other continually, Staples as an occasional conscience, Ramsey as the company's

\textsuperscript{23}J.P. Miller, 220.
driving force. With this pact, Serling leaves his audience with an unflattering picture of the American corporate mentality. This play and other Serling material will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter V.

The American family of the fifties was perhaps nowhere more consistently celebrated than on television. Many situation comedies were placed in family settings, including *I Love Lucy, Leave it to Beaver, Ozzie and Harriet* and even *The Honeymooners*. Live television drama also presented its share of tranquil family situations, including Gertrude Berg’s *The Goldbergs* (October 1949), which was quickly adapted into a popular weekly program. But to argue that this was the only picture of the American family that fifties television audiences witnessed would be to deny several significant television plays that challenged the idyllic depiction of the American family. Reginald Rose’s *Dino* (January 1956) and Tad Mosel’s *The Presence of the Enemy* (February 1958) posed such a challenge.

Dino Falcaro, the title character from Rose’s play, is a troubled teenager recently released from a state reformatory. Rose depicts the efforts of a social services case worker to reach Dino and alter his self-destructive course. The playwright quickly reveals that the root of Dino’s problems is a destructive family life. Rose’s stage directions make clear the manner in which these characters are to be portrayed:
we hear the shrill voice of Mrs. Falcaro. There is no Italian accent, but rather a tough Brooklynese inflection to her voice [. . .] both are factory laborers, are unattractive, poorly dressed. Their lack of parental ability is reflected in the asocial drives of their children, drives which they are totally unequipped to direct properly. With DINO, their attitudes are nearly similar. They were secretly relieved that he had spent four years in reform school, that they had not had to cope with him, and that his fate was out of their hands. [. . .] All they really want is to have this young tiger off their hands, where they can forget all about his ability to remind them of their total inadequacy. 24

Throughout the play, primarily through scenes involving Dino’s confrontations with his parents and the counselling sessions Dino attends, the audience is presented a picture of a family caught in a cycle of physical and psychological abuse. Dino’s father had beaten him before he was sentenced to reform school and strikes him repeatedly during a confrontation in their apartment. 25 Dino’s counselor consoles him, asking him not to expect too much from his mother and father:


25Reginald Rose, Dino, 198.
No one's really to blame. So many people just aren't equipped to be people. [.] don't blame your mother or father too much. They have a hard time, just trying to stay alive and well and reasonably unafraid. Don't expect too much from them. They just haven't got it to give.²⁶

Ultimately, Dino charts a new course for himself. He rejects the urging of his younger brother to participate in a robbery and resigns himself to years of counselling sessions to overcome his rage. The family unit is completely absent from Rose's solution for his main character, serving instead as an obstacle to be overcome.

In *The Presence of the Enemy*, Tad Mosel presents The Metcalfs, a family from a small Ohio river town. Mosel creates a conflict between the traditional values held by the father of the household, James, and the non-conformist values of Kristine, a young boarder. James Metcalf is most concerned with holding the family together after the death of his wife and with coming to terms with his recently returned brother. His brother Everett is depicted as a loner, an alcoholic, and a social outcast, everything that James considers an "enemy" to the family's cohesiveness and its reputation. Along with Everett, Kristine, a young idealist and aspiring performer, slowly comes to represent another non-conformist, anti-family challenge to James. She

hopes to travel to a large city to pursue a singing career. Everett and Kristine ally themselves and plan to leave the town following a Fourth of July celebration.

During the celebration, Everett becomes intoxicated, disgraces himself, implicates Kristine in morally questionable behavior, and harms the family's reputation. This severs the family connection between James and Everett:

MR. METCALF: I've put up with your irresponsibility, your sacrilege and your immorality long enough! We're decent people in this house. We don't need your kind.

EVERETT: But I need you, James. [. . .] I'd be lost if I didn't think I had this house to come back to - now'n'then. You're m' family.

MR. METCALF: [Coldly] No longer.\(^{27}\)

Everett wanders off into the night, leaving Kristine waiting for him at the Metcalf house. After a final confrontation with Mr. Metcalf, she decides to set out on her own. Unlike Everett, she remains an unspoiled and virtuous challenge to family life. Mosel leaves the family gathered around the breakfast table, with Mr. Metcalf warning his son about the forces that threaten to overwhelm their family:

the world is full of people who have to go against society and convention. [. . .] the ones we really have to beware of are the ones who go against us in the name

of a cause - art, for example. These are the people we have to fear, because there's nothing we can do to stop them. And their apparent sincerity half convinces us they are right to behave as they do. [. . .] We were caught off guard in this family. [. . .] If your mother had been here - we'd never have given way as much as we did. [. . .] I'm glad you had this experience at your age, knowing someone like Kristine! Because it's only through the actual presence of these people that we learn how hard we must fight them.28

In light of the innocence of Kristine, Mosel uses this speech to present this family as a prison for the Metcalfs, rather than as a source of openness and growth. Mosel's characterization of Kristine in The Presence of the Enemy can also be seen as another version of youth rebellion or wanderlust expressed in films like The Wild One (1953) and novels like Jack Kerouac's On the Road (1957), but with the threatening undertones muted and transferred to a female character.

American Ideals

Television dramas written for the live anthology shows repeatedly questioned a number of ideals that have been ascribed to the American experience. Many historians have argued that these American ideals, embodied in a capitalist, consumer-driven, progress-oriented economic system, were

enlisted to fight the Cold War. In this context, American capitalism became as much an ideal as an economic system. Capitalism was pitted against Soviet communism as a more efficient, benevolent, individualized means of production. Consumerism, including the marketing and mass consumption of thousands of unnecessary or redundant products, became an expression of American confidence, abundance, and efficiency. The promotion of science and industry, spurred on by Cold War antagonisms in weapons systems and space exploration, was a manifestation of the American belief in progress. Male aggression and belligerence, embedded in U.S. foreign policy, film, popular fiction, and business ethics, corresponded with a Cold War understanding of American masculinity.\(^{29}\) Based on the standard models of television programming presented by Cold War historians, television subscribed to and reinforced the Cold War representation of each of these American ideals. However, several of these ideals were challenged by material presented in television plays; these included Americans' idyllic views of capitalism, progress, and masculinity.

\(^{29}\)Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer series is a favorite target of Cold War historians (see Whitfield's \textit{The Culture of the Cold War}) in their efforts to analyze male aggressiveness, as are the shoot-'em-up westerns which have been identified with fifties television programming. Other sociological models, including William Whyte's 1956 landmark study, \textit{The Organization Man}, include the premise that male aggression and competitiveness orders American society.
Throughout the fifties, the American form of entrepreneurial capitalism was presented as a solution to the traditional forms of class-driven capitalism. Hard work and the willingness to take risks were central to the entrepreneurial spirit of American business. According to the precepts of the American system, anyone clever enough and persistent enough could climb the ranks of the American system and realize the American Dream. The American entrepreneur and the economic opportunities he embodied made the rigid class system a thing of the past. In the television programming typical of the early Cold War years, therefore, an effort was made to focus on middle-class families comfortably living out their version of the American Dream. These portrayals served to reinforce the perceptions that the American economic system was fair, beneficial, and all-encompassing. In *Class and Culture in Cold War America*, George Lipsitz illustrates Americans' desire for media that reinforced these views of the American economic system. Lipsitz isolates two Cold War films as exceptions to this trend and presents the reprisals encountered by their directors for questioning the American economic system. One film, *Till the End of Time* (1946), about the economic and social displacement of war veterans, led to a HUAC investigation of its director, Edward Dmytryk. Subsequently, Dmytryk found little work in the film industry until he reformed his errant ways and directed films with
acceptable messages, including an icon of Cold War conformity, The Caine Mutiny (1954). The other film analyzed by Lipsitz, Herbert Biberman's Salt of the Earth (1953), depicted working class oppression during a miner's strike. This film was banned from most movie houses and led to the blacklisting of its director. From these two experiences and the canon of Hollywood film, Lipsitz concludes that "most Hollywood films ignored the working class and continued to disseminate fantasies intended to strengthen existing hierarchies." Lipsitz then turns his eye to television programming, emphasizing that most programming performed this same function. The one exception he singles out is televised roller derby, pointing out that "the marketing and public relations people behind roller derby took pains to maintain the working-class identity of

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30George Lipsitz, "Hierarchical Culture and Popular Resistance: Film, Sports, and Speech," Class and Culture in Cold War America (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981) 181. Herman Wouk's The Caine Mutiny, in its novel, movie, and play versions (The play was entitled "The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial"), has been cited repeatedly as the quintessential example of Cold War praise of conformity. In this story Wouk presents a ship captained by a paranoid neurotic who nearly kills the men under his command. The executive officer takes command of the ship on the verge of disaster, but Wouk cites the men of the U.S.S. Caine as the guilty party for not supporting their commander in his tyrannical reign over them. Although reviewers of the play were mixed in their reception of its ultimate message, the work was extremely popular, and it stands as a model of Cold War attitudes toward authority and deference.

31Lipsitz, 183.

32Lipsitz, 184.
the stars with their fans." While pictures of plumbers, bartenders, and machinists wheeling around the television screen may have supported the definition of working class identity, Lipsitz ignores the large body of television plays that took working class characters as their heroes. Chayefsky excelled at this, basing his most successful play, *Marty*, on the troubles of a New York butcher. As previously stated, Reginald Rose's *Dino* centered on a teenager from a dysfunctional working class family. Furthermore, many of the settings for television plays were working class in nature; these included dance halls, bars, garment industry sweat shops, and bus stations. These plays were often not about upward mobility or realizing the American dream; they examined working-class relationships and the difficulties of surviving in a hostile world of shifting values. They presented intimate portraits of unimportant, relatively insignificant individuals, and through these plays audiences from a variety of social and economic backgrounds were called upon to consider the lifestyle and values of the working class. By ignoring this large body of working class plays, Lipsitz accounts for only a small portion of the television material that addressed working class reality.

The vision embodied in the American dream was one of beneficial progress, equality through opportunity, and the ability to achieve based on merit. A number of television

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33Lipsitz, 186.
plays challenged this optimistic view of American society. The Rocket (1952), written by Ray Bradbury and adapted for the CBS Television workshop by Mel Goldberg, was a futuristic tale about the desire of a scrap-yard worker to fly a rocket. This play presented a future in which economic disparity greatly segments American society:

OLD MAN: Fool! You’ll never go. Accept this now! This is a rich man’s world! When I was young the future was to be heaven on Earth — 'the world of tomorrow,' science, comfort, and new things for all. Hah! Eighty years. The future becomes now! Do we fly rockets? No! We live in shacks like our ancestors before us! The rockets are for the rich!"34

In this passage and throughout the play Bradbury (and Goldberg) challenges the American ideals of progress, economic opportunity, and the hope of succeeding through one’s children. The story is resolved when the scrap-yard worker receives a derelict rocket and uses film equipment and flashing lights to convince his young children that he has taken them on an interstellar journey. The playwright allows the protagonist to fulfill the dreams of his children, but denies a simple solution to the harsh economic realities of the protagonist.

In The Big Deal (1953), Paddy Chayefsky questioned American confidence in the entrepreneurial spirit. Chayefsky’s protagonist, Joe Manx, is a former big time building speculator who has fallen on hard times and has not had a large transaction in over twenty years. He refuses to accept a secure position as a building inspector because he feels the modest salary that this occupation entails is beneath him. Instead, he schemes to make it big, sacrificing his self-esteem and the financial security of his family in the hope of succeeding as an entrepreneur. Joe relies on his grown daughter for financial support. This support includes a few extra dollars to impress a prospective client and the rent payments for Joe’s house. He speaks constantly about setting up deals and making it big, but he is totally dependent on his daughter’s generosity. In analyzing The Big Deal, John Clum states that there are two sides to Joe Manx: the selfish dreamer and the generous, big-hearted man. Clum rightly points out that Chayefsky does not adequately develop the generous qualities of his protagonist, but Clum fails to acknowledge that this generous nature is overwhelmed by the get-rich-quick mentality that underlies the darker side of the American dream. This perversion of the entrepreneurial spirit serves as the tragic flaw in Chayefsky’s hero. It

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has led him to dependency and loss of personal pride. This selfish dependency provides a catalyst for the play’s climax, Joe’s request for five thousand dollars from his daughter’s savings for a questionable real estate deal. The loan would jeopardize her imminent marriage and her ability to buy a small house, yet she offers the money unquestioningly. At this supreme act of sacrifice and generosity, Joe breaks down, admits his own failure, and ultimately accepts the position as building inspector. Although this ending represents a sentimental reversal of Joe’s destructive path, Chayefsky’s resolution signifies that only by abandoning his dreams of making it big in American business can Joe Manx restore his self worth. Joe’s situation is the embodiment of the darker aspects of the American entrepreneurial spirit: selfishness, insecurity, cut-throat competitiveness, and the definition of self-worth through material possessions.

In one of the few analyses of this play, H.H. Anniah Gowda compares the message of The Big Deal with that of Death of a Salesman:

The Big Deal expresses its author’s distrust of personal aggrandizement accumulated by an individual merely through success in large business deals. That its leading character, Joe Manx, has failed to acquire personal stature along with material success appears in his spiritual collapse after a business depression
ruins his fortune, leaving him, financially speaking, a small instead of a large man of business.\textsuperscript{36}

Although Chayefsky does not reach the depth or poetry of Miller's masterpiece, this play presents clear challenges to its audience, especially within the context of a fifty-minute television drama. Through the character of Joe Manx, Chayefsky questioned the willingness of American society to define worth solely on the basis of economic success, a willingness that was the foundation of American capitalism, American consumerism, and the fifties version of the American dream.

In \textit{My Lost Saints} (1955), Tad Mosel asked television audiences to examine the American ideal of equality through opportunity, implying that there is a rigid class system in existence in American society. Mosel's protagonist, Kate, is a housekeeper for the Hallets, an upper middle class family in a midwestern town. Through much of the play she presents a motherly demeanor, guiding the members of the family in a forceful, yet loving way. Mosel creates a picture of a family shielded from unpleasantness; Mrs. Hallet goes as far as to identify Kate as her "protector."\textsuperscript{37} For her part, Kate continually refers to the Hallets as her "saints." The crisis develops when

\textsuperscript{36}Gowda, 35.

Kate's mother, who has recently lost her farm, stays with Kate on her way to live with Kate's brother. The mother feigns a variety of illnesses in order to monopolize the attention of her daughter. Under the strain of the mother's presence, the familial relationship between Kate and the Hallets gradually breaks down to expose the economic roles that are at the heart of their perceptions of each other. This realization is most keenly felt when Kate refuses to accept the doctor's diagnosis that her mother's illness is psychosomatic:

MR. HALLET: Then what do you want us to do? Keep your mother here until the house goes to rack and ruin?
KATE: No -
MR. HALLET: Then what do you want us to do?
KATE: I want you to help me.
MR. HALLET: How can we help you if you won't believe what the doctor says?
KATE: I told you we oughta get another doctor! A specialist! Mama's sick!
MR. HALLET: All right, then, she's sick! Your mother is sick! Forget what the doctor said! Forget everything except the fact that this is my house and I am your employer! I pay you regular wages to do a certain amount of work! And if anything interferes with that work, I want it removed! [...] You're a maid in this
house, Kate, that is your position, and it is your province to do a maid’s work!38

This reversion to purely economic roles undermines the familial relationship created between Kate and the Hallets. Shortly afterward, Kate’s mother is exposed as a self-pitying opportunist and is sent to live with Kate’s brother. Kate is persuaded not to quit as the Hallet’s maid, but she now realizes that she can no longer transcend her economic position. Mosel concludes the play by reinforcing the economic stratification that is now in effect. Kate distances herself from the family while playfully admonishing Mrs. Hallet for leaving for church in an outfit that is not presentable:

KATE: My goodness, trying to sneak out of the house in that old thing - What do you want to look like - ? Somebody’s maid - ? She is smiling, but there is something sad about it.39

Through this subtle conclusion, Mosel works within the limited conventions of fifties television to allow economic roles and their connotations of a class hierarchy to disrupt the familial bonds that have formed between these individuals. Despite her warm relationship with the Hallet family, Kate is now relegated to a lower economic and social status, identified by her occupation - that of a maid.

38 Mosel, My Lost Saints, 95.
39 Mosel, My Lost Saints, 107.
Although the bleak picture of the future painted by Ray Bradbury's *The Rocket* was a rarity for television drama, a number of television playwrights presented alternatives to the idealistic American vision of progress. Most commonly, these playwrights focused on individuals who faced obsolescence in a changing world. Chayefsky dealt with this unfortunate side-effect of progress in two plays: *Printer's Measure*, aired in 1953, and *The Mother*, aired in 1954. Although these plays suffered from several of the limitations of most fifties television, most notably a sudden and unsatisfying resolution, they presented powerful accounts of two of the negative consequences of modernization: the loss of craftsmanship and the dependency of those who become obsolete.

In *Printer's Measure* Chayefsky presents the conflict between the skilled craftsman and the efficient machine. Mr. Healy is a printer in his sixties who takes great pride in the tradition of his craft. After the owner of the print shop purchases a linotype machine, Healy is pitted against the machine for the affections of a young shop boy, who Healy sees as the next generation of craftsmen. Although each of Chayefsky's dramas are deeply rooted in human psychology, the playwright stressed that in *Printer's Measure* "[t]he characters are symbols of social currents".
rather than psychological studies. Throughout the play Healy decries the loss of craftsmanship represented by the linotype machine:

I don’t know what the trade is coming to. There’s nothing but machines. He’s got so many machines now in that shop I don’t know whether it’s a print shop, or he’s manufacturing Chevrolets. [. . .] the days of the handscrewsman are gone forever. After several conversations with other printers, Healy fears he will lose his position in the shop and grows increasingly confrontational toward the machine. Initially he challenges the linotype operator to a race, which he loses. He then imagines the machine burns him with hot lead, asphyxiates him with its fumes, and reaches out for him with its moving parts.

The crisis comes when the boy’s father dies and he is forced to seek a more lucrative means to support his family. When he refuses the training Healy offers in favor of linotype operator’s school, the proud old printer slaps the boy across the face. Later that evening the boy comes to see Mr. Healy to make amends. The two men reach an understanding, but Healy remains defiant in the face of the boy’s account of inevitable progress:

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MR. HEALY: Boy, I never met a linotyper who liked his job.

BOY: They like their job on payday, I bet you.

MR. HEALY: They sit all day plunking keys. There's no craft to it. There's no pride.

BOY: Nowadays, I don't know you have to be so proud.

[.. .] If they didn't have linotype machines, how would they print all the books in thousands and thousands of copies?

MR. HEALY: Are there so many good books around? Are the authors any more clever?

BOY: How are you going to set up daily newspapers?

You can't supply the public demand for printed matter by hand setting.

MR. HEALY: Are the people any wiser than they were a hundred years ago? Are they happier? This is the great American disease, boy! This passion for machines. Everybody is always inventing labor-saving devices. What's wrong with labor? A man's work is the sweetest thing he owns. It would do us a lot better to invent some labor-making devices. We've gone mad, boy, with this mad chase for comfort, and it's sure we're losing the very juice of living.42

Although the play was set in 1939, Chayefsky's criticism of consumer ease finds many targets in the early fifties.

42Chayefsky, Printer's Measure, 76-77.
After this meeting with the boy, Healy smashes the linotype machine. The following day he apologizes for his rash action, offering to pay the sizable repair bill. The conflicts of the plot are quickly resolved, as Healy makes peace with the linotype operator, the shop boss, and the boy. He has decided to take the advice of his son, retire, and live off of his savings. The play ends on an ambiguous note, as Healy dons his printer's apron to work "one last day" in the shop. Despite the easy resolution offered by Healy's savings and the tidy conclusion to the play, in Printer's Measure Chayefsky asked Americans to reconsider their blind faith in progress (in the form of a mechanized, consumer-oriented society), as well as their willingness to abandon the world of the skilled hand-craftsman. The playwright admitted as much himself when commenting on the construction of the play: "It even has a social significance, for the old compositor stands for the dying handicraftsman in this world of machinery."\(^{43}\)

Chayefsky touted The Mother, aired in 1954, as a psychological drama centering on a destructive daughter-mother relationship.\(^{44}\) In addition to this reading of the play, the script also serves as a study of those individuals who become obsolete in American society. The title character is a widow seeking work as a garment sewer.

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\(^{43}\)Chayefsky, Television Plays, 83.

\(^{44}\)Chayefsky, Television Plays, 177.
Unlike Joe Manx, she is determined to maintain her independence from her daughter, but is hindered by her frailty and her inability to work efficiently. Between several attempts to find work she encounters a group of elderly women who represent bleak lives of dependency, uselessness, and boredom:

OLD LADY: Is that what you do all day, Missus Geegan? Visit dying old ladies and go to confession?

MRS. GEEGAN: Well, I like to stay in the house a lot, watching television. There's ever so much fun on television in the afternoons, with the kiddie shows and a lot of dancing and Kate Smith and shows like that. But my daughter-in-law's cleaning up today, and she doesn't like me around the house when she's cleaning, so I came out a bit early to sit in the park.\footnote{Paddy Chayefsky, The Mother, Television Plays (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955) 193.}

The Old Lady fights against this syndrome of obsolescence. In this effort she is hindered by the intrusive behavior of her daughter, who insists that she remain at home because of inclement weather, invites herself over to pamper her mother, and repeatedly encourages her to sell her possessions and come live at their house. As in Printer's Measure, Chayefsky presents a protagonist who finds a sense of purpose in work. Work becomes a means of establishing an identity. For Mr. Healy it is his trade; for the Old Lady
it is her means of independence: "Work is the meaning of my life. It’s all I know what to do. I can’t change my ways at this late time."

By recognizing employment as American society’s measure of success, pride, or independence and then presenting characters struggling to maintain or acquire the means of employment against insurmountable odds, Chayefsky subtly challenged American complacency and the audiences’ shared vision of America as the land of unlimited opportunity. In The Mother, the Old Lady suffers many setbacks in her search for employment, including her daughter’s admonitions, a fainting spell on a crowded subway, and a number of unsuccessful exhibitions before prospective employers. The tragic climax occurs when she is given a chance to work for a kind-hearted employer and mistakenly sews all left-handed sleeves on an urgent batch of shirts. She is fired and returns to her empty apartment in disgrace. She attempts to telephone another of her daughters, contemplates an evening in front of the television (suggesting the beginning of an inevitable decline), and finally acquiesces to her intrusive daughter, asking permission to spend the night at her house. In the following scene a decision has been reached to move the Old Lady out of her apartment permanently, and Chayefsky’s protagonist is no longer a resilient,

46Chayefsky, The Mother, Television Plays, 218.
independent woman, but a character descended into a cycle of self-pitying dependency:

Well, the truth is, I’m getting old, and there’s no point saying it isn’t true. [. . .] Did you hear the stupid thing I did today? I sewed all left-handed sleeves. That’s the mark of a wandering mind, a sure sign of age. [. . .] I’m sixty-six years old, and I didn’t know what the purpose of it all was. [. . .] An endless, endless struggle. And for what? [. . .] Is this what it all comes to? An old woman parceling out the old furniture in her house?  

As in Printer’s Measure, Chayefsky resolves the provocative social issues raised by The Mother in a hurried, unsatisfying way. The following morning, the mother realizes that she cannot sleep in a house other than her own, she resumes her search for employment, and she reaches a rapprochement with her daughter, who finally respects her mother’s need for independence. Apparently, a predisposition toward sentimentality and the limitations of time and content imposed by the television medium reined in Chayefsky’s social commentary. It could also be argued that his primary purpose in this play is psychological, not social. Nevertheless, the issues of obsolescence, elderly dependency, and denial of meaningful occupations fail to

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"Chayefsky, The Mother, 213-16."
reinforce the vision of the American wealth and equality for all espoused by Cold Warriors of the fifties.

Many historians and theorists have cited fixed gender roles in the post war years as a product of the cultural Cold War. In *Gender and Power* R.W. Connell provides a framework for the societal construction of gender roles and gender definitions:

in key respects the organization of gender on the very large scale must be more skeletal and simplified than the human relationships in face-to-face milieus. The forms of femininity and masculinity constituted at this level are stylized and impoverished. Their interrelation is centered on a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women. This structural fact provides the main basis for relationships among men that define a hegemonic form of masculinity in the society as a whole. ‘Hegemonic masculinity’ is always constructed in relation to women. The interplay between different forms of masculinity is an important part of how a patriarchal social order works.48

Connell goes on to assert:

The most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual, being closely

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connected to the institution of marriage; and a key form of subordinated masculinity is homosexual.49

Connell's concepts have been successfully applied to the study of the theatre of the Cold War. In Cowboys Communists and Queers David Sarvan uses Connell's model to locate sites of resistance to Cold War notions of hegemonic masculinity in the plays of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. Primarily by exploring symbolism and innuendo in these plays, Sarvan argues that many of Miller's and Williams' characters challenged or subverted Cold War notions of gender roles. Television programming from the fifties has been charged, accurately, to a large extent, with reinforcing these hegemonic perceptions of gender distinctions. Yet, evidence from television plays can be presented that undermines certain aspects of Cold War hegemonic masculinity, and that calls into question the monolithic message ascribed to television in reinforcing gender identities.

It would be an overstatement to argue that television plays subverted Cold War notions of gender roles. Most of these plays were based on the patriarchal family unit. Homosexuality was hardly acknowledged, let alone espoused by any of these plays. On the contrary, Chayefsky's Marty has been analyzed by some as a story about a man's last attempt at "normal" love before descending into the perverted world

49 Connell, 186.
of homosexuality.\textsuperscript{50} Despite this bias, some of the best television plays, Chayefsky's included, attempted to challenge or at least question common American assumptions about masculinity. Often this was accomplished by undermining the stereotype of the romantic lead. Chayefsky commented on this effort in his analysis of Marty:

I didn't want my hero to be handsome, and I didn't want the girl to be pretty. [. . .] I was determined, in fact, to shatter the shallow and destructive illusions - prospered by cheap fiction and bad movies - that love is simply a matter of physical attraction, that virility is manifested by a throbbing phallus, and that regular orgasms are all that's needed to make a woman happy.\textsuperscript{51}

Although Chayefsky worked from the premise that homosexuality was a problem in American society, in analyzing his plays he offered a remarkably frank discussion of the pervasiveness of homosexual tendencies in American male culture, which he associated with the adolescent nature of American masculinity. He went on to argue that because stage drama focused upon "exceptional" characters and events, television drama was the theatrical medium best able to address this social concern:

\textsuperscript{50}Gowda, 33.

\textsuperscript{51}Chayefsky, Television Plays, 174.
An excellent story could be written about the latent homosexuality in the "normal" American male, and television would be the only medium I know that could present the problem as it really exists. [...] The homosexuality that television would explore would be one not of flagrant starkness, but of the hidden - sometimes terrifying - impulses deep within all of us. Most American men have decided homosexual impulses; the dramatic writer hardly needs Kinsey to prove that.  

By speaking of homosexuality as a problem within American society, and by praising heterosexual marriage as an ideal, Chayefsky reinforced several tenets of the Cold War perception of masculinity. However, by undermining the established notion of the romantic lead, positing the latent homosexuality of the American male, and exposing the adolescent nature of the masculine ideal in American society, his works demonstrate that television drama could serve as a site of resistance to the deeply rooted hegemonic masculinity of fifties America. Considered together, The Bachelor Party and Marty, aired in 1953, best represent Chayefsky's challenge to the stylized form of masculinity that was at the heart of American masculine ideal.

In The Bachelor Party, Chayefsky questioned the adolescent values he felt were praised by many American males. For Chayefsky, marriage is still the proper  

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52Chayefsky, Television Plays, 174.
expression of sexual roles, but the virility and sexual prowess represented by bachelor life is revealed as a shallow expression of adolescent masculinity. The play’s protagonist, Charlie, has recently discovered that his wife is expecting their first child. Charlie and a friend express their fear of the monotony they feel awaits them the rest of their married lives. In contrast to this bleak picture of marriage, a co-worker is constantly speaking of the wild evenings he has had with countless women. Each of the married men is envious of the bachelor for the freedom he represents. That evening, after a bachelor party for one of their co-workers, Charlie, the bachelor, and the groom visit several bars late into the morning. The adolescent nature of this lifestyle is represented by old high school fight songs, arguments about sports teams, and the drunken stupor of the groom. The bachelor’s supposedly glamorous life is revealed to be one of loneliness and immaturity. He remains out on the town until morning not for fun, but because he is afraid to go home for lack of anything to do. Charlie realizes this emptiness and ultimately rejects the adolescent form of masculinity represented by his bachelor friend:

This is just what we used to do before we got married. the whole bunch of us would wander around the streets, making wise cracks at girls, and then we’d end up in a bar, drinking beer and yelling at each other. [ . . . ]
Then we'd hang around the corner, because we hate to go home. We were looking, always looking for something. That's what we've been doing all night. Going from one place to another, looking. What are we looking for? The answer, as Charlie tells the groom at the end of the play, is found in a mature marriage based on partnership: Everybody's got things in them they're ashamed of. That's what a wife's for. To make you feel you don't have to be ashamed of yourself. Then she tells you what makes her feel miserable. [...] Then, that's your job. It's your job to make her feel she's not as bad as everybody makes her think she is. That's what marriage is, Arnold. It's a job. By explaining marriage in terms of work, commitment and sacrifice, Chayefsky avoids much of the sentimentalizing and trivializing of marriage found in the saccharine situation comedies of the fifties. At the same time, the adolescent masculine ideal represented by the bachelor is eventually discredited. He is left alone in the bar, and his evening's glamorous pickup is "a battered old veteran of the streets, a [bespectacled] woman in her late forties," whom Chayefsky describes as a "Bar Hag." By contrast, Charlie returns

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54 Chayefsky, *The Bachelor Party*, 256.

home to the comfortable familiarity of his wife and marriage, and we are left with an understated conclusion. There is no loving embrace, no profession of undying gratitude. He is found in the bathroom singing, and his wife is asleep with a smile on her face. This return to the mundane is an excellent example of John Clum's observation that "Chayefsky never sees life as more than a compromise with threatening forces within and without." The blissful, unrealistic ending is avoided. The idealization of heterosexual marriage is reinforced, but the stylized form of hegemonic masculinity represented by the untethered, virile, sexually active male is seen for its shallowness and immaturity.

Marty is the story of a New York butcher who describes himself as a "fat little ugly man." He spends most of his time working or loitering with his friend Angie, trying to decide how to spend their evenings. Chayefsky asserted that there is "a distinct homosexual relationship between Marty and Angie," but emphasizes that this is not the point of the story. Marty's fortunes change when he encounters an unattractive woman who has been left by her escort at the local dance hall. After some initial awkwardness, Marty

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56 Clum, 50.


58 Chayefsky, 176.
makes an adolescent attempt to force himself upon her. She rejects his sexual advances, but by the end of the evening have begun to build a promising relationship. Soon afterward Marty's mother and friends express their distaste for her based upon her independence and unattractiveness. Marty is forced to choose between satisfying his mother and friends, thus remaining in an adolescent state, or pursuing the relationship with this woman. By the end of the play, Marty breaks the adolescent cycle represented by Angie and their small circle of male friends:

You don't like her, My mother don't like her. She's a dog, and I'm a fat, ugly little man. All I know is I had a good time last night. I'm gonna have a good time tonight. If we have enough good times together, I'm going down on my knees and beg that girl to marry me. 59

Heterosexual marriage is still the ideal for Chayefsky, but in Marty he supplants physical attraction as the basis of male-female relationships and discredits the adolescent nature of American masculinity. While these plays favored heterosexual marriage as the best expression of masculinity, both raised questions about American masculine ideals grounded in adolescent behavior, sexual prowess, and physical attractiveness.

59Chayefsky, Marty, 172.
CHAPTER IV

CHALLENGING AMERICAN CONFORMITY: REGINALD ROSE

Of the great television playwrights of the fifties, Reginald Rose spoke out most consistently against the social ills he saw in American society. Most of his television plays display a sentimental optimism concerning the American character and American institutions, but he repeatedly attacked the racism, narrow-mindedness, and conformity he saw in his fellow citizens. Rose argued that television plays could be "as adult and revealing as much of our finest theatre."¹ He also made a case for the social critique offered by television playwrights: "A new school of writers has sprung up in the past few years, writers with much that is important and revealing to say about the social patterns of our times."² Rose insisted upon presenting a challenge to his television audience to such an extent that H.H. Anniah Gowda argues that his message often weighs down his art: "Rose's playwriting [. . .] shows anew the tendency of political thought and idealism to transmit an effect of

¹Reginald Rose, Six Television Plays, forward (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), xi.

²Rose, forward, xi.

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heaviness upon whatever art undertakes their expression.\textsuperscript{3}

In retrospect, Rose's television plays appear somewhat pedantic and his social message seems forced. Yet, while this didacticism undermines the artistic quality of portions of his work, it presents the historian with valuable evidence for the role of the television play in challenging Cold War conformity.

Rose's television career also presents a clear picture of the pressures faced by television playwrights who wanted to present a controversial message to their audiences. For example, in his commentary on \textit{Crime in the Streets} Rose discusses the difficulties he faced in attempting to present a television play addressing juvenile delinquency. His strongest criticism is directed toward a sponsor system that shied away from controversial material. According to him, this play was rejected three times by sponsors or advertising agencies. In indicting the sponsors, Rose presents a strong case for the intelligence of the television audience:

\begin{quote}
In trying to create what they consider orthodox and inoffensive entertainment, they are creating pap and managing to offend a good many potential customers who,
\end{quote}

it is true, do not write angry letters but merely turn off their television set.\footnote{Rose, 250.}

He also rails against the sponsors' double standard:
The claim was made by one network that \textit{Crime in the Streets} was too violent a show for the public to swallow. This is strange to hear, when we see every day that the networks are not afraid to dose the public with violence and murder as long as there is no reference to "controversial" social problems.\footnote{Rose, 251.}

Rose's arguments and his frustrations are an excellent example of the potential and the limitations of the television play as a means of challenging fifties conformity. His arguments in favor of controversial material illustrate the constraints placed upon television playwrights and their efforts to present controversial material in spite of those constraints.

In this chapter, I will briefly examine the social and political message of four of Rose's plays written between January 1954 and April 1955. I will then conclude by analyzing in greater detail two of Rose's most popular plays, \textit{Thunder on Sycamore Street} and \textit{Twelve Angry Men}. These plays, as well as \textit{Dino} (discussed previously), present a compelling picture of Rose's ability to use American television to challenge Cold War values.
Four Television Plays

Simon and Schuster published *Six Television Plays by Reginald Rose* in 1956. In addition to *Thunder on Sycamore Street* and *Twelve Angry Men*, the four other plays reveal Rose's ability to frame a controversial political or social message as palatable television fare. *The Remarkable Incident at Carson Corners* (January 1954), addresses the issue of shared responsibility within a community. After a child has fallen from a fire escape, a mock trial by the town's children reveals that several prominent community members shared responsibility in the fatal accident. By assigning blame throughout the community, Rose challenges the American willingness to seek scapegoats and shirk responsibility. As Gowda concludes, Rose shows:

> that disasters in the community, great or small, as a rule result from the faults of many men, indeed of virtually all men, and that through a community's zeal to discover a single victim, [sic] guilt is often grossly misassigned. [. . .] The drama about Carson Corners deals first of all with public and even with international affairs; for whose developments, Rose observes, a comprehensive responsibility must be shared.6

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6Gowda, 75. I am forced to draw heavily on Gowda's text in this chapter because, to my knowledge, no other comprehensive studies of Rose's television work have been undertaken.
While perhaps overstated, Gowda’s assessment of the social implications of Rose’s play fit with the author’s own commentary on his work. Rose claimed he wrote Carson Corners to tell "the story of man’s indifference to the needs of his fellow man." 7 Regarding the social-political implications of the story, Rose hoped that the play would present an eloquent attack on closed-mindedness, indifference, and conformity bred of laziness:

I sat down to write this script with an intense personal feeling of indignation at mankind’s sometimes terrifying irresponsibility and disregard for the basic needs and rights of people. Vaguely I thought of genocide, pogroms, lynchings, wars - the conglomerate tragedies allowed by human beings to fall upon other human beings through neglect, stupidity, indifference, and just sheer laziness. 8

Although it is impossible to assess how clearly the audience identified the town’s dilemma with their own lives or with American society, Rose clearly intended to attack several of the weaknesses of his society. Carson Corners, primarily through extensive distribution of kinescopes to schools, was widely viewed and praised. Its message of community irresponsibility, taken up as part of a campaign to reinforce the ethos of civic duty, seems to have been

7Rose, 53.
8Rose, 55.
accepted. The eagerness to find scapegoats, which Rose criticizes throughout the work, resonated with the witch-hunts for security risks and fellow-travellers. How successful Rose was at communicating this second message is impossible to say. As a measure of its popularity, Gowda claims that Rose’s story - primarily through CBS’s distribution of kinescopes of the program to schools - was as well known in the early fifties as Whittler’s "Barefoot Boy" was in the late nineteenth century.\(^9\) However extensively the lessons of Carson Corners were learned, this level of popularity at least emphasizes the potential impact of the controversial television play on fifties society.

*An Almanac of Liberty* (November 1954), Rose’s adaptation of Justice William O. Douglas’s 1954 novel, lacks the artistic finesse of Rose’s best works, in part because its message about individual rights is insistently, even blatantly put forward. Rose assessed the play as "one of the few dramas that might be classified in certain quarters as ‘controversial’ which has appeared on a national television show."\(^10\) He claimed that the public praise the play received was overwhelming, but not unanimous:

A man who refused to give his name shouted the following over the phone, "I’m a college graduate, so

\(^9\)Gowda, 74.

\(^10\)Rose, 205-06.
you can't fool me with that stuff. Why don't you
'Studio One' Commies go back to Russia?"\textsuperscript{11} The play begins with a foreigner being beaten by a mob. Shortly thereafter the townspeople begin to gather, summoned by an unknown individual to a 10:24 p.m. meeting. This meeting time parallels the time of the signing of the Bill of Rights: 10:24 a.m., December 1789. As several individuals express their distaste for the freedoms the foreigner represents, time begins moving backward, which, according to Rose, "symbolized [. . . ] what happens basically when something impedes man's unending struggle to be free."\textsuperscript{12} As the tension in the room rises, the closed-minded bullies of the town debate the newspaper editor and a few other enlightened townspeople over the rights of individuals to be different and to express unpopular opinions. Repeatedly, Rose portrays the bullies as dangerous ultra-conformists:


JOHN: Is that why I was attacked?

MR. WILKERSON: You bet it is! (To all) There's an element moving in here that's no good. They're not

\textsuperscript{11}Rose, 205.
\textsuperscript{12}Rose, 204.
satisfied with anything. They've got radical ideas and they infect good people with 'em.\textsuperscript{13}

Rose counters this oppressive viewpoint with the arguments of the newspaper editor, who ultimately triumphs, sobering the townspeople to the high price of allowing only safe ideas to exist: "when we start destroying liberty in the name of liberty, then we'd better run and hide. [...] Because no one will be safe and no one will be free."\textsuperscript{14}

Ultimately, once the townspeople pledge to uphold the liberties espoused in the Bill of Rights, the foreigner disappears and time begins moving forward again. We may question the effectiveness of Rose's sentimental ending, but the challenge he poses to Cold War conformism is undeniable.

*Crime in the Streets* (March 1955) and *The Incredible World of Horace Ford* (June 1955) address the social issues associated with poverty and crime. For Rose, poverty can be economic, as in *Crime*, or intellectual, as in *Horace Ford*. As he does with *Dino*, Rose uses *Crime in the Streets* to examine the social causes of criminal or anti-social behavior. Once again he challenges American eagerness to assign blame and seek scapegoats for modern problems. In *Horace Ford*, Rose creates a character who is impoverished in


\textsuperscript{14}Rose, *An Almanac of Liberty*, 201.
ideas. Ford, a toy maker, remains bound to childhood ambitions and ultimately regresses into childhood.

Rose assessed the controversy engendered by Crime in the Streets: "It dealt sympathetically with juvenile delinquency at a time when juvenile delinquents were considered to be eminently unpopular."\textsuperscript{15} By presenting an intractable social problem, this work undermined the idealistic vision of American society depicted by Cold Warriors of the fifties. The Incredible World of Horace Ford posed a different sort of challenge to American television audiences. Rose recounts that reaction to the play was mixed, but extremely passionate on both sides. Ford regresses back to childhood, but instead of the warm reception he had come to expect from his fond memories, a group of neighborhood boys beats him and leaves him sobbing on the sidewalk. Rose challenges his audience's expectations by presenting an undesirable hero who lacks maturity or mental stability, and he also does not offer a simple, optimistic solution. Ford is forced to remain in the frightening world he has created for himself, and the audience is forced to look beyond the happy memories of their youth (or at least the picture of youth commonly depicted in television) and accept the brutish, darker side of childhood. Such a powerful, complex, and terrifying

\textsuperscript{15}Rose, 249.
ending was a precursor to the techniques Rod Serling would make famous in his landmark series *The Twilight Zone."

**Thunder on Sycamore Street and Twelve Angry Men**

*Thunder on Sycamore Street*, aired in March 1954, and *Twelve Angry Men*, aired in September 1954, were Rose's most powerful and popular plays. Each has been adapted into a stage version, and *Twelve Angry Men* achieved great popular success in a film version. Despite a liberal sentimentalism that pervades these works and leads to their optimistic conclusions, both plays vividly represent Rose's challenges to American conformity, American racism, and the Cold War perversion of traditional American values.

For Rose, conformity can be equated with the mentality of the mob. In *Thunder on Sycamore Street*, the families of a middle class neighborhood have gathered to evict a new neighbor they have deemed undesirable. Although Rose's idea for this story came from the efforts of a white community in a Chicago suburb to evict a family of African-American tenants, the network did not permit him to present the story with any racial overtones. Instead the neighbor, the hero of Rose's story, is an ex-convict. Rose commented on the ability of television audiences to perceive a representation of many minorities in this character:

> It seems, however, that no matter how the protagonist of the play was disguised, viewers recognized him either for what he was meant to be or for a
representative of a minority group in their particular area. It was variously felt by viewers with whom I discussed the show that Joseph Blake was meant to symbolize a Negro, a Jew, a Catholic, a Puerto Rican, an ex-Communist or fellow traveler, a Japanese or Chinese, a Russian, an anarchist or an avowed atheist.\textsuperscript{16}

Erik Barnouw, in analyzing Thunder on Sycamore Street, points out that Rose, by not revealing to the audience the reasons the neighbor was unwanted until near the end of the play, "turned the play into an extraordinary social Rorschach test," and that for once, the sponsor's censorship actually backfired on them: "The sponsors found, with some uneasiness, that they had presented precisely the kind of controversial drama that they had tried to avoid."\textsuperscript{17}

Thunder on Sycamore Street was unusual not only for its powerful social message, but also for its structure. In the three acts, Rose presented the same fifteen minute sequence in three neighboring houses. The audience soon discovers that the families of this neighborhood have met and decided to evict their new neighbors. In the first house, Frank Morrison is preparing his family for a confrontation with the neighbor. In the second, Arthur Hayes is expressing

\textsuperscript{16}Rose, 107-08.

\textsuperscript{17}Erik Barnouw, \textit{Tube of Plenty} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) 165.
second thoughts about the vigilantism of his community. In
the third house, Joseph Blake, the patriarch of the
undesirable family, is preparing for the onslaught of the
community. Throughout the play, Cold War interpretations
of the American values of family, middle-class
respectability, and masculinity are repeatedly questioned by
Rose.

As the Morrisons prepare to embark on the evening's
adventure, they are left without a baby-sitter at the last
minute. Frank Morrison, declaring that "we're doing it for
them as much as anyone else," insists that the couple take
their two small children with them to witness the
confrontation.18 As the patriarch of this family, he
demonstrates the means by which an act of prejudice and
violence coopts family-centered values. The perversion of
these values is coupled with repeated arguments for the need
to maintain the respectability of this middle-class
neighborhood. Lastly, these values go hand in hand with a
belligerent form of masculinity. Frank Morrison's two sons,
dressed as cowboys, attack him with toy pistols as he walks
into his house.19 After roughhousing with his sons, he
allows them to watch a violent television show and
ultimately allows them to come to the gathering as a form of

18Reginald Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, Six

19Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, 61.
instruction. Frank Morrison sees this experience as a lesson in life for his sons and as an expression of his own masculinity:

He's old enough. You want something bad, you gotta go out and get it. That's how this world is. Boy, I like this, Clarry. You know what it makes me feel like? It makes me feel like a man!  

This sentiment is echoed in the second house, as Arthur Hayes' father-in-law voices his resentment at being left behind "when there's real action going on right under your nose[.] Something a man wants to get into."  

Despite the enthusiasm of his father-in-law, Arthur Hayes is reluctant to follow the community's plan of action. However, his wife Phyllis constantly reminds him of the need to maintain the respectability of their family and community. She counters Arthur's misgivings by outlining the risks to their child and to the real estate prices in the neighborhood:

Will the police stop his child from playing with Billy? What kind of a child must that be? Think about it. Her father is an ex convict. That's a lovely thing to tell our friends. Why yes [. . .] you know Billy's little friend Judy. Of course you do. Her father spent a great deal of time in prison. Charming people.

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20 Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, 68.
21 Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, 80.
It's beautiful for the neighborhood, isn't it, Artie?
It makes real estate prices just skyrocket up.²²

By the end of the scene, Rose replaces Frank Morrison's praise of conformity with Phyllis Hayes' fear of not conforming. Phyllis argues for the value of the impending vigilantism, but she is motivated by a fear of finding her family on the wrong side of community opinion:

PHYLLIS: [. . .] we're going to walk out into the gutter, you and me, the Hayes family, and we're going to be just like everybody else on Sycamore Street!
[. . .] Do you want to know why? Because we're not going to be next!

ARTHUR: You're out of your mind!

PHYLLIS: Sure I am! [. . .] I'm crazy with fear because I don't want to be different. I don't want my neighbors looking at us and wondering why we're not like them. [. . .] We'll be the only ones, the odd ones who wanted to let an ex-convict live with us. They'll look the other way when we walk down the streets. They'll become cold and nasty . . . and all of a sudden we won't have any neighbors. (Pointing at the Blake house) We'll be like them! [. . .] We can't be different! We can't afford it! We live on the good will of these people. Your business is in this town.

²²Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, 82.
Your neighbors buy us the bread we eat! Do you want them to stop?23

The fear of economic coercion, analogous to the effects of the blacklist, temporarily forces Arthur to accept his wife's advice and join her in the neighborhood demonstration.

Rose represents this concerted neighborhood effort in the darkest terms. He repeatedly refers to the gathering group of neighbors (and the conformity they represent) as a "mob." Arthur Hayes challenges his wife's portrayal of community action in these terms: "Look, Phyllis, this is a mob we're getting together."24 Later, when the Blakes are arguing about the approaching confrontation, they speak of their neighbors not as individuals, but as a mob:

ANNA: Joe [. . .] Do you know what a mob is like? Do you know what they're capable of doing?

JOE: It's something I've never thought of before . . .

a mob. I guess they're capable of doing ugly things.25

Lastly, Joe attempts to understand the actions of his neighbors, attributing them to fear:

23Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, 86-7.

24Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, 82.

25Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, 95.
They’re people, Anna. And I guess they’re afraid, just like we are. That’s why they’ve become a mob. It’s why people always do.  

Rose also uses the sound of marching feet to reinforce the conformity of the crowd. At the end of the first two acts, this marching is the final noise heard before fade out. At the end of Act I Rose’s stage directions conclude with:

"[T]hey walk into a mob of grimly advancing men and women. [. . .] the only sound we hear is the frightening noise of tramping feet."  

Rose provides a similarly ominous description of conformity at the close of Act II:

we begin to hear the cold and chilling sound of the tramping feet. [. . .] We see the crowd, grimly marching, and the Morriscs at the head of it. No one looks at the Hayes. The dull thud of the tramping feet is sickening to hear.  

This unison marching reinforces the blind conformity of the community, a conformity which the group of neighbors has masked in decorum and an official air. In Act III the leaders of the crowd attempt to maintain their authority over the mob by referring to this eviction as an orderly process. When it appears the crowd is about to become unruly, Frank Morrison calls on his neighbors to act

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26Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, 97.

27Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, 73.

28Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, 88.
according to polite decorum and within the bounds of their majority-derived "authority":

This whole thing is going to be handled the way we planned it at the meeting. [. . .] This man here is gonna be asked politely and quietly to pack his things and get his family out of here [. . .] If he's got any brains in his head he'll be out in one hour - and nobody'll touch him or his house. If he hasn't - There is a low throated, ominous murmur from the crowd.
Right! This thing is gonna be done fair and square.  

Thus Rose invites his audience to realize that a mob exists not merely in the riotous behavior of a group of night-time vigilantes, but in the willingness of a majority of high-minded, well-mannered, respectable citizens to forfeit the rights of any minority. Against this majority Rose pits the lone individual, Joseph Blake.

Blake is portrayed, perhaps too simplistically, as a heroic, utterly sympathetic character. He is the sole provider for his daughter, wife, and mother. He accepts a position as a salesman of pots and pans with humility and dignity, and his time in prison was based on a fatal automobile accident. In this way one could argue that Rose makes identification too easy for his audience. Yet, according to the current reading of Cold War television, the

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39Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, 101.
choice in favor of the non-conformist should never have been presented to television audiences in the first place. Joseph Blake is a man of great dignity, determined to fight for acceptance on his own terms. When his wife urges him to tell their neighbors about the accident, believing they will then depart, Joe reveals the deeper principles to her and the audience:

Anna, we have our freedom. If we beg for it, then it's gone. [. . .] we're only little people, but we have certain rights. Judy's gonna learn about them in school in a couple of years . . . and they'll tell her that no one can take them away from her. She's got to be able to believe that. They include the right to be different. Well, a group of our neighbors have decided that we have to get out of here because they think we're different. They think we're not nice. (Strongly) Do we have to smile in their faces and tell them we are nice? We don't have to win the right to be free! It's the same as running away, Anna. It's staying on their terms, and if we can't stay here on our terms, then there are no more places to stay anywhere.³⁰

Such a defense of "the right to be different" is a surprisingly blatant challenge to fifties television audiences, reinforced by the concealment of Joseph Blake's identity until the final act and made universal by his claim

³⁰Rose, Thunder on Sycamore Street, 98.
that capitulation would forfeit their right to stay anywhere.

Rose constructs the confrontation between the mob and the individual as a complete reversal of the forces that have been building throughout the play. After Frank Morrison's pronouncements on behalf of the community, Blake refuses to leave, challenging the crowd: "You good people of Sycamore Street are going to have to kill me tonight!"\textsuperscript{31} He then challenges the group as individuals, starting with Frank Morrison. One of the crowd throws a rock at Blake, striking him in the head. This act of bloodshed sobers the crowd, and in rapid succession, Arthur Hayes comes to the defense of Blake, the crowd loses its cohesiveness, Morrison tries unsuccessfully to rally them, and Morrison's son looses the unquestioning pride he has shown in his father: "Roger looks at his bewildered father and then he turns away [. . .] his father is no longer the greatest guy in the world."\textsuperscript{32} The leader of the crowd is revealed as a bigoted bully, and Arthur Hayes, who had previously been unable to stand up to his family and his community, is now seen in a new light by his wife. To her, "Arthur is no longer a grown-up child."\textsuperscript{33} By the time the crowd has dispersed and the Blakes reenter their house, the individual has triumphed

\textsuperscript{31}Rose, \textit{Thunder on Sycamore Street}, 102.

\textsuperscript{32}Rose, \textit{Thunder on Sycamore Street}, 104.

\textsuperscript{33}Rose, \textit{Thunder on Sycamore Street}, 104.
over the misguided community - a theme that runs throughout Rose’s work. While it could be argued that Rose’s anti-conformist message was likely dismissed as a portrayal of a few atypical closed-minded Americans, Rose himself comments on the painful chord it struck in some viewers:

a week or so after the show I received a letter which contained a bitter, shocking point of view. It was signed by ten married couples living in a Far Western city, and stated in effect that the events depicted in this show could never happen in America and that the author was obviously trying to foment some kind of mysterious anti-American trouble.  

Clearly these viewers were responding to something they felt did not square with their perceptions of Cold War television. If the Cleavers or Lucy and Desi were the model of the fifties family, the Morissons, and the Falcaros in Dino, were the antithesis of the family ideal. Whereas television advertising promoted the effort to keep up with the Joneses and supported a middle class consumer ethic, Rose depicted an environment in which these middle class values could be perverted to persecute someone who differed from the norm. Although the rapid resolution and the melodramatic, sentimental conclusion of Thunder on Sycamore Street invite skepticism regarding the artistic complexity of the piece, Rose’s theme can not be situated in the

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34Rose, 108.
traditional model that presents fifties television as a staid, conformist vehicle for Cold War values.

In Twelve Angry Men Rose again confronted the issues of blind conformity and prejudice. In this play, the lone individual is "Juror No. 8," and his misguided community is a group of twelve ordinary citizens. By choosing this community, Rose has placed himself in an excellent position to comment of the representative fears, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities that obscure the underlying virtue of the American citizenry. The individual triumphs again, but not before a heated confrontation with a group of Americans who are either apathetic, acquiescent, aggressive, or racist. Once again Rose questions American notions of masculinity and the audience's ideas of respectability and fairness.

Juror No. 8 is the only member of a jury to question the guilt of an accused murderer. As a heated debate ensues regarding the verdict to be rendered, Rose discloses the prejudices of several members of the jury. Because the accused is a young African-American from a slum, Rose can make him the target of a variety of prejudices within the jury. The most aggressive juror, No. 3, is a bully who Rose describes as "intolerant of opinions other than his own and accustomed to forcing his wishes and views upon others."³⁵

In the course of the jury's deliberations he is revealed as

an abusive father and a bigot. Yet he is only one of the voices of economic, social, and racial prejudice throughout the play. No. 4, described by Rose as "a man of wealth and position," presents a version of unthinking economic prejudice that nearly leads to a fist fight in the deliberation room:

No. 4: We're not here to go into the reasons why slums are breeding grounds for criminals. They are. I know it. So do you. The children who come out of slum backgrounds are potential menaces to society [...] 

No. 10: You said it there. I don't want any part of them, believe me [...] 

No. 5: I've lived in a slum all my life -

No. 10: Oh, now wait a second!

No. 5: I used to play in a back yard that was filled with garbage. Maybe it still smells on me. Rose presents racial prejudice through Juror No. 10, whom he described as an "angry, bitter man [...] A bigot who places no values on any human life save his own." His prejudice forces the other jurors to turn away from him in the midst of a violent tirade:

How can you believe this kid is innocent? Look, you know how those people lie. I don’t have to tell you. 

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36Rose, Twelve Angry Men, 113.
37Rose, Twelve Angry Men, 124.
38Rose, Twelve Angry Men, 114.
They don't know what the truth is. And lemme tell you, they [...] don't need any big reason to kill someone either. You know, they get drunk, and bang, someone's lying in the gutter. Nobody's blaming them. That's how they are. [...] Violent [...] Human life doesn't mean as much to them as it does to us. Look, these people are drinking and fighting all the time, and if somebody gets killed, so somebody gets killed. They don't care. Oh sure, there are some good things about them, too. Look, I'm the first to say that. [...] I've known a few who were pretty decent, but that's the exception. Most of them, it's like they have no feelings. They can do anything [...] They're no good. There's not one of 'em who's any good. We'd better watch out.\(^3\)

Only after one of the other jurors threatens to split his skull does Juror No. 10 subside.

Through re-enactment of portions of the testimony and by discrediting several witnesses, Juror No. 8 slowly wins the other jurors to his side. As he does this, Rose presents a case for the value of unpopular opinions. Before he is silenced by Juror No. 3, Juror No. 11, a recent immigrant, attempts to present an argument for the right to dissent:

\(^{39}\)Rose; Twelve Angry Men, 148-49.
I have always thought that a man was entitled to have unpopular opinions in this country. This is the reason I came here. I wanted to have the right to disagree.\textsuperscript{40}

While it seems commonplace today, in the context of fifties television, such a message flew in the face of the hard line God-fearing, anti-communist rhetoric that gripped the nation. Juror No. 8 eventually persuades all of his fellow jurors to acquit the accused, with Juror No. 3 the last to acquiesce. As Juror No. 3 no longer commands the majority opinion, we see his once-fierce convictions waver. His surrender reveals the shallowness beneath the conformity that had once held this group of men together. When No. 3 threatens to force a hung jury, the other jurors point out his isolation:

No 3: Well you're not going to intimidate me! [. . .]
I'm entitled to my opinion! It's going to be a hung jury! That's it!
No 8: There's nothing we can do about that, except hope that some night, maybe in a few months, you'll get some sleep.
No. 5: You're all alone.
No. 9: It takes a great deal of courage to stand alone.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40}Rose, Twelve Angry Men, 129.
\textsuperscript{41}Rose, Twelve Angry Men, 152.
Not buttressed by moral conviction, he capitulates and the jury finds the defendant not guilty. Rose could be criticized for simply replacing one form of conformity with another, yet he escapes this dilemma (perhaps too neatly) by calling on Juror No. 3 to deal with the internal turmoil a wrongful conviction would cause him. Ultimately, conscience replaces conformity as the basis of the decision. As with his other plays, Rose presents a universal message about the danger of blind conformity and the emptiness that is the center of the conformist's ethic.

If we consider Rose's seven published television plays, a number of the assumptions held by Cold War historians regarding the role of fifties television are undermined. Rose presents family strife without apparent resolution. Mr. and Mrs. Falcaro are implicated in Dino's anti-social behavior. A misguided effort to protect the family underlies Frank Morrison's and Phyllis Hayes' vigilantism. Mr. Morrison looses his hero status with his sons and is revealed as a bully and a bigot. Juror No. 3's hostility can be traced to a strained relationship with his own son. Furthermore, Rose dealt with complex, insoluble problems in compelling ways. The best example of this is the issue of juvenile delinquency in Crime in the Streets and Dino. Shared blame and the eagerness to find scapegoats were addressed in most of these plays, most prominently in Carson Corners. The conformist's ethic was attacked and equated
with laziness (*Carson Corners* and *Twelve Angry Men*), prejudice (*Almanac, Thunder, Twelve Angry Men*), and mob psychology (*Almanac, Thunder*). For both their melodramatic simplicity and the complexity of their social message, Reginald Rose’s television plays call for a more sophisticated understanding of television’s role in supporting and undermining the cultural hegemony of fifties America.
CHAPTER V.

CHALLENGING THE SYSTEM: ROD SERLING

In his assessment of the live television of the fifties, Rod Serling claimed that: "[t]elevision, while unique in its potentials, is further unique in its limitations." Serling's television plays present both these limitations and the enormous potential of fifties television drama. The limitations of the television medium - primarily censorship, time constraints, and a penchant for tidy resolutions - are reflected in much of Serling's work. However, at his best, as in Patterns, the 1955 play that made Serling famous, he created enormous controversy by undermining or manipulating these restrictions. Because of this ability to stir controversy, Serling biographers Gordon F. Sander and Joel Engel have described the playwright as a "video Aesop" and "television's last angry man." The controversial subjects Serling addressed in his television plays were precursors to the social commentary he often presented in the CBS series The Twilight Zone (1959-64). His published plays challenged and questioned many of the

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Rod Serling, Patterns: Four Television Plays With the Author's Original Commentaries (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957) 16.
premises of fifties conformism. In addition to The Strike and Noon on Doomsday (published in separate collections and discussed in Chapter III), Simon and Schuster published four of Serling's plays in 1957. In the following year, Bantam published this collection in a paperback edition. Three of these plays, Patterns, The Rack, and Requiem for a Heavyweight, illustrate Serling's effectiveness at probing the underlying tensions of fifties America. By pitting the individual against a faceless system, exposing the moral ambiguity of contemporary social structures, and contrasting a new form of malleable ethics with traditional ethical absolutes, Serling found a wide audience and vulnerable targets in American society.²

Yet, because of his commitment to social drama, Serling faced sponsor and network censorship throughout his career. The changes he was forced to make to Noon on Doomsday diluted his bold statement against American racism and small-mindedness. In April of 1956, Serling's play The Arena was presented on Studio One. Originally conceived as

²The fourth play in this volume, Old MacDonald Had a Curve, Serling claimed was not presented as anything other than entertainment. In this play, an elderly man has a chance to play major league baseball because of his newfound ability to pitch a curve ball that no batter could hit. Even this "entertainment" vehicle subtly presented a social issue for consideration. Serling claimed that "I had no ax to grind, no issue to solve. It did show, even at this relatively early date, something of my later preoccupation with the age-youth problem, so obvious in Patterns [. . . and the problem of aging without grace and perhaps without dignity." Rod Serling, Patterns, 179-80.
a drama of political intrigue, Serling was prohibited by the sponsors from discussing any current or pressing problem. After being forced to make several revisions, Serling criticized the final script as "hieroglyphics about make-believe issues, using invented terminology, a kind of prolonged, unbelievable double talk." As a result, the play television audiences watched was an incoherent debate over fictional and undefined Bill R.R. 107803906. As Rose had done in his commentary on Crime in the Streets, Serling presented his own critique of the sponsors' shortsightedness:

Perhaps if some thoughtful people would write to sponsors, pleading for an adult airing of issues on a dramatic program, to counterattack those cranks who hoist up the Stars and Bars whenever a play suggests a racial controversy, the sponsor or agency would realize that not to attack a controversial theme might be just as destructive as attacking it."

After 1955 Serling was able to fight for controversial material because with Patterns' enormous success he had clout. Before that time, with the exception of The Strike, most of the material he sold to the networks he described as "non-controversial [. . .] socially inoffensive and dealt

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4Serling, "About Writing for Television," Patterns, 25.
with no human problem in which battle lines could be drawn." For those writers who had not established a reputation, and even those who had, Serling recognized the tight constraints that limited the work of television playwrights: "in television today, the writer is hamstrung and closeted in by myriad of regulations and imposed dogma that dictate to him what he can write about and what he can't." 

In addition to the restrictions of censorship, time constraints also hampered Serling's efforts. These time constraints included air time, the commercial break, rehearsal time, and script preparation. Serling lamented each of these:

in no other writing form is the author so fettered by the clock. The half-hour program will sustain a story for only 23-odd minutes. The hour program calls for a 48-to 50-minute play. It is unheard of that a legitimate playwright must write within so rigid and inflexible a time frame. But the TV writer must. It is further arbitrary that his play must break twice in a half hour show to allow for the commercial

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5Serling, "About Writing For Television," Patterns, 19.
6Serling, "About Writing For Television," Patterns, 19.
message [. . .] The "break" will hurt the flow, the continuity and the build, but the "break" must come."7 He also compared the eight or nine days of rehearsal accorded a television play to the month of rehearsals a Broadway play received.8 Serling prided himself on the speed with which he could produce scripts. The Rack, the play that he took the longest to develop, was researched and written in nineteen months.9 This extensive preparation was the exception. Because television created such an enormous demand for materials, television playwrights were called upon to produce an enormous volume of scripts. Many writers, Serling and Rose included, were under contract for a certain number of plays per year. Serling biographer Gordon F. Sander comments that after Patterns, when Serling material was in great demand, he produced too many scripts too quickly and revised or recycled inferior scripts that should have remained unproduced. This resulted in a long list of forgettable television plays that were ill-prepared and weakly developed, leaving the playwright "overworked, overpressured, and overexposed."10

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7Rod Serling, "About Writing for Television," Patterns, 16.
8Serling, "About Writing for Television," Patterns, 16.
9Serling, 136.
Although Serling succumbed to each of fifties television’s limitations in one form or another, his best plays provided powerful challenges to fifties conformity. In fact, the challenges he posed in these plays are all the more impressive when they are recognized as products of such a limiting system. In these plays Serling focused his commentary upon rigid dehumanizing systems and the moral relativism which they spawned.

Serling targeted "the system" in most of his plays. He confronted the corporate system in Patterns, the military system in The Rack, and - as a metaphor for an all-consuming system - the world of professional boxing in Requiem For a Heavyweight. In these works each system dehumanizes and coopts its members. The system itself is not always evil, but each system ultimately traps its members or often, as it does in Patterns, leads to a moral relativism that calls for the characters and audience to re-assess their previous beliefs. In contrast to Rose’s plays, the individual does not always triumph in the end of Serling’s plays; he rather comes to a new understanding.

In Patterns, Serling’s protagonist, Fred Staples, arrives at the New York offices of Ramsey and Company, having been hand-picked by Ramsey to be company vice-president. Before the audience sees Ramsey or Staples, two secretaries emphasize the corporate pecking order by
discussing the significance of Staples' office location.\textsuperscript{11} Staples has been chosen to replace Andy Sloane, one of the original founders of the company. Ramsey, representing a vicious modern corporate mentality, wants Sloane replaced because he represents an outdated ethical standard. Sloane's secretary remarks: "Mr. Ramsey doesn't like his judgement questioned. An old fashioned point of view, a deep concern with ethics."\textsuperscript{12} While Sloane is depicted as a virtuous man weakened by years of giving in to Ramsey, Ramsey is portrayed as ruthless, but not sinister. Joel Engel points out that the success of the play is due in part to the fact that Ramsey is not the stereotype of the greedy capitalist.\textsuperscript{13} Ramsey ultimately constructs his own logical ethical code based on a Darwinian-style business tactics. In Staples' first board meeting, Sloane questions Ramsey's purchase proposal for a factory. By delaying the purchase, Ramsey will reduce the expense substantially. Sloane argues that such a delay would force hundreds out of work needlessly. Ramsey, in turn, counters convincingly that by lowering his initial costs, he will ultimately be able to employ more people and compete more effectively. Within the emerging corporate mentality of the fifties, Ramsey's

\textsuperscript{11}Serling, Patterns, 51.

\textsuperscript{12}Serling, Patterns, 66.

\textsuperscript{13}Joel Engel, Rod Serling: The Dreams and Nightmares of Life in the Twilight Zone (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989) 111.
argument makes sense. If the audience accepts that the system, or the collective good represented by that system, is more important than individuals (in this case a group of plant workers), then, despite his ruthlessness, the audience can accept Ramsey's confident assertion that "We're not going to ruin that town, we're going to make it."\(^{14}\)

Over the course of several months, Staples finds that Ramsey is deliberately making life intolerable for Sloane so that he will resign. Though once a fierce fighter, Sloane now invariably backs down in his confrontations with Ramsey. Sloane is the portrait of the tortured individual trapped by the system, belittled, and dehumanized:

I'm the kind [. . .] who gets into a rut and feels desperate about the job. The kind who gets used to a big salary and decides it's more important than his pride. [. . .] The chain that binds. Habit. Pattern. So I conjure up another illusion. That the other morning didn't happen. And all the other mornings. All the other little humiliations.\(^{15}\)

Staples, feeling that he and Sloane share many of the same ideals and personal insecurities, offers a defense of Sloane to Ramsey, but Ramsey counters that Sloane, and his form of ethics, are obsolete: "Mr. Sloane now has a certain

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\(^{14}\)Serling, Patterns, 58.

\(^{15}\)Serling, Patterns, 67-68.
sentimental value. He's a sweet old keepsake - a sentimental carryover from the old days."\textsuperscript{16}

The conflict arises when Staples' ambitious wife shows Ramsey a report that he and Sloane had developed together, implying that this was solely her husband's work. Staples fails to correct the mistaken assumption, partly because he wants the vice-presidency, and recognizes his own responsibility in the events to follow: "in that meeting, in that conference room, he's going to whip Andy to death. [. . .] I handed him the whip."\textsuperscript{17}

The next morning, Ramsey publicly attacks Sloane for taking credit for Staples' work. Sloane attempts a feeble defense, as does Staples, and then acquiesces. Shortly afterward, apparently from the relentless pressure and humiliation, Sloane suffers a fatal heart attack. After returning from the hospital, Staples confronts Ramsey, expecting to resign. As he encounters Ramsey, Staples attacks the ruthless, amoral corporate ethos that Ramsey represents:

It wasn't Andy's weakness that bothered you. It was his strength. It was his ethics that kept digging into you. Every minute he was around, Andy Sloane was your conscience. A constant, irksome reminder that some

\textsuperscript{16}Serling, Patterns, 71.

\textsuperscript{17}Serling, Patterns, 74.
things are wrong. They can't be shaded somehow or changed - they're wrong!¹⁸

In this final confrontation, Serling presents his attack on the dehumanizing system through Staples' assessment of Ramsey: "You're a washout! You're a genius, a production, organizational marvel with no compassion for human weakness!"¹⁹

However, what begins as the traditional showdown between good and evil turns into a battleground of competing, relativistic moral codes. Ramsey's ethic is centered on the system. It does not permit him to grieve for Sloane, but merely allows him to accept that Sloane could not survive as a modern corporate executive. Ramsey coopts Staples into his new ethical code, convincing him to remain with the company. Thereafter Staples may serve as a company conscience if he desires, but the bottom line will always be the best interests of the corporation. While this ambiguous solution appears to justify the new corporate mentality, Serling depicts these men as subservient to their creation. The business, the system, is ultimately the god they must serve:

¹⁸Serling, Patterns, 81.

¹⁹Serling, Patterns, 82. Joel Engel points out that actor Richard Kiley (who played Staples) changed the word washout to "freak" unexpectedly, (Engel 109) an alteration which further emphasized the inhuman nature of the Ramsey character.
RAMSEY: It's no one's business! It belongs only to the best! To those who can control it. Keep it growing, producing - keep it alive! It belongs to us right now! In the future, to whoever can give it more.  

In the end, the system consumes not only Andy Sloane, but all those who serve it.

The extent to which Serling intended his play as an attack on American capitalism is unclear. Serling claimed that "there is nothing Marxist in the message of this play. It is not an indictment of our capitalist system." Yet this can be seen as a response or a defense against negative press. Following the initial broadcast of Patterns, the reviewer for The Wall Street Journal labeled the play "Marxist." Serling may have been responding directly to this criticism when he wrote his assessment of Patterns. Regardless of the Marxist implications that may or may not be present in the script, there appears to be a broader purpose behind Serling's work. The corporation serves as a metaphor for the modern, faceless organization and the willingness of individuals to succumb to such organizations. This, coupled with the erosion of American ethics portrayed by Serling, led many observers to question the broader

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Serling, Patterns, 82.
Serling, Patterns, 85.
Sanders, 103.
implications of Serling's message. There is little doubt that Serling's ability to portray the darker side of the American corporate mentality held frightening implications for many viewers. Robert Lewis Shayon, writing for The Saturday Review of Literature, claimed that he had never been "so stimulated to challenge the haunting conclusions of an hour's entertainment." 23

Serling was also able to tap into a particularly troubling aspect of the American conscience in the mid-fifties. At the time American consciousness was focused on the nation's corporate elite. In 1955 Time Magazine named a General Motors executive as its "Man of the Year." In the same year, Sloan Wilson's The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit addressed troubling issues of the corporate mentality and identity. A year later, in 1956, two studies would have a profound influence on the American self-image: C. Wright Mills' The Power Elite, a study of corporate, political, and social authority, and William Whyte's The Organization Man, an analysis of the new American ideals forming around effective teamwork instead of self-reliance. Within this context, Patterns served as a reflection of these social critiques and a means by which an enormous television audience was presented a harsh picture of "the system," modern corporate reality, and their toll on American ethics.

In The Rack (aired April 1955), Serling took on the

23Engel, 108.
controversy surrounding American prisoners of war who collaborated with the enemy. After the Korean War, the many P.O.W.'s accused of collaboration were at the center of a national debate on American character and the battle against communism. The indecisiveness of the outcome of the Korean War and the apparent weakness of U.S. fighting men who succumbed to "brainwashing" were serious blows to American morale during the early Cold War. Serling claimed that his first ideas for The Rack came from newspaper accounts of these soldiers' return, and he spelled out many of the doubts raised by this issue:

At best, Korea seemed to be an inconclusive, muddled, indecisive and bloody affair that we were unable to win and couldn't afford to lose. And from this particularly ugly and uninspired engagement came the disconcerting spectacle of Americans informing upon Americans. [. . .] We were a nation priding ourselves on the moral fiber of our fighting men, and suddenly we were given a torturous exhibition of the disintegration of that fiber - not only on specific individual levels but operating on whole groups of American men.24

Serling addressed the moral dilemma of convicting these men based on rules that did not account for the new form of torture used in Korea. Except for the 1956 film version of The Rack (with Paul Newman in the lead role), it was not

24Serling, Patterns, 137.
until The Manchurian Candidate in 1962 that a major film studio attempted such a candid depiction of this problem (and, even then, it was presented as a backdrop for suspense rather than as a subject calling for national consideration). One also wonders to what extent Broadway's first treatment of this issue, Henry Denker's and Ralph Berkey's Time Limit! (January 1956) was a reflection of the controversy generated almost a year before by The Rack.²⁵

Serling undermined the public condemnation of these men by presenting a sympathetic portrayal of one such collaborator, Captain Ed Hall, who Serling claimed was a compilation of the different cases he studied during his extensive research.²⁶ Hall, a war hero decorated several times for bravery, has returned home and is about to face a court martial for providing aid and comfort to the enemy. Hall is not depicted as a hero or villain, but rather as a fallible human being who succumbed to inhuman pressures. Throughout the play he attacks the Army as an inhuman system that railroads him through its own dogmatic interpretation of justice:

ED: They love it, don't they?

WASNIK: Who?


²⁶Serling, Patterns, 141.
ED: The Court. The brass. The shiny field-graders with the fruit salad and the bravery that just plumb oozes out of their eyes. [...] I think the Army is so goddamn orderly that it has to stick a tag on everything and label it. [...] "Treason's" a fat, meaty, understood word. We'll tag this guy with treason. We'll fit him into a nice, recognizable mold. Henceforth, skip the complexities of motives and personality and psychology. Just label him! Label him and act accordingly.27

Earlier in the play, Hall criticizes the inhuman nature of the Army and, by extension, his father (a career military man), "I was born into the Army [...] my father was a uniform and three tiers of ribbons [...] this Army could perform only one human function. It could bleed, but it couldn't weep!28

Yet, Serling does not cast the Army as a villain. Instead he denies a simple answer to the complex, disturbing specter of collaboration with the enemy. The U.S. Army is ultimately presented as a group of fair-minded men attempting to perform an impossible task. Captain Sam Moulton, the prosecuting attorney, presents the Army's perspective on dealing with this impossible task:


You think the Army has some set, prearranged words dragged out for certain occasions. Army words. All very orderly, all very categorical, everything in its proper place. A man does this, therefore he's that . . . he's sentenced thus. I want to tell you something. [. . .] When it comes to its own, the Army walks tiptoe and in agony looking for justice.\textsuperscript{29}

Ultimately, after Serling presents arguments for both sides of the issue, he situates Ed Hall's guilt within an inherent weakness in mankind:

You have a guilt, Captain Hall, but it's in some ways partly a guilt in all of us. You'll bear the cross because of this guilt - the verdict, the sentence, the stigma, perhaps. But the conscience you can share - with all of us. This you needn't bear alone. For this weakness is not yours alone, though you succumbed to it. [. . .] I think it is a weakness of the race of men - who may believe in a God but who don't act as if they believed.\textsuperscript{30}

Hall is found guilty and accepts the verdict as just, after which he is reconciled with his father. However, Serling does not leave the audience with a pat or cliched ending. As in Patterns and The Strike, the individual does not

\textsuperscript{29}Serling, The Rack, Patterns, 113.  
\textsuperscript{30}Serling, The Rack, Patterns, 131-32.
triumph over the system, he accommodates himself to it or comes to a new realization within its strictures.

If Patterns presented a protagonist coopted by the system and The Rack offered a protagonist who comes to terms with the system, then Requiem For a Heavyweight presents a protagonist who is consumed and discarded by the system. In Requiem, Serling portrays a boxer who, after years of punishment, is forced into retirement. After boxing, Harlan "Mountain" McClintock must find a new purpose for his life. Throughout the play Serling presents a system - professional boxing - that destroys human beings and discards them. In the opening scene, the aging fight doctor paints a grim picture of this system and its discarded fighters:

Too bad none of them are machines. [...] I've seen a lot of them. Thirty-eight years. When I first come in they used to lay them out in front of me. They were human beings then. They were young men. [...] Now it's like a guy who grades meat in a packing plant. They roll the carcasses down the line in front of him and he stamps them. Beef. [...] Just a hunk of something inanimate.31

Serling portrays the other members of this system - managers, trainers, promoters - as consumers as well. As Mountain's friend remarks: "Why do so many people have to

feed off of one guy's misery." A neighborhood bar serves as a destination for the refuse of this world: a place where all of the old fighters and hangers-on drink and re-enact great fights. The bar, or "graveyard," as Mountain's trainer calls it, symbolizes the decline that awaits the retired fighter.

After years of punishment in the boxing ring, the system has consumed Mountain's body. As Mountain fears for his livelihood after his retirement, the system attempts to consume his personal dignity as well. Feeling that he owes a debt to his manager, Mountain is persuaded to try professional wrestling. In the climactic scene of the play Mountain must choose between retaining his dignity or putting on a mountaineer's wrestling costume which he identifies as the costume of a clown. In an attempt to hold on to his pride, he refuses to wrestle. In the ensuing argument his trainer reveals that he is in debt because he bet against Mountain. This act of confession reveals the complete corruption of the system. The trainer tries to defend his action within a new system of ethics based not on personal loyalty but on expediency: "You're not a winner anymore, Mountain. And that means there's only one thing left - make a little off the losing." This act of betrayal forces the fighter to lose faith in the world of

32Serling, Requiem For a Heavyweight, Patterns, 227.

33Serling, Requiem For a Heavyweight, Patterns, 233.
professional boxing, and he leaves this system behind forever. In the final scene, Mountain finds work as a boxing coach at a boy's camp and thus escapes the system and the graveyard. Here Serling illustrates the weakness that a few of his other television plays had managed to avoid. He admitted that this ended the play too "blithely and too patly," a failing endemic to television writing.

Although Serling's earlier plays sparked much greater controversy, Requiem remains one of his most popular and critically acclaimed plays, released as a Columbia Pictures film in 1962 and appearing on Broadway in 1982. His self-proclaimed premise for the play, that "every man can and must search for his own personal dignity," once-again led to a play that pitted the individual against the all-consuming system. In Requiem and his other major works, Serling, like Rose and so many other great television playwrights of the fifties, pushed the audience to grapple with serious, insoluble problems. He may not have always succeeded, but he consistently tried to challenge the television audiences of the fifties and to raise the television play to an art form:

the medium for which I write need never short-change itself by assuming an audience of escapist idiots who

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34 Serling, Patterns, 244.

35 Sander, 250, 223.

36 Serling, Patterns, 242.
would rather gasp at contestants in sound booths than expose themselves to a life-and-death problem, however ugly and however unpleasant. [. . .] The only deterrent is not the audience, it's the medium itself.37

As a playwright, Serling managed to overcome several difficulties that plagued Rose and many other television writers. He was better able to avoid the sentimentalism and sense of unquestioning fairness that is present in Rose's work. He also more successfully avoided the tidy conclusion by leaving many of his plays open-ended or ironic in nature. At the same time, Serling was eventually corrupted by the commercial television system to an extent that Rose was not. He is as likely to be remembered for his achievements after the live television era (The Twilight Zone, The Night Gallery) as he is for his best television plays. Sadly, he is also remembered for his work as a commercial spokesman and for the decline of his stature among American writers toward the end of his career.38 Although the television work of both men was often compromised by sponsor pressures and the restraints of the medium (time, taboo subject matter, performance space, etc.), they each served to channel the criticism of American culture that was surfacing

37Serling, Patterns, 142.

38Both Engel's and Sander's biographies of Serling - as their titles suggest - chart the demise of a once-great writer as he was corrupted by the Hollywood system much in the same way as many of his characters who lose their integrity to the system.
in the mid-fifties into a popular entertainment form. The extent to which their audiences heeded the warnings they presented is impossible to calculate, but their work, and the combined work of the socially-conscious television playwrights of the fifties, were clearly tools for social change.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Cultural historians such as Halberstam and Whitfield have acknowledged the contentious elements of American culture in the fifties that foreshadowed the turmoil of the sixties. Therefore, it should not, in light of the evidence presented in this study, be difficult to include a new role for fifties television in an ongoing reappraisal of fifties conformism. Relative to the thirties, forties, and sixties, the fifties can easily be seen as a period of complacency. However, understanding the underlying dynamism within American culture of that decade requires a more complete reading of the cultural representations it produced than most historians or theatre scholars currently provide. The rapid expansion of television, certainly, was the pivotal cultural event on the American scene in those years. Whether it is viewed as competition or an offshoot, television affected American theatre in this same period. During this decade television was an integral part of the careers of many theatre artists. Theatre artists, plays, and audiences crossed over from the legitimate stage to the television studio and from the studio to the stage.
Audiences in the legitimate theatre almost certainly had their expectations affected by the dramatic programs they witnessed on television with increasing regularity through much of the fifties. A greater understanding of the dynamism of fifties television programming permits historians to understand better the audience and the culture that spawned it, responded to it, and shaped it.

As compelling works of theatre, the best television plays of the live anthology shows are the clearest example of television's sophistication during the fifties. These plays presented social dissent within a forum of popular entertainment, and they offered a critique of many troubling facets of American culture during the height of the Cold War. The best playwrights of this genre - Paddy Chayefsky, Tad Mosel, Robert Alan Arthur, Reginald Rose, and Rod Serling included - repeatedly challenged the tenets of Cold War ideology.

A small sampling of this work illustrates the variety of challenges these plays posed to the Cold War consensus that historians of the fifties have constructed. In The Gallows Tree, Halstead Wells attacked the witch-hunts of the early fifties. In Noon on Doomsday, Rod Serling confronted the prejudice and small mindedness of Americans. Many television playwrights targeted the American institutions that formed the pillars of Cold War society: the American military, American business, and the American family.
Maurice Valency (Battleship Bismarck), Serling (The Strike and The Rack), and Gore Vidal (Visit to a Small Planet) in various ways depicted militarism as a senseless, dehumanizing, or barbaric representation of humanity's self-destructiveness. Theodore Sturgeon (television adaptation of Raold Dahl's The Sound Machine), J.P. Miller (The Rabbit Trap), and Serling (Patterns) each criticized the dehumanizing, belittling, oppressive or amoral nature of the modern American corporation. Both Reginald Rose (Dino) and Tad Mosel (The Presence of the Enemy) countered the prevalent picture of the idyllic American family by depicting families that were abusive or repressive. Furthermore, the American ideals that served the Cold War effort were repeatedly dissected by these playwrights. Mel Goldberg (adaptation of Ray Bradbury's The Rocket), Mosel (My Lost Saints), and Paddy Chayefsky (The Big Deal) called into question the ideal of America as a classless society as well as the entrepreneurial spirit of Americans, thus challenging the American Dream on two levels. Chayefsky also wrote plays that disputed the American faith in progress (Printer's Measure and The Mother) by presenting characters who faced obsolescence due to this progress. Other Chayefsky plays (The Bachelor Party and Marty) attacked Americans' notions of masculinity that were part of the Cold War mentality. Rose skillfully depicted Americans' prejudice (Thunder on Sycamore Street and An Almanac of
Liberty), conformism (Twelve Angry Men), and their eagerness to assign blame or seek scapegoats (Carson Corners), while pointing to difficult or insoluble problems such as juvenile delinquency in American society (Dino and Crime in the Streets). Articulating a growing uneasiness among American intellectuals, Serling repeatedly presented television audiences with the individual compromised or dehumanized by the system (The Strike, Patterns, The Rack, and Requiem for a Heavyweight). Considered together, these plays, although a small sampling of the television plays of the fifties, form an impressive body of work rich in social commentary and critical of many aspects of Cold War culture. Appreciating these works of popular culture may allow Cold War historians to avoid setting up the fifties as a cultural "straw man" ready to be knocked down for its all-encompassing shallowness, nearsightedness, complacency, and materialism. Such as appreciation may also provide theatre historians a bridge between television drama and other forms of theatrical expression in the post-war period. Theatre historians are certain to benefit from considering the social messages embedded in many of the plays of the fifties - The Crucible (1953), Picnic (1953), Inherit the Wind (1955), and Orpheus Descending (1957), for example - within the context of television dramatists' social critique of American society throughout that decade. Many people were surely seeing both genres simultaneously. One commentator
from the late sixties articulated the central place in the American theatre’s social critique that television drama held for several decades:

Television drama is an effective barometer of contemporary attitudes and values. In fact, television’s original plays . . . have assumed the major responsibility for exploring the social reality and domestic problems of a majority of Americans . . . . Whereas legitimate theatre and even movies have almost completely abandoned domestic drama and have stopped trying to be social engineers, television still tries to teach viewers not so much how to live as how to put up with the kind of lives they are forced to live in this tense and distressing era.¹

While Hoopes overstates the death of social critique in American theatre, he makes a compelling case for the social function of many television playwrights. By dismissing all of television because the majority of it was unsophisticated or mundane we close our eyes to a wealth of theatre history that provides a context for much of the underlying unease of the fifties. Such a dismissal also keeps alive the myth that dissent only existed within tight circles that were either high-brow or extremely radical. Ultimately, historians, both of American theatre and the culture of the

Cold War, omit this material from their assessment of fifties culture at their own peril.

An appraisal of the television play based in theatre studies, perhaps aided by the model of cultural hegemony put forth by Antonio Gramsci and applied effectively to theatre scholarship by Bruce McConachie, provides a more sophisticated understanding of the most popular theatrical form of the fifties. Gramsci’s model allows for cracks and fissures in any hegemony whereby new modes of thought (and ultimately, a new, temporary consensus) may emerge. If the television dramas examined in this study, and the many other television dramas yet to be explored, can be seen as fissures in the dominant ideology of the fifties, then a new understanding of Cold War attitudes in fifties America may emerge. These dramas provided entertainment and social messages - although frequently curtailed and hemmed in by the many constraints of fifties television - that challenge many aspects of J. Ronald Oakley’s assessment of television programming’s role in reinforcing a Cold War mentality. In contrast to Oakley’s assertions, these dramas - as television at its best - called upon Americans to reconsider

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3J. Ronald Oakley, God’s Country: America in the Fifties (New York: Dembner Books, 1986) 109. (Oakley’s assessment of the lessons taught by fifties television programming was previously quoted on page twenty-two of this study.)
their own small-mindedness; to connect conformity to racism, vigilantism, and mob rule; to realize that material goods were not the solution to Americans' needs for love, understanding, acceptance, and, above all, dignity; to share responsibility, not assign blame; to acknowledge that there were pronounced inequalities in American society that kept the American Dream out of reach for many citizens; and to question the role of a system or a dogma when it reduced an individual's humanity.

Lastly, a new appreciation of these television scripts calls upon us to question a dangerous shortcoming of modern theatre scholarship. The reluctance of many scholars to integrate this television drama into their understanding of American theatre history, despite its enormous appeal and social relevance, illustrates the extent to which theatre artists and academics can make their field culturally irrelevant. If this point seems overstated, consider the minute number of theatre instructors who integrate television drama into their research or teaching materials on modern American theatre. If theatre scholars deny the validity of this clearly theatrical form - perhaps in the misguided effort to lend credibility to their discipline - they relegate their studies, especially in the television era, to a minute audience.¹ Perhaps it is time for theatre

¹I would argue that a new wave in theatre scholarship focusing on avant-garde performance art, a genre that is often obscure and seen by a fraction of the public, has not
scholars to consider their televisions as more than furniture. The television plays of the fifties, closest in content, form, and artistry to traditional (i.e., on-site) theatre, provide the best window into this world of opportunity.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{5}To facilitate this investigation, I have provided a representative list of scripts for live television drama published in various collections, as well as several sources for further investigation of this material in collections, through distributors, or from publishers (Appendix).
APPENDIX:

PUBLISHED RESOURCES

The following chart provides a starting point for research in television drama. It is by no means an exhaustive list of the available scripts. It serves as a representative sampling of some of the most readily available texts. Most of the following collections pertain to television drama of the 1950's.

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<td>Johnny Pickwick</td>
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<td>Ashes in the Wind</td>
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<td>Hedda Rotten</td>
<td>Studio One, CBS</td>
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<td>Rescue</td>
<td>David Shaw</td>
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<td>5/27/51</td>
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<th>PLAY</th>
<th>PLAYWRIGHT</th>
<th>&quot;THEATRE&quot;</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Rod Serling</td>
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<td>Cracker Money</td>
<td>Steven Gethers</td>
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<td>Tad Mosel</td>
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<td>Alvin Boretz</td>
<td>Armstrong Circle Theatre, NBC</td>
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<td>Survival</td>
<td>Alfred Bronner</td>
<td>The United States Steel Hour, CBS</td>
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<td>Lee of Gettysburg</td>
<td>Alvin Sapiaanky</td>
<td>Omnibus, ABC</td>
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<td>Thank You, Edmundo</td>
<td>Mac Shoub</td>
<td>Matinee Theatre, NBC</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Lottery (adaptation)</td>
<td>Ellen Violett</td>
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<td>The Big Deal</td>
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<td>Twelve Angry Men</td>
<td>Reginald Rose</td>
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<td>The Final War of Olly Winter</td>
<td>Ronald Ribman</td>
<td>CBS Playhouse, CBS</td>
<td>2/1/57</td>
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<td>Apartment Hunting</td>
<td>Joseph Mickel</td>
<td>Lin-Rey School of Broadcasting, LA</td>
<td>pre-1953</td>
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<td>The Return of Benjamin</td>
<td>Joseph Mickel</td>
<td>New Orleans, LA</td>
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<td>The Mask of Guilt</td>
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<td>The Mother</td>
<td>Paddy Cheyevsky</td>
<td>Philco Television Playhouse</td>
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<td>Thunder on Sycamore Street</td>
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<td>Studio One, CBS</td>
<td>3/15/54</td>
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<td>My Lost Saints</td>
<td>Tad Mosel</td>
<td>Goodyear Television Playhouse</td>
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<td>Man on the Mountaintop</td>
<td>Robert Alan Arthur</td>
<td>Philco Television Playhouse</td>
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<td>A Young Lady of Property</td>
<td>Horton Foote</td>
<td>Philco Television Playhouse</td>
<td>4/5/55</td>
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<td>The Strike</td>
<td>Rod Serling</td>
<td>Studio One, CBS</td>
<td>6/7/54</td>
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<td>The Rabbi's Trap</td>
<td>J.P. Miller</td>
<td>Goodyear Television Playhouse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visit to a Small Planet</td>
<td>Gore Vidal</td>
<td>Goodyear Television Playhouse</td>
<td>5/8/55</td>
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</table>

In the years between 1946 and 1958, of the ten plays included in each year's edition of Margaret Mayorga's "Best Short Plays" anthology, one was often a television play. The following are three examples of the types of scripts chosen for inclusion in this series.


*The Eagle*  
Ted Beebe  
WRGB; Schenectady, NY  
5/8/46


*Dino*  
Reginald Rose  
Studio One, CBS  
1/2/56


*The Presence of the Enemy*  
Tad Mosel  
Studio One, CBS  
2/10/58

In addition to these general anthologies, a number of playwrights had their television plays published in individual collections. These collections were published for Chayefsky, Serling, Rose, Horton Foote, Tad Mosel, and Gore Vidal, to name just a few.


*Holiday Song*  
Philco-Goodyear Playhouse  
9/14/52

*Prisoner's Measure*  
"  "  
4/26/53

*The Big Deal*  
"  "  
7/19/53

*Marty*  
"  "  
5/24/53

*The Mother*  
"  "  
4/4/54

*The Bachelor Party*  
"  "  
10/11/53


*The Remarkable Incident*  
Studio One, CBS  
1/11/54

*at Carson Corners*  
"  "  
3/15/54

*Thunder on Sycamore Street*  
"  "  
9/20/54

*Twelve Angry Men*  
"  "  
11/8/54

*An Almanac of Liberty*  
"  "  
3/3/55

*Crime in the Streets*  
"  "  
6/13/55

*The Incredible World of Horace Ford*  
"  "  


*Patterns*  
Kraft Television Theatre, NBC  
1/12/55

*The Rock*  
United Steel Hour, NBC  
4/12/55

*Old MacDonald Had a Curve*  
Kraft Television Theatre, NBC  
8/25/53

*Requiem for a Heavyweight*  
Playhouse 90, NBC  
10/11/56

At least one collection of television plays by an African American playwright has been published:

**O'Neal, Regina. And Then the Harvest: Three Television Plays. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1974.**

*Walk a Tight Rope*  
*And Then the Harvest*  
*Night Watch*  

[Despite the significance of these works in African-American history and the history of women writers, no scholarly appraisal of these plays has been conducted. Broadcast information is not available.]

Several depositories of television material have published their own directories, for example:


**Bowker's Complete Video Directory** (published yearly) and similar trade publications offer a comprehensive lists of the few television plays available on VHS video or other audio-visual formats.

Several video companies, such as Video Yesteryear, have company catalogues of their offerings from the live television era.

**Video Yesteryear**  
Box C  
Sandyhook, CT 06482  
(203) 744 - 2476  
(800) 243-0987

Although twenty years old, the most comprehensive list of published television material is still:


The two best references for television plays, published and unpublished, are:


BIBLIOGRAPHY


*Tulane Drama Review* 3.1 (1957)


