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"Baby Doll" (1956): A case study of film censorship and its decline during the 1950's.

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BABY DOLL (1956): A CASE STUDY OF FILM CENSORSHIP AND ITS DECLINE DURING THE 1950s

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

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ABSTRACT

Prior to World War II, state and municipal censor boards, the Production Code Administration, and the Catholic Legion of Decency effectively monitored and shaped the content of Hollywood's film industry so as to insure that American movies would not corrupt public morals or offend major segments of the population. After 1948, however, a series of Supreme Court decisions seriously weakened this triad, and a new breed of independent directors emerged to challenge the boundaries of censorship. One of these trailblazers was Elia Kazan.

Kazan broke free from the restraints of the studio system and as an independent director he pursued realism in his films that helped push Hollywood into the adult film era. Kazan's early pictures like *Gentlemen's Agreement*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *On the Waterfront* and *East of Eden*, illustrated the potential of an adult-oriented cinema. In 1956, *Baby Doll*, his first fully independent production, broke new ground and in doing so, demonstrated that the once powerful triad of censors no longer stood as a barrier to film realism. When making *Baby Doll*, Kazan took full advantage of those developments that had begun in the decade prior to the film's release. *Baby Doll* and the negotiations

and events surrounding it, epitomize the effects of all those changes since 1948. Thus, *Baby Doll* must be viewed as the off-spring to those changes. More importantly, though, *Baby Doll* is parent to those daring films symbolic of the late 1950s and early 1960s. As such, *Baby Doll* can be viewed as the transitional film between the "olden days" and the uninhibited 1960s. Because Kazan's film marked the end of Hollywood's innocence and ushered in the adult film era, this thesis on *Baby Doll* provides insight into how the film censoring system worked and why it declined.

This thesis traces the decline of film censorship by focusing on the evolution of one film maker and the production of one picture. Drawing on the files of the Production Code Administration, the Legion of Decency and Warner Bros., it traces Kazan's long struggle to win Code office approval for his picture and the extensive campaign launched by the Legion to discourage attendance. Kazan's quest to win Code approval and *Baby Doll*'s ultimate success at the box office illustrated that both Hollywood and its audience were ready for the adult picture. In a sense then, *Baby Doll* is a transitional film. It marked the end of Hollywood's innocent era and pointed toward the much more sexually explicit and uninhibited films of the 1960s.

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PREFACE

Film historians have long recognized the powerful influence of censors on the content of U.S. movies. From the early 1930s through the mid-1950s, Hollywood's creative community was forced to meet the demands of state and municipal censors, the film industry's own self-censoring body called the Production Code Administration, and the Catholic Legion of Decency. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s these censors maintained a general decency in American films. Immediately after World War II the triad's strength began to erode. Historians have long been aware that the system was seriously undermined by a series of Supreme Court rulings which weakened the studio system, freed theater owners of studio control and brought movies under the protection of the First Amendment. To date, accounts of the collapse of this system focused on films that challenged the Production Code like *The Outlaw*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Moon Is Blue* and *The French Line*. As significant as these films were, the Production Code Administration and the Legion of Decency survived their challenges with very little change. As late as 1956, these two agencies remained as powerful barriers to screen realism and the adult motion picture.

This thesis suggests that Elia Kazan's *Baby Doll* was the seminal film in moving the industry and more importantly, the Legion of Decency toward more liberal and modern standards of film content. It traces Kazan's long struggle with the Code office to win approval for his picture and recounts the extensive campaign of the Legion and its allies to discourage attendance at the movie. Kazan's quest to win Code approval and *Baby Doll*'s ultimate success at the box office illustrated that both Hollywood and its audience were ready for the adult picture.

In a sense then, *Baby Doll* is a transitional film. It marked the end of Hollywood's innocent era and pointed toward the much more sexually explicit and uninhibited films of the 1960s. As such it merits detailed investigation. The first chapter of this study will focus on the emergence of the various censoring agencies, the working relationship between them, and the developments that led to their declining effectiveness in the 1950s. The second will concentrate on the early career of Elia Kazan, illustrating his frustrations with the censors and his determination to break free from those restraints. Chapter three traces the evolution of *Baby Doll* from a vague idea drawn from four Tennessee Williams plays, through the long scripting process and the extensive negotiations between Kazan, Warner Bros. and the Production Code Administration to gain final script approval. The fourth chapter examines the Legion of Decency's efforts to

keep audiences away. By following *Baby Doll* through the entire censorship system of the 1950s, this thesis is designed in part to illustrate how the system of censorship worked and how and why it began to collapse.

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"Wanted. An Idea: Established writer would like a good uptodate idea for a motion picture which avoids politics, sex, religion, divorce, double beds, drugs, disease, poverty, liquor, senators, bankers, wealth, cigarettes, Congress, race, economics, art, death, crime, childbirth and accidents (whether by airplane or public carrier): also the villain must not be an American, European, South American, African, Asiatic, Australian, New Zealander or Eskimo. Noncontroversial even amongst critics, if possible. No dogs allowed. Apply P.O. Box 13, Patton, Calif."

(*The Screen Writer*, 1948)[1]

CHAPTER 1

THE STATE CENSOR BOARDS, THE PCA AND THE LEGION OF DECENCY: THEIR EVOLUTION AND THEIR DECLINE

The postwar film world echoed with increasingly sharp and cynical criticism of its censors. The targets were three: the state and municipal censor boards which had existed since early in the century; the Legion of Decency, a Catholic agency created in 1934 to steer the faithful away from unsuitable motion pictures; and the Production Code Administration, an arm of the Motion Picture Association of America, also created in 1934 to enforce the industry's infamous Production Code. Throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s these three elements, although entirely separate, operated a well orchestrated *censorial* system which kept the movies "clean" and most Americans content.[2] After World War II, though, several changes began to gnaw away at the foundation on which this system stood. This chapter will focus on how these censoring agencies emerged, the working relation between them, and the developments that led to their declining effectiveness in the early 1950s.

State censorship originated with the progressive movement. Moral reformers, fearing that the flickering images on the screen might poison the minds of youth, pressed

state officials for the creation of agencies that could monitor movie content and remove objectionable material. Pennsylvania created the first board of censors in 1911, Ohio followed suit in 1913, Kansas in 1914, Maryland in 1916 and New York and Virginia in 1922. In each case, state law required the approval of the board before any film could be exhibited.[3] In 1915, the Supreme Court rejected the industry's claim of First Amendment protection, calling the movies a form of amusement rather than an agency for the dissemination of ideas.[4]

Throughout the 1920s and the early 1930s, the industry struggled to keep the censors and the "bluenoses" content. Its first step in March 1922, was the organization of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (referred to hereafter as the Association), and the appointment of Postmaster General Will Hays as president. This new leader recognized those target areas which needed immediate and constant attention in order for the industry to reach its goals:

> (1) the motion picture had to be freed from the fear of any possible federal censorship, and also from any further incursions of political censorship in any form; (2) self-regulation had to become a viable and enforceable process; (3) public confidence had to be raised, and this could be done only by involving the public more directly in industry affairs; (4) relations had to be improved among various sectors that made up the industry and industry practices had to become more standardized.[5]

Having pinpointed these areas, Hays immediately went to work alleviating the industry of its problems. He fought diligently against governmental censorship, and his efforts in 1922 against a Massachusetts public referendum on censorship were extremely successful.[6] To gain more substantial public approval for the movie industry, Hays organized the Committee for Public Relations, to whose ranks he invited Hollywood's largest and loudest antagonists: the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Boy Scouts of America, the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae. Because many of the groups involved remained leery of the industry and felt the Committee acted only as a "smoke screen . . . for salacious films," Hays's early public relations endeavors suffered.[7]

To further appease those trying to gain control over the movies as well as move the industry toward self-regulation, Hays first created the "Formula" in 1924. The "Formula" made Association members, the major Hollywood production companies, use extreme caution when choosing books or plays for screen adaptation. However, the "Formula" did not restrict the use of original scripts, and member companies, recognizing the potential profits of certain "adult" films, frequently ignored it. A second step toward self-regulation appeared with the advent of the "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" in 1927. These eleven "don'ts" and twenty-seven

"be carefuls" formalized the activities of the newly created Studio Relations Committee headed by Jason Joy and codified the objections and rejections of the state censors. Although largely advisory, the "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" assisted producers who soon recognized that by following Joy's advice they could avoid many of the costly cuts demanded by state censors.[8] In this endeavor Hays received a boost from the advent of the talking pictures, which increased the cost of post-production editing. Because money was the name of the game, some movie producers found it beneficial to abide by the "Don'ts and Be Carefuls." Others, however, not wanting to be outdone by competitors, continued to challenge contemporary morality, and in spite of the "Don'ts and Be Carefuls," the period from 1927 to 1929 witnessed an alarming increase in controversial films. One observer claimed that "hungry for money, the movie producers suddenly descended to levels of vulgarity and sheer obscenity which did much to make the movie theaters a pornographic institution."[9] With the Depression, movie attendance dropped dramatically, and the industry sought to fight the dwindling audience by producing even more sensational films.[10] Not surprisingly, public protests intensified forcing Hays to take action.

With the help of Martin Quigley, the Catholic publisher of *Motion Picture Herald*, and Father Daniel Lord, a Jesuit priest, a new regulatory document was realized. The Production Code, adopted by the industry on March 31, 1930,

was designed to be "a practical working guide to aid in keeping the moral character and influence of motion pictures within the requirements of the fundamental tenets of the Judeo-Christian moral order."[11] But like its predecessors, the new document lacked a powerful enforcement agency. As Murray Schumach later observed, many producers felt "the Code and Hays were tidy bits of camouflage, behind which they could continue to do what they wished."[12]

While Hollywood put little more stock in the Code than in their New Years' resolutions, the leaders of the Catholic Church took this new document quite seriously. Many influential churchmen, like Father F.J. Dinneen, S.J. of Chicago and Father Wilfred Parsons, who edited the influential Jesuit weekly *America*, agreed with Quigley that "a most intimate relation" existed between the "maintenance of an acceptable moral standard" and motion pictures.[13] Because of this feeling and Hollywood's continued disregard of the Code, Catholic prelates began to apply pressure. The intended goal was to transform "a rowdy and tasteless film world into an orderly, self-regulated industry."[14] First the Catholic leaders tried moral persuasion, and when this failed, several bishops established the four member Episcopal Committee on Motion Pictures in November, 1933. Immediately this committee formulated a battle plan: 1) to secure a pressure group; 2) to endorse a buyer's strike as a

sanction; and 3) to gear the pressure toward more efficient operation of industry self-regulation.[15]

Once this framework for operation had been established, the Catholic machine went to work. Within five months of these pronouncements, the Committee had created the Legion of Decency and had organized a boycott. Those interested in joining the movement simply signed or recited the pledge of the new organization.

> In the name of the Father, and the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.
> -I condemn indecent and immoral motion pictures, and those which glorify crime and criminals.
> -I promise to do all that I can to strengthen public opinion against the production of indecent and immoral films, and to unite with all who protest against them.
> -I acknowledge my obligation to form a right conscience about pictures that are dangerous to my moral life. As a member of the Legion of Decency, I pledge to remain away from them.
> -I promise further to stay away altogether from places of amusement which show them as a matter of policy.[16]

While estimates vary, it is clear that over 5,000,000 Catholics and several hundred thousand non-Catholics took the pledge.[17]

Initially Hollywood and the movie moguls thought this new religious effort to reform the movies would simply blow over. However, as blacklists sprouted up in various U.S. cities and pressure for federal censorship mounted, the Hays Office and the industry caved in.[18] In June 1934, Hays sent Martin Quigley and Joseph Breen (the head of the Studio Relations Committee since February 1934) to the Episcopal Committee to discuss the industry's potential responses to

Legion pressure. The following month at the request of the bishops, Hays created the Production Code Administration (PCA), a powerful new Code enforcement agency, and appointed Joseph Breen, a staunch Catholic, as head of this department. The new arrangement would not allow any major studio to distribute or exhibit a movie without a certificate of approval from the PCA, and the submission of all scripts was made mandatory. Association members also agreed to a $25,000 fine for any company violating this clause and to submit any appeals from PCA decisions to the Motion Picture Association's Board of Directors in New York.

With Breen as head of the PCA and the new rules in place, the Legion of Decency could boast success in all three initial goals: a pressure group had been organized, boycotts threatened, and the movie industry had been forced to abide by a program of strict self-regulation. In November 1934, the Episcopal Committee established the Legion as a permanent agency accompanied by the Legion Rating System, which gave the Catholic faithful guidance in film attendance.[19]

With "tact, firmness and instinctive judgement," Joseph Breen forced compliance with the Code among the movie moguls.[20] During his twenty year reign (1934-1954), the state censors, the Legion of Decency and the PCA established and maintained a largely cooperative, congenial and effective working relationship. In fact, because disagreement between the Code administration and the Legion was rare during

Breen's tenure, many Code critics feared that the PCA had too "close [a] liaison with the Catholic group."[21] Yet others came to see the Code office as a benevolent agency. Under Breen's supervision, the PCA protected the industry from the costly and inconvenient cuts ordered by the state and local censor boards. As Joseph L. Mankiewicz observed in 1949:

> The code is an attempt to keep our films from being mutilated as they go out into the various states and run up against their various censors. We abide by that code because we know if we do not, the audiences in the censorship states will find that the films they see will be so mutilated that they will not be understandable.[22]

Still others saw the PCA as "a haven of refuge--refuge from a censoriousness in the American public which might otherwise, long before this, have stifled them [the movie producers] altogether."[23]

Benevolent or not, the strength of the Code system began to erode after World War II. An initial blow was delivered in 1948 by the Supreme Court in the *Paramount* case. In response to an anti-trust suit, the Court ordered the major movie corporations to divest themselves of their theater and distribution organizations. Before the *Paramount* case the majors controlled up to seventy per cent of the first-run houses in cities with populations over 100,000 people, and nearly sixty per cent of those in towns of twenty-five to 100,000.[24] This meant that these theaters could not run a film that lacked Code approval. After the

decision, exhibitors were free to show any film that might be a money-maker.

Four years later the Court dealt a second major blow to the censorship system when it overturned the *Mutual* decision of 1915. In *Burstyn v. Wilson* (1952) the justices finally recognized the movies as a medium protected by the First Amendment.[25] The ruling seriously weakened the state censor boards whose activities had provided much of the justification for the Code system. As the threat of state censorship diminished, the Code office found its rulings much more likely to be challenged.

Otto Preminger's initial independent production for United Artists, *The Moon Is Blue* (1953), represents the first domestic assault upon the weakened "censorial" infrastructure. This light comedy about a virtuous young girl fending off seduction by a lecherous young man was denied a Code seal not only because of the "'blue' language," but more specifically because the movie dealt unacceptably and much too candidly with seduction and illicit sex. In May 1953, the Association's appeals board in New York upheld the PCA's decision. Interestingly, the Legion of Decency only condemned the rather innocuous film to support Breen's decision. Father Patrick Masterson, the Legion's Executive Secretary, recognized that without cooperation between the two organizations the strength of the PCA, as well as the morality of the movies, would rapidly decline. In defiance

of both the Legion and Motion Picture Association, United Artists agreed to support and distribute *The Moon is Blue* without the seal. Despite PCA disapproval, Legion condemnation and rather unimpressive reviews, the picture became a smash hit. Three of the recently divorced theater chains, which controlled over 2,400 theaters including many of the industry's finest, booked and guaranteed the prosperity of this controversial film.[26]

The success of *The Moon Is Blue* signified to daring movie makers that films without Code approval, and with Legion condemnation could still be financially rewarding. Many of the rising independent film makers saw *The Moon is Blue* as creating a hole within the "monitorial" system through which other previously taboo subjects might sneak. Many believed *Moon's* success signified the ruin of the Production Code, while others, like Samuel Goldwyn, clamored for Code modernization. The next threat to the Code, however, convinced the movie colony of the importance of the Production Code and its administration.[27]

Howard Hughes' and RKO's *The French Line* premiered without a Code seal in St. Louis in December 1953. As a member of the Motion Picture Association, RKO was the first company to violate the original Production Code agreement of 1934 (United Artists was not a member in 1953). Despite the Production Code ban and the intense boycotting activities by St. Louis Catholics, *The French Line* opened to record crowds.

Some believed the initial success of this unsealed film would destroy "the whole system . . . of achieving decency in the movies. . . . exploit the bulge created by Preminger, and would spell eventual doom for the entire experiment."[28] Breen, regardless of the apparent doom, intuitively knew that even those industry-liberals seeking Code revisions would not abandon the Code if it meant placing the future of the industry in the hands of the king of the "bosom peep-show," Howard Hughes.[29] It was from the antics of such exploitive film makers that the Production Code had for twenty years protected the industry's reputation. Predictably, many within the industry went immediately back to defending the Code, including many of the independent theater chains which had booked *The Moon Is Blue*. For the PCA and the Code, however, this film provided only a temporary reprieve from intensifying criticism. With its audience vanishing and theaters closing at an alarming rate, it would not be long before new challenges arose which would erode the power of the Legion and the Code office even further.

America's changing values contributed further to the erosion of this system.[30] Movie makers, as well as those administering the Code, recognized that they had "a new audience--an audience that [had] grown up out of the war and been in contact with realities much greater than former audiences."[31] Many recognized that the PCA had to adapt to these new more mature values. For example, prior to the war

the Breen approach to sensitive issues was to require that scripts contain punishment for moral offenders. After the war this method seemed more questionable. In 1949 John Huston commented that in one of his films, Breen's approach to infidelity called for the adulterer to murder her ex-lover. Breen's idea of "compensating moral values" may have been satisfactory to audiences prior to the war, but to postwar audiences such a remedy seemed archaic. As Huston expounded, "The moral . . . is that where adultery occurred, murder was required. That was, I think, not too good a picture to present to homecoming troops."[32] Directors like Huston believed that postwar audiences craved more "adult" and "realistic" themes in the movies, and they wanted to oblige that demand. By 1955 producer Daniel Mann had concluded that although "Hollywood once catered to [the] supposed 12-year old audience, now a story must have intelligence and integrity or it doesn't stand a chance."[33] Five months later, the Legion's Executive Secretary, the Reverend Thomas F. Little, expressed displeasure at "the number of objectionable films accepted by the public within the past seven or eight months," and he noted the public's "'immunization' to what's right and wrong in pictures."[34] The same month Martin Quigley observed that the public supported "the wrong kind of pictures."[35] According to Legion statistics, in 1955 the number of movies rated "B-morally objectionable in part for all" increased by eleven percent

over the previous year.[36] That increase may have been prompted by Hollywood's need to lure the audience away from their television sets.

Television and other forms of recreation brought a disastrous decline in movie attendance after the war.[37] Between 1946 and 1956 the industry lost almost one half of its patrons. Statistically, attendance dropped from ninety million in 1946 to forty-six million in 1956. Similarly, profits for the motion picture production companies reached an all time low in 1952 having decreased nearly eighty per cent.[38]

At first, movie makers believed the popularity of television would diminish, the craze would blow over, and everything would return to normal. However, continued decline forced the industry into action. The earliest efforts involved cost-cutting and reorganization. Eventually all of the studios, except Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, substantially reduced their number of contracted stars, producers, directors, writers and technical people, which in turn led to an increase in the number of independent producers and productions.[39] Technological changes to enhance the difference between motion pictures and television were also attempted. With such processes as "3-D," Cinerama, and CinemaScope (also called VistaVision and Todd-AO), the screen received a "new look." Other efforts to outdo television included a move away from original scripts towards "pre-

tested and pre-sold" material such as best selling books, the classics, Broadway plays and successful TV programs. To generate income, studios also began using long runs, or the showing of a film in many theaters at top admission price for one or two years.[40]

Regardless of these attempts to counter the threat of television, many leading film makers argued for the need to produce fewer, but more provocative films. One of the most persistent advocates of this approach was Elia Kazan, a highly-successful independent director. In September 1953, while lauding the industry for its technical improvements, he insisted that although the people of Hollywood may try to ignore TV, "deep in their hearts, they're scared to death."[41] One year later Kazan expressed frustration with the "ostriches [of the industry who] continued to stick their heads in the sand and make the same movies their fathers made before them." The industry, he demanded, must learn that "it isn't how you put it on the screen, but what you put on the screen that counts." Moreover, he insisted that the audience had not truly been lost, but was "just waiting." Thus, Hollywood could continue to make money and regain the so-called "lost audience" if it was willing "to stray from the straight and narrow path of conforming to tradition."[42] In 1956 he urged the industry to stop trying to "grind out 50, 60, 70 features a year," and emphasize those specialty films which are "more honest . . . more daring in [their] material

and [their] attack."[43] Later he insisted that with television the "standard brand," the film industry must become "the innovator," because "unless the screen discusses exciting events and tackles new themes, the film has lost its reason."[44] Obviously, Elia Kazan was willing to lead the way.

NOTES

[1] As taken from Eric Hodgins, "A Round Table on the Movies," *Life Magazine*, 27 June 1949, 100.

[2] Here I have italicized "censorial" because neither the Production Code Administration nor the Catholic Legion of Decency considered themselves to be true censorship boards. According to *The Random House Dictionary* to censor means to "suppress anything objectionable," and both organizations claimed only an advisory position, which simply suggested potential cuts to clients so that a movie might avoid any trouble at the state level or at the box office. As one article noted:

> The word 'censorship' seems to depend on who you are and where you stand. Legal censors like to say they merely 'license' films. The Legion of Decency calls itself a 'reviewing agency.' And the Production Code Administration sees its job as 'self-regulation'.

Milton Lehman, "Who Censors Our Movies?," *Look*, 16 April 1954, 90.

[3] See Nancy J. Rosenbloom, "Between Reform and Regulation: The Struggle Over Film Censorship in Progressive America, 1909-1922," *Film History* 1 (1987): 307-327.

[4] The Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio, 236 U.S. 230 (1915). In this unanimous decision, Justice McKenna declared:

> The exhibition of moving pictures is a business, pure and simple, originated and conducted for profit, like other spectacles, not to be regarded by the Ohio Constitution, we think, as part of the press of the country, or as organs of public opinion.

Because moving pictures were "capable of evil," the state of Ohio had the right "to require censorship before exhibition." Two works provide thorough investigations of the *Mutual* decision: Ira H. Carmen, *Movies, Censorship, and the Law* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966), 10-53; and Richard S. Randall, *Censorship of the Movies: The Social*

and Political Control of a Mass Medium (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 19-25. On state censorship, see Thomas B. Leary and J. Roger Noall, "Entertainment: Public Pressures and the Law: Official and Unofficial Control of the Content and Distribution of Motion Pictures and Magazines," *Harvard Law Review* 71 (1957): 327-334.

[5] Will H. Hays, *The Memoirs of Will H. Hays* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1955), 329-330. Also, see Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), 164-182.

[6] Jowett, *Film*, 167. For a detailed account of Hays's attack on the Massachusetts referendum, see 166-171.

[7] Ibid., 173-175. The quotation is taken from 175. Also, see Leonard Leff and Jerold Simmons, *The Dame In The Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, & the Production Code From the 1920s to the 1960s* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 5.

[8] Garth Jowett, "Moral Responsibility and Commercial Entertainment: Social Control in the United States Film Industry, 1907-1968," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 10 (1990): 13. One study stated that "altogether the movie industry paid about $1,800,000 annually in fees and expenses to comply with state and local censorship boards. See Alan F. Westin, *The Miracle Case: The Supreme Court and the Movies* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1961), 1.

[9] As quoted in John Haynes Holmes, "The Movies and the Community," in *The Movies on Trial*, ed. William J. Perlman (New York: Macmillan Co., 1936; New York: Jerome S. Ozer, 1971), 200.

[10] For a look at the increasing problems for Hollywood between 1927 and 1929, see Leff and Simmons, 6-9. Also, see Raymond Moley, *The Hays Office* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co,. Inc., 1945), 49-55.

[11] Martin J. Quigley, "The Motion Picture Production Code," *America*, 10 March 1956, 630. For a thorough discussion of the creation of the Code, see Stephen Vaughn, "Morality and Entertainment: The Origins of the Motion Picture Production Code," *The Journal of American History* 77 (June 1990): 47-56.

[12] Murray Schumach, *The Face on the Cutting Room Floor: The Story of Movie and Television Censorship* (New York: William and Morrow and Co., 1964; New York: DaCapo, 1975), 20-21. Leff and Simmons were more optimistic in their view towards the early days of the Code. In their account of the year 1930 and the Code's reception, however, it is evident that a hopeful attitude about the movie industry's acceptance of the Code could not last long, and indeed by early 1931 cooperation with the Hays Office and its new weapon waned. See 13-15.

[13] Quigley quoted by Paul W. Facey, *The Legion of Decency: A Sociological Analysis of the Emergence and Development of a Social Pressure Group* (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 39. On the Legion, see also, John M. Phelan, S.J., "The National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures: An Investigation of the Policy and Practice of Film Classification" (Ph.D diss., New York University, 1968); and Richard Corliss, "Film and Catholicism: The Legion of Decency," *Film Comment* 4 (Summer 1968): 24-68.

[14] Raymond Moley, "The Code and the Church," *Newsweek*, 7 January 1957, 72.

[15] Facey, 45-47.

[16] Avery Dulles, S.J., *The Legion of Decency* (The American Press, 1956), 9-10.

[17] Facey, 57, 60-62. Facey contends that uncertainty in the figure exists because of the decentralized nature of the movement. Some dioceses returned their signed pledges to the Bishop's office, others kept the pledges in their files, while apparently other churches administered the pledge orally to their parishioners. Other reasons include the fact that some reports only included adults, others included secondary school children, but not those from the lower grades, while others simply noted entire families who had taken the pledge.

[18] The Patman Bill brought before congress during the 1933-34 session, sought "to provide for inspecting, classifying, and cataloguing motion pictures, both silent and talking, before they enter interstate or foreign commerce, to create a federal motion picture commission, to define its powers, and for other purposes." Later, the Neeley-Pettingill Bill sought to control such practices as 'block booking' and 'blind selling.' For an excellent analysis of the various bills prior to and contemporary with the

establishment of the Legion of Decency, and the Catholic Church's response to each of these, refer to Facey, 132-143.

19 The Legion's ratings included "Class A-1," morally unobjectionable for general patronage; "Class A-2," morally unobjectionable for adults; "Class B," morally objectionable in part for all; "Class C--Condemned," totally objectionable.

20 Quoting Eric Johnston, *Variety*, 14 July 1954, 4. There are two works that provide detailed accounts of the PCA boss: Leff and Simmons, chaps. 3-9, and Jack Vizzard, *See No Evil: Life Inside a Hollywood Censor* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 45-104. Vizzard, who worked under Breen at the PCA from 1944 to 1954, gives a view of Breen through memorable yarns and anecdotes. For a succinct account of Breen's early days with the PCA, see Leonard Leff, "The Breening of America," *PMLA* 106 (May 1991): 432-445.

21 *Variety*, 11 May 1955, 22.

22 Quoted in Hodgins, 103. Mankiewicz and several others from the movie industry met at *Life Magazine's* "Round Table on the Movies" in May 1949. At this three-day session "Hollywood and *Life* thrashed out the tough problems of making films." See Hodgins, 90.

23 Ibid., 104.

24 United States v. Paramount Pictures, 334 U.S. 131 (1948). John Izod, *Hollywood and the Box Office, 1895-1986* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 123. See also, Michael Conant, *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry: Economic and Legal Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960; New York: Arno Press, 1978).

25 For a full discussion of the *Miracle* case or Burstyn v. Wilson, 343 U.S. 495 (1952), see Westin.

26 For the most thorough discussion of *The Moon Is Blue*, refer to Leff and Simmons, 185-203. Also, Geoffrey Shurlock, Interview by James M. Wall, July 1970, Louis B. Mayer/American Film Institute Oral History Collection, The American Film Institute, 1975, Beverly Hills, California, 139-158; Vizzard, 151-158; and Edward DeGrazia and Roger K. Newman, *Banned Films: Movies, Censors and the First Amendment* (New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1982), 86-89. As for the monetary success of this controversial film, Richard Randall (p. 209) noted that the movie grossed eleven times more than the cost of production.

[27] Leff and Simmons, 207-208.

[28] Vizzard, 173. Leff and Simmons provide a detailed discussion of Howard Hughes and the controversy over *The French Line*, 203-213.

[29] Breen quoted by Leff and Simmons, 208.

[30] Intellectual debate concerning the shifting values of Americans was prevalent during the 1950s. For an excellent discussion of various studies, approaches and findings, see Clyde Kluckhohn, "Have There Been Discernible Shifts in American Values During the Past Generation?" in *The American Style: Essays in Value and Performance*, ed. Elting E. Morison (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958), 145-217.

[31] Robert Rossen quoted in Hodgins, 107. Also, see Eric Johnston, "25th Anni [sic] of Film Code-Problem Now Is Not Of Maturity But Avoiding Old Age," *Variety*, 5 January 1955, 11. In this article Johnston wrote:

> that [the] old bugaboo about the average American having the average intelligence of a 12-year old child, has gone by the board long since. That fallacy grew out of a study by some people who looked into the records of our doughboys in World War I.

[32] Quoted in Hodgins, 103.

[33] Quoted in *Variety*, 12 January 1955, 1.

[34] Quoted in *Variety*, 18 May 1955, 4.

[35] Ibid.

[36] "Volunteer Censors," *The New Republic*, 23 January 1956, 4.

[37] Fredric Stuart stated that television, by 1957, had emerged "as the single most popular recreation activity of Americans, as measured by total time devoted to it." See Fredric Stuart, *The Effects of Television on the Motion Picture and Radio Industries* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 8.

[38] For figures of decline, see Stuart, 10. Also, see "Hollywood Learns How to Live with TV," *Business Week*, 9 August 1952, 46-47. As for the other explanations for the decline, see Stuart, 16-21.

[39] Stuart, 53-56.

[40] "Getting Them Back to the Movies," *Business Week*, 22 October 1955, 60. Excellent sources on these technological advancements are Stuart, 56-66; Kenneth MacGowan, "The Screen's 'New Look'-Wider and Deeper," *The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television* 11 (Winter 1956): 109-130; and Kenneth MacGowan, "The Wide Screen of Yesterday and Tomorrow," *The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television* 11 (Spring 1957): 217-241. For information about those films made by each process, refer to Gordon Gow, *Hollywood In The Fifties* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1971), 11-37.

[41] "Kazan Says Film Men 'Scared to Death' of TV," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, 24 September 1953, page number unknown, in Elia Kazan file, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California. (Hereafter cited as Kazan file). This file is a collection of articles and studio biographies on Kazan.

[42] Quoted in Whitney Williams, "Offbeat Films Can Hypo B.O.," *Variety*, 15 December 1954, 3, 21.

[43] As quoted in *Variety*, 29 August 1956, 21.

[44] As quoted in *Variety Daily*, 5 December 1956, page number unknown, Kazan file. Another source close to the industry described the competition from television with an analogy to the original competition between stage and screen. He said:

> At the start, pictures took away from the stage a lot of the weak, trashy stuff and the stage had to start looking for the provocative themes. Today, tv has done about the same to Hollywood, and now the film producers are being driven in the same direction as the stage.

For this quotation, see *Variety*, 11 May 1955. For similar statements by Kazan, see Elia Kazan, "The Writer and Motion Pictures," *Sight and Sound* 12 (Summer 1957): 22; and Robert Hughes, ed., *Film: Book I: The Audience and the Filmmaker* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 49-50.

"Too much censorship. . . . Too many people telling you what to do."

(Elia Kazan, 1953)[1]

CHAPTER 2

ELIA KAZAN: HIS BACKGROUND AND HIS RISE TO PROMINENCE AS AN INDEPENDENT FILM DIRECTOR

In the 1950s a new breed of independent producers and directors known as the "Young Turks" descended upon Hollywood and helped dismantle Hollywood's feeble studio system. Though the independent movement began in the late 1940s, it took on definitive characteristics early in the next decade.[2] The new film making rebels were especially attracted to the new conventions set by the Italian Neo-Realists, like Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio de Sica. Films by such artists started a "'new' realism that broke with romantic film conventions of the past," and provoked anticipation among "filmmakers and filmgoers alike" about the movies and their potential for portraying real life.[3] America's "Young Turks," embracing both the ideals and the realism of the neo-realistic movement, sought "independence of thought and action" to achieve similar artistic goals.[4] Some of the finest and most influential independents included: Fred Zinneman (*The Men*, 1950, *High Noon*, 1952 and *From Here to Eternity*,1953); John Huston (*The African Queen*, 1951 and *Moulin Rouge*, 1952); George Stevens (*A Place in the Sun*, 1951, *Shane*, 1953 and *Giant*, 1956); William Wyler (*Detective*

Story, 1951, *Carrie*, 1952, *Roman Holiday*, 1953, *Desperate Hours*, 1955 and *Friendly Persuasion*, 1956); Mervyn LeRoy (*The Bad Seed*, 1956); Billy Wilder (*Sunset Boulevard*, 1950, *Some Like It Hot*, 1959 and *Irma La Douce*, 1963); and Otto Preminger (*Forever Amber*, 1947, *The Moon Is Blue*, 1953 and *The Man with the Golden Arm*, 1956). Throughout the 1950s these directors determined the character of American movie making. Elia Kazan, as one of these innovative "Young Turks," helped stimulate the stagnant Hollywood industry.

Elia Kazan was born in Istanbul, Turkey to Anatolian Greek parents. In 1913, when Kazan was four, the family moved to New York so his father's import rug business could prosper. Young Elia never had the desire to enter his father's business, and against his father's will he began his post-secondary education at Williams College. Because he desperately wanted to avoid the family business and that "something called work," Kazan upon graduation from Williams in 1930 entered Yale's Drama School.[5]

Unimpressed with what he had learned during his two year tenure at Yale, Kazan withdrew and sought admission into New York's recently organized Group Theater, a professional company of actors sharing both common ideals and goals for the "New Deal" theater. Kazan later claimed that for him "the Group was the best thing professionally that ever happened."[6] There he gained the nickname "Gadget" ("Gadge" for short) because of his industriousness and his willingness

to perform any task.[7] Within two years he had become the Group's stage manager, and in 1935 acted in his first important stage play, *Waiting For Lefty* by Clifford Odets.[8]

Between 1935 and 1941, when the Group officially dissolved, Kazan learned the elements of his trade. In these years he discovered and practiced many of the basic techniques that a director must master in order to become successful. He learned the nuts and bolts of creating scenery, lighting, and other facets of theater production. More importantly, during his Group years Kazan formulated a specific style which included documentary realism, elements of improvisation, and the Stanislavsky Method, which strove to produce actors who conveyed real emotions instead of simply imitating them. The Group also brought him into contact with Communism, but soon he left the Party in disgust after recognizing its "menace to freedom of thought and expression."[9]

Once the Group Theater formally disbanded in 1941, Kazan wasted no time setting up an independent professional career. Immediately he had acting jobs, but it was his directorial success with *Cafe Crown* in early 1942 that launched his Broadway career.[10] Later that same year, *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942) won a Pulitzer Prize, and changed Kazan's life. Given the New York Drama Critics' Award for best director of the year, Elia Kazan became "suddenly very much in demand."[11] Moreover, not only had Kazan shown his

directorial talents to the drama critics, the "kid director" had triumphed over the pressures that accompany directing temperamental stars. In fact, although his "fight" with the main actress, Tallulah Bankhead, got extremely nasty, the play opened exactly as Kazan and the producer, Michael Myerberg, had hoped. Having both won this battle and proved that he could direct even the biggest stars, Kazan was on the road to "directorial eminence."[12]

During the war years Kazan produced the lighter fare so popular to Broadway's wartime audience, but two significant events drastically changed Kazan's course.[13] First, shortly after signing his contract with Twentieth Century Fox in 1944, Kazan became involved in a marriage-threatening affair, which resulted in a separation from his wife, Molly. Eventually, the couple reunited on the condition that Kazan would undergo psychoanalysis. After these sessions began, Kazan gradually moved towards "darker, riskier material and started gravitating toward deeply troubled characters whose behavior ranged beyond their own understanding and control."[14] In addition, the end of the war changed the social climate in the U.S. This popular director accurately identified this shift and recognized its meaning. For him this change meant the freedom to attempt more mature themes. He knew and publicly insisted that entertainment must be provocative to accommodate the postwar audience, which because of the wartime experience had become "tougher, more honest and a lot

more progressive."[15] His personal struggles combined with his intuitive recognition of the changed audience to push Kazan toward intriguing dramas. Apparently Kazan had found his artistic niche.[16]

Although Kazan grew more popular and more successful during the mid-1940s in Broadway circles, he wanted to "get into films."[17] When Darryl F. Zanuck of Twentieth Century Fox approached Kazan in 1944 about a film based on Betty Smith's best-selling novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, he jumped at the opportunity. Because of the strength of his theater reputation, the contract negotiations were favorable for Kazan. The final agreement between Kazan and Fox granted him absolute approval over material he was to direct and a schedule of only one picture a year.[18] Requesting such a liberal contract suggests that Kazan had brought with him from Broadway a desire to establish and maintain his independence. On stage this master of realism had freedom of expression, and he directed plays that "hit you where you lived with raw emotion" and without subtlety.[19] Apparently Kazan hoped to transfer this freedom to Hollywood.

The contract with Fox allowed Kazan to work with Darryl F. Zanuck, the head of one of the unusually bold studios of this period. Under Zanuck, Fox directors experimented with mature themes, and he supported their efforts.[20] Kazan's early films particularly benefited from this support. For example, when several of the Jewish studio heads pleaded with

Zanuck to drop *Gentlemen's Agreement* for fear that it might set off anti-semitic protests and/or draw attention to Jewish influence in Hollywood, the Fox executive ignored them. As Zanuck had thought, the film became the favorite of the season and won the Academy Award for the Best Picture of the Year. Later, when Kazan's *Viva Zapata!* outraged the Mexican government because of its portrayal of Emiliano Zapata, again, Zanuck ignored threats of future exclusion of all Fox pictures and backed the film and its director. Kazan admired the strength of Darryl Zanuck and sought to emulate his resistance to pressure.[21] As his independence within the movie industry blossomed, Kazan became increasingly adamant in not only standing up for, but sticking to, his artistic creations.

Kazan's commitment to his art would eventually bring him into conflict with Hollywood's censorship agencies. Initially, however, Kazan's films faced only minor challenges from the Production Code Administration, all of which were handled by Zanuck. His first effort for Fox, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1944), received rave reviews complimenting his honesty and naturalness. His next film for MGM, *Sea of Grass* (1947), was much less successful.[22]

Still, 1947 represents a watershed in Kazan's career. He shot on location for the first time in *Boomerang!*; *Gentlemen's Agreement* won the Oscar for best picture; and his direction of *A Streetcar Named Desire* on Broadway won a

Pulitzer Prize. In addition, he and Cheryl Crawford, once a leader of the Group Theater, opened up the Actor's Studio, "a dramatic workshop open only to actors who have, in auditions, convinced Kazan, Crawford and Lee Strasberg . . . of their exceptional talent."[23] The Stanislavsky Method permeated the Actor's Studio. Kazan and other faculty members strove to train the actors to convey real emotions rather than mere imitation. Kazan never told his students specifically how to move or speak. Instead he stressed improvisation by having the actors project themselves into the minds and hearts of characters. After the actors had accomplished this, Kazan then showed how they "could evolve a valid interpretation of a role through their own reactions to the specific stage situation."[24] Because of the Actor's Studio, Kazan became known as an actor's director, and many of his students followed him to Hollywood. From the first class of fifty students emerged stars like, Julie Harris, Kim Hunter, Maureen Stapleton, Eli Wallach, Lee Grant, John Forsythe, Anne Jackson, and Karl Malden. Marlon Brando, Sam Wanamaker, Shelley Winters, Mildred Dunnock and June Havoc, also worked and trained at the Studio in their spare time.[25]

Boomerang!, a Louis de Rochement production, gave Kazan an opportunity to experiment. Like de Rochement's earlier films, *The House On 92nd Street* (1945) and *13 Rue Madeleine* (1947), it was photographed on location and produced to resemble a "news-reel effect." Additionally, *Boomerang!*

reflected Kazan's interest in, and his admiration for, the Italian neo-realists. Kazan later stated that the movie was "our neo-realism, exactly at the same time as *Paisan*, but of course in no way as good."[26]

Despite his early success and the leeway granted for experimentation, Kazan remained in the restraints of the studio system and was closely monitored by Darryl Zanuck. For its time *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1947), based on Laura Z. Hobson's best-seller, was seen as a "liberal" movie, one that certainly "broke some new ground." Cause movies like this and Edward Dmytryk's *Crossfire* (1947) brought anti-semitism to the screen and for the "first time someone said that America is full of anti-semitism."[27] The Code administrators had no qualms with the movie's use of the terms "jew" or "dirty kike," the first major Hollywood movie to have done so, but the PCA questioned two other elements. Zanuck, who still maintained cutting rights on Kazan's films, handled all the censorship problems. The Breen Office insisted that Zanuck change the divorced status of his "sympathetic lead." Because the Code did not specifically ban the portrayal of a divorced woman, however, Zanuck accused Breen of adhering too closely to those rules set by the Catholic Legion of Decency, and refused to make the change. As for the Code administrator's concern about the developing relationship between Phil (Gregory Peck) and Cathy (Dorothy McGuire), Zanuck complied to their stipulation that the film should in

no way depict or even suggest a love affair between them.[28] Despite the success of *Gentlemen's Agreement*, Kazan remained dissatisfied with the film. Denied the opportunity of shooting on location, he felt that *Gentlemen's Agreement* looked like "an illustration for *Cosmopolitan* magazine [with] everyone prettified."[29]

In this same year Kazan staged *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the legendary Pulitzer Prize winning play by Tennessee Williams. The play represents the first professional collaboration between Kazan and Williams. These two artists, both of whom harbored strong feelings about being "outsiders," Kazan for his foreign heritage and Williams for his homosexuality, became immediate friends.[30] On the professional level both immensely respected and admired each others' work and opinions. In one tribute, Williams claimed, "In my time there was no director who could touch Elia Kazan. He had a phenomenal rapport with actors and with the most difficult playwrights. He was supreme in his craft which he practiced with great love."[31]

Together these "quirky rebels" thrilled and stunned Broadway audiences with *A Streetcar Named Desire*.[32] To Kazan's powerful honesty, Williams added a sexual element. With this new emphasis on sex, Kazan's characters throughout the 1950s became "more tortured, more violent, often less articulate . . . and [began] to establish themselves much more forcefully."[33] Because the theater was far more liberal

in allowing provocative themes to be staged, Kazan encountered few difficulties in carrying Williams' neurotic and lustful characters to the stage. Passing these by the Production Code Administration and the Legion of Decency, however, would be another matter altogether.

A film version of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* made both Hollywood and Elia Kazan nervous, but for very different reasons. Kazan held the play in high regard and believed it could be made into an intensely psychological film. But he shuddered at the thoughts of doing the adaptation. Williams insisted that Kazan was the only director who could do the job but Kazan told him: "Oh God, Tenn, it would be like marrying the same woman twice. I don't think I can get it up for *Streetcar* again."[34] Several things eventually convinced Kazan he could do it. First, Williams' desire infected Kazan. Second, Kazan recognized the potential for achieving pure realism by shooting *Streetcar* on location. Finally, because of the sharp contrast between Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski, Kazan discerned that this adaptation from stage to screen would be a "great lesson in filmmaking."[35]

On the other hand, the film version of *Streetcar* unnerved the movie people because of the very adult theme. The play's explicit portrayal of homosexuality, promiscuity and rape prompted a serious conflict with the Breen Office. Because *Streetcar* was an independent production, Kazan dealt

more directly with the PCA. On the first two issues Kazan relented, but the rape scene forced a confrontation. Kazan proved extremely tactful and tenacious in his first great struggle with the Code office. When Code officials Geoffrey Shurlock and Jack Vizzard denounced the rape scene, Kazan demanded a one-on-one conference with Breen. The PCA director understood Kazan's sincerity about maintaining his artistic integrity, thus approved the rape scene if "done by suggestion." Having this promise from, and not wanting to force the issue any further with Breen, Kazan thereafter "practiced discreet avoidance."[36] That is, he disregarded Breen's requests for script changes and pretended that no problem existed. The remarkable ground breaking final product came from his "shrewd, determined negotiations with the censor and a sensitive but cautious exercise of his filmmaking skills."[37] Kazan's success had a dramatic impact on the film community and its censors. As Shurlock, Breen's second-in-command and successor, would later observe, "For the first time we were confronted with a picture that was obviously not family entertainment. Now we know that a good deal of what we decide in censoring movies is not morality, but taste. It began with *Streetcar*."[38]

By the summer of 1951 *Streetcar*'s problems had been worked out to the Breen Office's satisfaction, and the picture had received the Code seal of approval. The Legion of Decency, however, immediately condemned the film. Facing

the prospect of a Catholic boycott, Warners panicked. To avoid the dreaded rating, Warners agreed, without Kazan's consent, to twelve different cuts suggested by the Legion.[39] Kazan may have understood Warner's appeasement of this powerful Catholic agency, but was nonetheless outraged by the secrecy under which the cuts had been made. Against Warner's advice, Kazan swore that he "would be vindictive." His article in the *New York Times* on October 21, 1951 revealed this "well organized conspiracy" against *Streetcar*, and focused "a floodlight" on the issue of film censorship.[40] Only months after his *New York Times*' article, Kazan, Williams and Warner Bros.' Code liaisons began script negotiations for what would become a much more controversial movie, *Baby Doll*.

NOTES

[1] *Hollywood Citizen-News*, 24 September 1953, Kazan file.

[2] The movement received a boost from the *Paramount* decision which allowed theater chains to show films of their choice. Another boost came when several of the majors, like Paramount, acting in self-defense against the growing competition from the "indies", began inviting independent producers, such as Hal B. Wallace, Cecil B. De Mille and Buddy DeSylva, to work within their systems. All productions were released through the major studio, but instead of collecting all the profits, the studio shared the profits with the independent (See "Trouble in Paradise," *Time*, 29 January 1945, 86). By 1955, the trend had definitely taken hold and *Variety* headlines announced, "STUDIO 'DICTATORS' IN FADE." The article declared that "the long reign of the individual studio Napoleon" had ended and that the strengthening relationship between the major studios and the "indie producers" had changed the role of the major studios to that of bankers (See *Variety*, 16 February 1955, 3).

[3] See Charles Champlin, *The Movies Grow Up: 1940-1980* (Chicago: Ohio University Press, 1977, 1981), 38. Also, see Peter Brunette, "Rossellini and Cinematic Realism," *Cinema Journal* 25 (Fall 1985): 35-49.

[4] Fred Hift, "Becoming a 'Provocative' Medium," *Variety*, 16 January 1957, 10.

[5] Quoted in Warner Bros. Studios, *Biography of Elia Kazan* (1961), Kazan file. See also, Elia Kazan, *Elia Kazan: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 12-13, 24-31; and James Poling, "Handy 'Gadget'," *Collier's*, 31 May 1952, 58, 60.

[6] Michel Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 15. See also, Virginia Stevens, "Elia Kazan: Actor and Director of Stage and Screen," *Theatre Arts* 31 (November 1947): 19. In this Ciment interview, Kazan simply called the Group Theater "left-wing," but later in 1988 he more eloquently called it an "ideologically cemented collective." See Brian Case, "Elia Kazan: Methods and

Madness," *Time Out* (London), 4-11 May 1988, 22, Kazan file. In her study Estelle Victoria Changas refers to the Group as a "repertory with strong polititat tendencies." See Estelle Changas, "Untitled" (Master's thesis, University of California at Los Angeles, 1971), 5. Also, see Changas, "Elia Kazan's America," *Film Comment* 8 (Summer 1972): 9.

[7] Kazan, *A Life*, 102-103. Also, Poling, 60; Case, 22, Kazan file; and Stevens, 20. The latter reveals that some of Kazan's self-imposed chores included "licking stamps . . . cutting out clippings for the scrapbook . . . and painting scenery."

[8] Kazan appeared in four other Odet plays: *Till the Day I Die* (1935), *Paradise Lost* (1935), *Golden Boy* (1937), and *Night Music* (1940). See Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, 18-19.

[9] *New York Times*, 15 May 1952, 39. This contact with Communism influenced the type of material that Kazan found interesting. He had written two plays on strikes while with the Group. *For Bread and Unity* was about a bread strike and *People of the Cumberland* was about the hardships of strip mining. Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, 15, 23.

[10] His immediate acting job, a play called *Five Alarm Waltz*, proved a flop, but Kazan had arranged other alternatives to replace acting. He had earned a substantial sum of money from the sale to Warner Brothers of a play entitled *Blues In the Night*, out of which the Studio subsequently made a film and gave Kazan the part of Nickie.

[11] Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, 28. For an excellent discussion of Kazan's early "conquest of Broadway," see Thomas H. Pauly, *An American Odyssey: Elia Kazan and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 57-77.

[12] Poling, 60. Concerning his "fight" with Bankhead, Kazan told Murray Schumach in a 1947 interview that he had not desired to "beat her down," but that he needed to affirm his authoritarian position. He continued, "every fighter has one fight that makes or breaks him" and "that was my fight." See Murray Schumach, "A Director Named 'Gadge'," *New York Times Magazine*, 9 November 1947, 18.

[13] His Broadway hits during the war years include: *Skin of Our Teeth* (1942), *Harriet* (1943), *One Touch of Venus* (1943) and *Jacobowsky and the Colonel* (1944).

[14] For the conditional reunion, see Kazan, *A Life*, 238-239, and Pauly, 64-65. The latter assessed the effect of psychoanalysis on Kazan.

[15] Elia Kazan, "Audience Tomorrow: Preview in New Guinea," *Theatre Arts* 29 (October 1945): 577.

[16] His plays after the war include: Kermit Bloomgarden's *Deep Are the Roots*; Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*; and Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

[17] Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, 28.

[18] *Biography of Elia Kazan* (1961), Kazan file.

[19] Anon., "A Quiz for Kazan," *Theatre Arts* 60 (November 1956): 30; and Pauly, 7.

[20] Hollis Alpert, *The Dreams and the Dreamers* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1962), 134. See also, Leonard Mosley, *Zanuck: The Rise and Fall of Hollywood's Last Tycoon* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1984).

[21] For Kazan's admiration of Darryl F. Zanuck's strength and determination, see Kazan, *A Life*, 254, 420-421; and Mosley, 229,239-241.

[22] See Bosley Crowther, "*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*: A Review," *New York Times*, 1 March 1945, 25. For a thorough discussion of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, see Changas, "Untitled," 19-24. Pandro S. Berman, the producer for the *Sea of Grass* (1947), did not appreciate Kazan's honesty. He told the young director, "we are in the business of making beautiful pictures of beautiful people and anybody who does not acknowledge that should not be in this business." See Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, 54.

[23] Poling, 60.

[24] Ibid., 61. Also, see Gene D. Phillips, *The Films of Tennessee Williams* (Philadelphia: Art Alliance Press, 1980), 67; and Michel Ciment, ed., *Elia Kazan: An American Odyssey* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988), 37.

[25] Because of Kazan's success and that of many of his student actors, "probably no other single organization has had so great an influence on contemporary American acting as the Actor's Studio." Poling, 60. For more information about Kazan as an actor's director, see Changas, "America," 9; Jim

Kitses, "Elia Kazan: A Structural Analysis," *Cinema Journal* 7 (Winter 1972-73): 34; and Robin Bean, "Elia Kazan on the Young Agony," *Films and Filming* 8 (March 1962): 27.

[26] Eugene Archer, "Elia Kazan: The Genesis of a Style," *Film Culture* 2 (1956): 21. For comparison of *Boomerang!* to *Paisan*, see Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, 56.

[27] As taken from Kazan, *A Life*, 333, 382. Also, see Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, 57.

[28] See *Gentlemen's Agreement* file, Breen to Colonel Jason S. Joy (Director of Public Relations for Fox since 1932), March 21, 1947; Zanuck to Breen, March 27, 1947; Breen to Joy, May 23, 1947; and Breen to Joy, June 18, 1947, Production Code Administration Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California. See also, Changas, "Untitled," 36; and Kazan, *A Life*, 254, 420-421.

[29] In his autobiography Kazan reveals that his memories of making *Gentlemen's Agreement* are minimal because of the "big-studio production." For his specific dissatisfactions, see Kazan, *A Life*, 331-332.

[30] Kazan, *A Life*, 48, 334-336, 348, 495 For his admiration of Williams, see 261, 353-354. For Williams, see Tennessee Williams, *Tennessee Williams: Memoirs* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1975). For his feelings of isolation, see 5, 163, 175; and for his admiration of Kazan, 102, 174, 183, 195 and 229.

[31] As taken from Jeanine Basinger, John Frazer and Joseph W. Reed Jr., eds., *Working with Kazan* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University, 1973). This work is a collection of praise for Kazan from all those who enjoyed and shared in his professional experiences.

[32] Kazan, *A Life*, 336. Also, see Changas, "Untitled," 34-35

[33] Jim Hillier, "Kazan and Williams," *Movie* 19 (Winter 1971-72): 17. For a discussion of some of Williams' characters brought to the stage and screen by Kazan, see Henry Hewes, "The Williams-Kazan Axis," *The Saturday Review*, 29 December 1956, 22.

[34] See Kazan, *A Life*, 383.

[35] For his doubts about the *Streetcar* project and his eventual decision to do it, see Kazan, *A Life*, 383-384.

[36] As taken from Leff and Simmons, 175, 177. For a thorough discussion of Kazan's battle with the PCA over *Streetcar*, see Changas, "Untitled," 171-177; Leff and Simmons, 172-184; Schumach, *A Face*, 71-79; and Corliss, 44-46. For the PCA's general nervousness over *Streetcar*, see Foster Hirsch, "Tennessee Williams," *Cinema Journal* 8 (1973): 2.

[37] Pauly, 13.

[38] Schumach, *A Face*, 72. Geoffrey Shurlock had been second-in-command of the Production Code office in Hollywood under Joseph Breen. However, from 1951 Shurlock and Jack Vizzard were the leaders of this office due to Breen's health problems. Breen retired in October 1954 and Shurlock, to the dismay of the leaders of the Legion of Decency who wanted Vizzard in this position, formally took the reins.

[39] See Corliss, 46; Changas, "Untitled," 174-175; Leff and Simmons 180-184; Schumach, *A Face*, 76-79; and Kazan, *A Life*, 432-437.

[40] Kazan, *A Life*, 436-437, 443. See Elia Kazan, "Pressure Problem," *New York Times*, 21 October 1951, 13.

CHAPTER 3

BABY DOLL: ITS INCEPTION, ITS DIFFICULTY WITH THE PCA AND ITS PUBLIC RECEPTION

Elia Kazan embarked on *Baby Doll* to make a statement. *Variety's* reviewer recognized the film as "a huge step in the screen's road towards maturity." It was, as he suggested, "a raw, shattering experience, surcharged with red-hot emotionalism and directed and acted with such skill that some of the so-called 'sexy' pix of the past seem like child's play."[1] With this picture Kazan celebrated his independence from the constricting demands of the studio system, the Production Code and the Legion of Decency.

Baby Doll originated with discussions between Kazan and Tennessee Williams over the potential of a movie derived from four of Williams' one-act plays: *27 Wagons Full of Cotton, The Unsatisfactory Supper* (also called *The Long Stay Cut Short*), *This Property is Condemned*, and *The Last of My Solid Gold Watches*. Ultimately Kazan decided to utilize only the first two.[2] The plot from *27 Wagons* provided the driving force for the screenplay. In this one-act play Flora Meighan's husband, Jake, the owner of a decrepit old cotton gin, burns down Silva Vacarro's gin to force the foreigner to use his facilities instead. While Jake is ginning Vacarro's

twenty-seven wagons full of cotton, Vacarro frightens Flora into revealing her husband's crime, and after her confession proceeds to rape and beat her. Because he wants Vacarro's business, Flora's despicable husband agrees to let her entertain the Sicilian every time the latter brings him a load of cotton. The second play, *The Unsatisfactory Supper*, is the story of an elderly spinster, Aunt Rose Comfort, who wears out her welcome with her niece Baby Doll and the latter's husband, Archie Lee.

Originally Williams displayed little enthusiasm for the project and only occasionally sent Kazan, who was working on the script, "a page or two" instructing his cohort to "'insert somewhere.'"[3] Eventually however, together these two artists skillfully intertwined the two unrelated plays.[4] First they simply fused together the characters of Flora and Jake Meighan from *27 Wagons Full of Cotton* with those of Baby Doll and Archie Lee from *The Unsatisfactory Supper*. Thus, the married characters of the film became Baby Doll and Archie Lee Meighan. To form the final quartet of principals, Kazan and Williams took Silva Vacarro from the first play and Aunt Rose Comfort from the latter.

Kazan and Williams shaped the final story around the financially strapped middle-aged man (Archie Lee) who was married, in name only, to a woman (Baby Doll) half his age. Desperately wanting his wife, Archie Lee takes his aggression out on his successful Sicilian competitor, Silva Vacarro.

Archie burns down the latter's cotton gin, forcing Vacarro to bring his cotton to Archie for ginning. To fully develop the theme, especially Archie's frustration, new elements were added including an agreement between Archie Lee and Baby Doll's daddy that the couple's marriage would not be consummated until Baby Doll's twentieth birthday. Amended by Baby Doll, the final agreement required Archie Lee to provide for his wife a fully furnished house by her twentieth birthday or forfeit his marital prerogatives. The entire film takes place during the two days prior to this birthday when the marriage will be consummated. On the first day while Archie Lee discusses with the doctor his sexual frustration, the Ideal Pay-As-You-Go Furniture Company repossesses all of the Meighan's furniture except Baby Doll's crib-bed. Outraged, Baby Doll calls off the agreement. This additional pressure helps to explain Archie Lee's irrational behavior and makes his act of arson seem "less venal and mercenary, if not really sympathetic."[5]

Kazan and Williams also added scenes to show that Baby Doll's maturation in the film occurred because of her attraction to Archie's Sicilian rival, Vacarro. Unlike Archie, Vacarro treats her like a woman, instead of a child. Vacarro's character also experienced drastic alterations. Changed from the "hardboiled and sadistic ruffian" who raped and brutalized Flora Meighan in *27 Wagons*, in the film Vacarro appears more interested in acquiring a signed

affidavit from Baby Doll exposing her husband's crime than in violating her. Baby Doll and Vacarro spend the afternoon playing hide and seek, and after finally getting her confession, Vacarro takes a nap in Baby Doll's crib-bed. His film character still contains nasty elements, particularly his sadistic joy in manipulating Archie Lee into doubting his wife's faithfulness. Returning home after ginning Vacarro's cotton all day, Archie senses that something has changed and accuses Vacarro of making love to Baby Doll. Vacarro then reveals to Archie Baby Doll's signed affidavit, whereupon Archie flies into a rage of insane jealousy, frustration and fear, and begins shooting at anything that moves in the darkness. Vacarro flees, hides in a tree, and is quickly joined by Baby Doll.

Altering each character's motivations compelled Kazan and Williams to change the ending. *27 Wagons* ended disconcertingly, leaving the audience to believe that Flora will continue her submission to Vacarro's "sadistic sexual inclinations," while *Supper* ends with Aunt Rose Comfort left alone in her survival against the elements.[6] The film's final scene is considerably more hopeful. After Archie Lee's arrest and Vacarro's departure into the darkness, Baby Doll and Aunt Rose are left wondering whether they will be "remembered or forgotten."

From the outset Kazan was "very high on this movie" with its "sex and excitement and danger and violence."[7] Yet

this "sex . . . and violence" caused Warner's officials to wonder "how the picture could be filmed," especially "as far as the Breen Office [was] concerned."[8] As they suspected, gaining Code office approval required very lengthy and delicate negotiations. These negotiations, which stretched over nearly five years, were shaped in large part by Kazan's career and his relationship with Warner Bros.

In January 1952, only five months after the debacle involving *Streetcar* and the Legion, Kazan had the script entitled "Hide and Seek" ready for the initial reading and evaluation by Warner's Code representatives, Finlay McDermid and Walter MacEwen. The staff found Williams' words "fascinating" and were pleased about the reduced number of plays on which the film would be based. However, MacEwen displayed concern at "the main story of arson and adultery," adapted primarily from *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*. MacEwen found it extremely troublesome that of the entire script there were "almost 40 [pages] devoted to one sequence between the wife and the other man, as he preps to seduce her." He felt that "as one incident in the type of picture originally contemplated," this type of adultery "could probably [have been] handled--but now it is the whole meat of the picture." He doubted "whether [they could] ever get this situation by the Breen Office."[9] In response, the Code liaisons offered only "tentative methods" and "random suggestions" as how to incorporate Breen's "compensating moral values," so as to

override Meighan's, Vacarro's and Baby Doll's transgressions.[10]

Despite *Streetcar*'s critical and box office success, Kazan obviously felt hemmed in by studio restraints. Trying to avoid trouble, Kazan sought to assure the studio of his good intentions. Two months after McDermid's letter, Kazan wrote Steve Trilling, Jack Warner's production assistant, promising him the Breen Office problems would be solved. Kazan also happily announced Williams' burgeoning "interest in the project," which he believed would lead to "the best writing he's done on it," and undoubtedly "something really stupendous."[11] Kazan did not want Warners tampering with the final version of this project, as they had with *Streetcar* to satisfy the Legion of Decency. But he knew that it was not the right time to push too hard for potentially controversial material. The *Streetcar* clash apparently forced his caution. In these earliest negotiations Kazan evoked his enthusiasm for the project's potential, but remained illusive about his ultimate intentions for the final script.

Months later, Kazan claimed to have fixed the new script (now "27 Wagon Loads of Cotton") in accordance with potential Breen Office protests, but McDermid "thought that none of the problems had been solved." Upon closer review, however, he found that with the newly inserted "frog-gigging sequence," where Archie Lee murders Vacarro, Kazan had provided PCA officials with Breen's compensating moral

values. Because the sadism and adultery were now punished, "one less Breen Office objection" existed. Regardless, some of the most disturbing elements still remained. In this second version, Kazan kept a scene with a Negro woman in Silva's bedroom, despite McDermid's advice that the scene be moved to the porch. To McDermid's further dismay, the seduction scene was, "if anything, longer than it was before," and the "sadism even more emphasized." Because of Kazan's subtle obstinacy, McDermid lamented to Trilling that despite minute signs of progress, he felt the project was "standing on a treadmill as far as the Breen Office [was] concerned." Therefore, he felt uncertain about when the project should be submitted to that office. To allay his colleague's worries, Trilling arranged a conference with Kazan prior to the first meeting with Code officials.[12]

No major script changes resulted from this meeting, but Kazan apparently agreed with the consultants that further modifications were needed. As a result, Breen and Vizzard were told that the "present script was to be considered only as a very rough draft, still very far from the story which was to be put on screen." In this light, and "at the urgent request of the studio," Breen's initial letter offered only a few written "reflections and general reactions" as "guides in the further preparation of the screenplay."[13] Several points caused problems.

First and "most obvious" was the "low and sordid tone of the story as a whole," in which the main characters wallow "in crime, sex, murder and revenge." Breen did not question the theme about "a certain inexorable progression to evil." Instead he suggested that Warners eliminate "as much sordidness as possible" and add a "voice for morality" by including a character who could express moral outrage at the main characters' transgressions. Finally, "the most important single problem" centered around the affair between Vacarro and Baby Doll. The detailed seduction of Baby Doll was "entirely too long," and Vacarro's "taunting" of Meighan about his "cuckolding him" added significantly to the ignoble tone. Clearly, the Code office could never approve adultery stemming from a "calculated process of revenge." In fact, to use adultery "deliberately and with malice as a weapon of retribution . . . would be impossible under the Code." To avoid this Breen suggested that Vacarro become infatuated with Baby Doll during his larger quest for information concerning her husband's arson.[14] Later, Vizzard expressed to McDermid "his private, unofficial, off-the-record opinion" that Kazan's script was "a long, long, long way from" receiving a seal, and that the "odds against achieving it are very large."[15] The PCA's response caused Warners to become wary and contract disputes arose.

During the earliest script negotiations, Williams and Kazan lacked final contract agreements with the studio.

Kazan raised the issue of a contract only after his friendly testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in April 1952. Kazan recognized that like all of the studios, Warner Bros. demanded that its contracted employees comply with the Committee.[16] Once he had testified and "named names" to the Committee's satisfaction, Kazan hinted to Warners that this film would be his first independent production, and that he wanted the contract negotiations settled prior to the PCA's introduction to the script.[17] The two parties apparently reached a satisfactory, but temporary agreement.[18]

After Vizzard's expression of wariness, lawyers for both parties, Harold S. Bareford (Warners) and William Fitelson (Kazan), began re-negotiating. Fitelson understood that the original deal excluded Warners from final script approval and that Kazan was "subject only to clearing the script with the Breen Office." Kazan staunchly maintained his right to freedom as a film maker and insisted on final cut.[19] On the other hand, Bareford argued that Williams and Kazan had both agreed to let Warners have "final, unconditional and unqualified approval of the screenplay" and that without this, the contract was void. To depart from this position, Bareford told Warners, would be unsafe.[20]

For a little over a year, Kazan and Warner Bros. remained estranged. During this period, as a director of both Broadway and Hollywood productions, Kazan continued

stunning his audiences. His Broadway hits included Williams' *Camino Real* (March 19, 1953) and Robert Anderson's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Tea and Sympathy* (September 30, 1953). Simultaneously, Kazan devoted himself to Sam Spiegel's production of Budd Shulberg's *On the Waterfront* and began discussing *East of Eden* with his friend, John Steinbeck. Kazan's Broadway achievements, combined with the probable success of *On the Waterfront* and the idea for a movie based on John Steinbeck's novel, enticed Jack Warner.

By January 30, 1954 the contract problems had been resolved according to Kazan's wishes.[21] Having achieved final cut, the ultimate prize for a director, no one, except the PCA, could tell Kazan how to put *Baby Doll* together.[22]

On the Waterfront opened in July 1954. Later that year the film could boast a world-wide gross of $8,000,000.[23] It won the Oscar for Best Picture, and Kazan took the Academy's award for Best Director. After this Kazan later recounted, "I could have everything; any story, any power, any money."[24] Prior to the release of his next film, Kazan staged yet another Williams play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (March 1955), which also won a Pulitzer Prize. Two months later his adaptation of John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* debuted. Opening to rave reviews it became one of the biggest grossing films of the year and was nominated for Best Picture. With such extraordinary successes, Kazan became bolder in his script negotiations with Warners and the Code officials.

Three months after *East of Eden's* opening, Kazan resumed the *Baby Doll* project, submitting to Warners a new script entitled "Mississippi Woman." Immediately, he assured Trilling that "though his contract permitted," he had no desire to do anything the "guys didn't like."[25] Regardless, McDermid, utilizing his "Breen Office crystal ball," found most of the script unsuitable. He congratulated Kazan on having reduced "the overt sadism" to "a manageable level," for deleting the scene with the Negro girl completely, and for placing "less emphasis on the revenge idea as a sole reason for adultery." McDermid felt that this version closely resembled some of "the best French ironic comedies," but added that these were "the ones that didn't win Code seals in this country." Furthermore, he pointed out that adapting "an ironic commentary on the pettiness of human selfishness, avarice, sex drives, etc. to the Puritan 'right is right and wrong is wrong' point of view would be a difficult task." As many of the original scenes remained, McDermid simply restated some of the August 1, 1952 comments of the Breen Office, specifically, those which he felt Geoffrey Shurlock, now director of the PCA, and his second-in-command, Jack Vizzard, would still consider appropriate. The story as a whole still remained "low and sordid." Finding the third act most disturbing, the Code consultant concentrated on it. McDermid informed Kazan that while some of the material could be "jockeyed into acceptability under

the Code" if the "'Voice for Morality' could boom out loud and clear," he lamented that "what's there now won't satisfy the censors."[26]

Apparently, Kazan rejected McDermid's attempt at "Breen Officialese;" that is, suggesting alternative devices to bring a script within Code limitations. In spite of his reservations, McDermid sent Shurlock the nearly unaltered script now titled "Baby Doll." In a hurried reading, Shurlock and Vizzard found numerous problematic lines and scenes. Still, the crucial elements were those retained from the earlier scripts. Some of these original violations included: "justified adultery . . . the element of the unconsummated marriage . . . and Archie's sex frustration." They deemed this script unworthy of a Certificate.[27]

McDermid worried that the director might over-react to the PCA's response and immediately wrote to Kazan informing him that Shurlock's letter should be taken "seriously but not literally." First he noted that most of the issues involved mere word eliminations. As for adultery, the biggest problem, McDermid reminded Kazan that he had already agreed to eliminate this element.[28] McDermid also informed Kazan of a recent telephone conversation with Shurlock in which he challenged the Code boss on various issues, specifically Archie's sex frustration. For example, McDermid specifically asked Shurlock about the opening scene in which Archie spied on Baby Doll through a peep hole. He inquired, "If she were

under bedclothes," would this scene be acceptable? The PCA boss would not answer specifically, but stated that "undoubtedly in conference such concessions would be made." After being pressed "a bit further," Shurlock conceded that the question of showing Archie's sex frustration was a matter of degree. As a result, this troublesome theme would not have to "be entirely eliminated from the script." McDermid assured Kazan that probably "some modifications of the dialogue would do the trick."[29]

Warner's representative encouraged the director to "accept some of the cuts and changes suggested," but revealed his willingness to fight for those specifics which Kazan felt strongly about. In closing, McDermid emboldened Kazan with his certainty that Shurlock respected his artistry. The new Code director would surely treat him respectfully, and give him "enough room to work." McDermid, therefore, believed that even with some eliminations a "shooting script with plenty of juice left in it" could be reached.[30]

No doubt Kazan wanted as much juice as possible. By November 15, 1955 Kazan had set up on location in Benoit, Mississippi, and from there he responded to McDermid's and Shurlock's recommendations. In a letter addressed to Jack Warner, but also sent to Shurlock, he advised that unusual movies like this must be made or those in the movie industry might as well "just quit and sign up with the TV guys." Kazan insisted that they (Warner's Code representatives and

himself) must "fight hard [for] the admissibility of the grown up subject at the core of this script." To this end, he wrote that he had "eliminated everything except" several points. His "only exceptions" were those elements most controversial. While he conceded the elimination of several lines and the "sex-affair," Kazan held firmly to the meat of the picture. He told Warner, "I cannot reduce the element of Archie Lee's sex frustration. . . . This is the whole nub of the story. . . . This is the very essence of the plot."[31] Kazan emphasized that the final film would not be sordid because he would "handle it delicately and in good taste," and he reminded Warner that the boys at the Code office trusted him as a director because when he said something, he made "good on it." He did not want a sordid picture, but in this case, he remarked, the Shurlock Office would "have to take" him at his word.[32]

Warner's representatives defended Kazan's artistic position. Trilling first convinced Shurlock and Vizzard, who remained very leery of the entire concept's viability, and then successfully debated the acceptability of the problematic scenes. In the end the Code officials only asked for some dialogue modification within these scenes.[33] Again, as a sign of compromise, Kazan accepted some of the minor changes and deletions, but kept those lines, no matter how small, that he felt were crucial to the picture. Kazan, with help from Warner's agents, remained at the helm of his ship.

Kazan filmed on location in Benoit, Mississippi for almost three months. By February 16, 1956 he had returned to the Warner Brother's Vitagraph Studio in New York "to polish up the final directorial touches" for the film.[34] The problems with the PCA, however, had not been officially resolved and the movie still needed the Code seal. With the film finished, Kazan took on yet another attitude toward the Production Code staff.

In mid-July Kazan informed Trilling that the film was "going to have a little trouble with the Breen Office, but really very little." Because he had eliminated the adultery, Kazan felt he had "covered their points." Yet he confessed that enough ambiguity existed so the audience would wonder about a "D.F. (delayed fuck)." He admitted that PCA officials would again denounce the "general moral tone" as low and sordid, but concluded that it's "none of their goddamn business. This is certainly no Bells of St. Mary's nor am I a professional catholic or any other type of do gooder. I try to show people like they are, fucked-up and horny, and I like them that way."[35]

As expected the PCA found problems with the final product. With Shurlock in Europe for the summer on Code business, Vizzard was now acting head of the PCA. Aside from commending Kazan for the absence of the sex affair, Vizzard's comments were negative. Viewing the material as filmed rather than scripted led him to see new problems in *Baby*

Doll. He no longer only focused on specific dialogue. Instead, Vizzard denounced three troublesome scenes, two of which he found inappropriately suggestive. The bathroom scene, though not photographed, still caused problems because of the inference of Archie Lee trying to play with Baby Doll's naked body. As an "intrusion on the intimacies between a man and wife . . . this scene would have to be cut down to the merest and briefest footage if it is to be found acceptable under the Code." Kazan kept this scene intact. "Much more importantly," Vizzard was offended by the "scene in the swing between Silva (Vacarro) and Baby Doll." Obviously, with the "prolonged stroking and caressing of her skin, by pressing himself intimately on her, and by purring words of tenderness at her," Silva aimed to seduce her. Vizzard claimed that everyone on the entire staff knew that "this scene clearly intimated . . . that the girl is having physical reactions which are orgiastic." The film would not receive a Certificate until Kazan eliminated this scene. Again, Kazan would not back down. Finally, the Code staffers felt "the word 'wop' was offensively overdone in the final sequence." Kazan made no changes.[36] In fact, on the same day that Vizzard drafted his letter to Warner, Kazan also sent one to the studio boss intimating that he intended to keep the controversial material. Kazan insisted that he did not "want to start taking out 'niggers' and 'wops' and every

other damn thing that will tame the script down." Defending his position he asserted:

> What's wrong with show business is that its balls have been cut off. . . . No one showboats anymore. There is no flash in it. It is too damn much like television. . . . Television doesn't allow 'nigger' and 'wop' and all kinds of sexual murmurs, etc.

He complimented Warner for the "new era" at the studio and begged for more boldness.[37] In the fall, approximately four months later, without major alterations to appease the PCA, Kazan's *Baby Doll* received a Certificate.

To explain this abrupt and remarkable reversal, it is necessary to review the dramatic changes in the Code office during the mid 1950s. First, Joseph Breen retired in October 1954, and Geoffrey Shurlock, a Protestant, replaced him. The confrontations at the end of Breen's career, over *The Moon is Blue* and *The French Line*, had weakened the industry's self-censoring system, and the new director, unlike Breen, believed the function of the PCA was "not to sit as censors," but to "render service and whenever possible to help a writer, director or a producer to overcome problems."[38] Also, to appease those crying for liberalization and to keep up with the Supreme Court's decisions since 1952, the Production Code underwent some very minor revisions in late 1954.[39]

Geoffrey Shurlock held vastly different views about how to apply the Code than his predecessor. In late 1955 the M.P.A.A. still boasted of its Breen-like resistance against the "trend to break down accepted standards," but Shurlock

disagreed with this attitude.[40] The new captain's desired destination was liberalization and modernization. He believed that any subject could be shown on the screen provided that it be done with good taste. For him the Code should be a permissive, not a restrictive, document.[41] To succeed in his goal, Shurlock needed further Code revisions sponsored by Eric Johnston and supported by the industry bosses in New York.

Several movies challenged the Code with controversial material and assisted Shurlock in his efforts to persuade the East Coast Board of Directors that change was needed, but Otto Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm* best revealed the uselessness of the unrevised Code.[42] This film, based on Nelson Algren's best-selling novel, portrayed the life of a heroine addict. Because dope addiction was still considered taboo under the Code, Shurlock had no choice but to deny the film a seal. United Artists, a member of the M.P.A.A, released the film in defiance of the decision by the Board of Directors who upheld the ban and the $25,000 fine.[43] Immediately upon the Board's denial, the studio resigned from its voluntary position in the Association. Without the seal, but with a "B" rating from the Legion, *The Man with the Golden Arm* eventually gained approval from all of the state and local censor boards. Disappointed that the appeal was denied, Preminger hoped the critics and the public would accept his picture anyway. The film, like Preminger's *The*

Moon is Blue, became a box office smash in part because of the strength of some of the recently divorced theater chains. In this case, the decision by Loew theaters to feature *The Man with the Golden Arm* determined the film's success. The director had his vindication.[44]

Preminger's daring film signified the weakness of the PCA and its Code. Specifically, the controversy over *The Man with the Golden Arm* highlighted three important issues: the widening rift between the PCA and the Legion; the stricter regulations enforced by the PCA than those of the state and local censors; and the organization of the appeals process, where the heads of rival companies as board members voted on those appeals made by their competitors. These issues forced Eric Johnston, President of the M.P.A.A., to order an inquiry into the industry's self-regulation system in January 1956. Out of this study came several significant changes to the Production Code, but the mechanics of appeal remained untouched.[45] These changes reflected the industry's desire to modernize, but perhaps too little too late.

Elia Kazan's *Baby Doll*, approved under the old Code, opened one week after the announcement of the new Code revisions.[46] It is likely that Johnston's decision to create the revision committee and Shurlock's meetings with that Committee in March 1956 signaled to the PCA that the New York bosses wanted liberalization. By mid-year change was certain. On May 22, 1956, with *Baby Doll* negotiations still

in progress, Shurlock discussed with Legion officials the potential changes to the Code.[47] And by November 14, just two weeks before the Legion's condemnation of *Baby Doll*, Legion officials recognized "concrete evidences" suggesting that the "restrictive statutes of the Production code in terms of forbidden subject matter are being liberalized to allow on the screen so-called adult and mature themes."[48] During Shurlock's early reign the PCA's approach to evaluating movies also gradually changed. Based on Shurlock's belief that "it's the treatment that counts," judgment of screenplays by Code officials relied increasingly on the treatment of subject matter rather than on the subject matter per se.[49] Undoubtedly Kazan's steadfast negotiations were bolstered not only by the PCA's anticipation of Code revisions, but also by the agency's new attitude and director.

Kazan's film gained instantaneous notoriety. Some complimented Kazan for both his "realism" and "artistic integrity," but disdainful reviews far outdid the congratulatory, both in number and in tone.[50] Feelings ranged from bewilderment at how this film got passed the Production Code, to total disgust at its content.[51] Most chastised the artists for the degradation and sordidness portrayed in the movie. One reviewer simply wanted to know, "For whom was this unhealthy film made?"[52] Another complimented Kazan for this film, but also gave "The *Holiday* Award for Navigation

and Downhill Slalom . . . to the unsung genius who gunned this one through the Breen Office."[53] Still other reporters, because of the coincidental release of *Baby Doll* and the revised Code, questioned Johnston about the controversial film's influence upon the new document. Johnston denied that these new revisions were made with any specific movie in mind.[54]

For the moralists, *Baby Doll* verified "that a rather considerable difference existed between the language of the Code and its interpretation by the men who administer it."[55] One contemporary article claimed that because the Motion Picture Code had obviously long since ceased to frighten movie producers, the Legion of Decency and United States' Catholics must act vigorously to maintain morality in the movies.[56] Outraged by the PCA's leniency with Kazan's *Baby Doll*, the Legion of Decency condemned both the Code administrators and the film, thus setting the stage for a heated battle that would leave the last bastion for screen morality profoundly changed.

NOTES

[1] Fred Hift, "*Baby Doll*: Review," *Variety*, 5 December 1956, 6.

[2] Early in the script negotiations, in July 1952, Warner Bros.' Code representative, Finlay McDermid, and Steve Trilling, Jack Warner's chief assistant in charge of production, had questioned the cohesiveness of a story based on four entirely separate plays. Since no records remain of this original script, it must be deduced from the earliest negotiations that the project initially maintained more aspects of the other two plays than in its last form. Kazan eventually removed any reference to Mister Charlie from *The Last of My Solid Gold Watches* and the two kids from *This Property is Condemned*. McDermid to Trilling, July 17, 1952. Three years later, McDermid commended Kazan's decision to focus only on two plays which gave the script a "greater sense of unity." See McDermid to Kazan, September 16, 1955. Both letters are in the *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. Production Files, Special Collections, Doheny Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles (Hereafter cited as Warner Bros. papers).

All secondary accounts suggest that the original idea for the film was based on four one-act plays, but Walter MacEwen, another Warner Bros. Code representative, wrote to Trilling and Jack Warner that the Kazan script would be based upon four one-act plays, "rather than six as indicated by Kazan's letter of January." (This letter from Kazan was not included in the file). MacEwen to Warner and Trilling, March 14, 1952, Steve Trilling Letters, Jack L. Warner Collection, Doheny Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles (Hereafter cited as Steve Trilling letters).

[3] Kazan to Trilling, May 31, 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers and Steve Trilling letters. Kazan wrote to Trilling that "Tennessee, for the first time, is really beginning to show a very eager interest in the project. Up to now, it's rather been something that he's been doing 'for me'."

[4] There seems to be some question as to who actually wrote the script. Kazan told Michel Ciment that he worked

"as a writer in disguise, behind the scenes," and in his autobiography Kazan espouses a similar claim. See Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, 75, and Kazan, *A Life*, 562. Yet, Gene D. Phillips' work suggests that Williams did all of the writing on the script, see Phillips, 87-92. Despite Phillips, the negotiations reflected in Warner's *Baby Doll* file clearly establish that Kazan and Williams worked together on this project.

[5] Phillips, 90.

[6] Ibid. For discussion of Vacarro's character, see 90-92.

[7] Elia Kazan to Dave Weisbart, June 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers. Dave Weisbart had been Kazan's film editor on *A Streetcar Named Desire*. He was sent clandestinely to New York by Warner Bros. to edit the controversial film at the Legion of Decency's request. Because Kazan knew his "decent, if weak" friend had been summoned to New York by Jack Warner, the director did not blame Weisbart for the problems over *Streetcar*. Moreover, they remained friends and worked closely on the *Baby Doll* project. See Kazan, *A Life*, 433.

[8] McDermid to Trilling, July 17, 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers.

[9] MacEwen to Warner and Trilling, March 14, 1952, Steve Trilling letters. Apparently the script vividly portrayed the seduction scene between Vacarro and Baby Doll because the Warner Code consultants warned that "any suggestion of sadism, etc., such as Vacarro's whip, should be de-emphasized -- and Baby Doll's bruises will need a little salve." McDermid to Williams and Kazan, approx. March 22, 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers and Steve Trilling letters.

[10] McDermid to Williams and Kazan, approx. March 22, 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers and Steve Trilling letters.

[11] Kazan to Trilling, May 31, 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers and Steve Trilling letters.

[12] McDermid to Trilling, July 17, 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers. In a note scrawled in the margins of McDermid's letter, Trilling wrote that the script could "not yet" be sent to the Breen Office, and assured his

colleague that the script would be sent to the PCA as "soon as have meeting with Kazan."

[13] Breen to Warner, August 1, 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers. Although Breen signed this correspondence, Vizzard actually wrote this impressive letter outlining the problems with the Kazan script. See McDermid to Trilling, August 6, 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers.

[14] Breen to Warner, August 1, 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers.

[15] McDermid to Trilling, August 6, 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers.

[16] Kazan to Trilling, May 31, 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers and Steve Trilling letters. During the McCarthy era the House Committee on Un-American Activities revealed Kazan's former Communist affiliation. Because he "named names" in his friendly testimony, Kazan, unlike many who did not cooperate, was able to continue his work. Those who did not comply with HUAC were blacklisted by the studios. On the plight and motives of witnesses before HUAC, see Victor Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Viking Press, 1980). For Kazan's testimony, see Eric Bentley, ed., *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts From the Hearings Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 482-495. Also, for a detailed discussion of Kazan and HUAC, see Roger Tailleur, "Kazan and the House Un-American Activities Committee," trans. Alvah Bessie, *Film Comment* 4 (Fall 1966): 43-59.

[17] Kazan to Trilling, May 31, 1952, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers and Steve Trilling letters. In this letter Kazan revealed that he wanted to take his time on the project because "it's too important for me," and "since we have a large interest in the profits of this venture we really don't want to start until the script is as good as it can be."

[18] Although this author did not have access to the original contract, it seems that when the dispute broke out in late August, both parties disagreed as to what exactly was agreed upon in this initial contract between Warner Bros. and Kazan. See William Fitelson to Harold S. Bareford, August 28, 1952; Bareford to Warner, September 3, 1952; Steve Trilling Memo, September 5, 1952; and Fitelson to Johnny Beck (of the William Morris Agency), September 15, 1952. All found in Steve Trilling letters.

19 Fitelson to Bareford, August 28, 1952, Steve Trilling letters. For Kazan's feelings, see Steve Trilling Memo, September 5, 1952, Steve Trilling letters.

20 Bareford to Warner, September 3, 1952, Steve Trilling letters.

21 R.J. Obringer (Warner Bros. legal advisor) to Warner, January 30, 1954, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers.

22 Kazan, *A Life*, 529.

23 *Variety*, 13 December 1954, 3.

24 Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan*, 120.

25 Kazan to Trilling, August 16, 1955, Steve Trilling letters.

26 McDermid to Kazan, September 16, 1955, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers.

27 Shurlock to Warner, October 24, 1955, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers. Kazan's rejection of McDermid's suggestions, while never specifically stated, is clearly defined by Shurlock's comments about the script sent to him on October 21, 1955. From his remarks, it is obvious that Kazan did not incorporate any of McDermid's proposals.

28 McDermid to Kazan, October 27, 1955, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers. Kazan had "stated categorically," in a conference with Shurlock and Vizzard, "that he would make it quite clear that there was no adulterous affair." See Shurlock to Warner, October 24, 1955, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers.

29 McDermid to Kazan, October 27, 1955, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers.

30 Ibid. Kazan had previously impressed the Code officials with his artistic integrity. In *Streetcar*, the rape had been handled so delicately that Breen requested no alterations. See Leff and Simmons, 172-177. More recently with *East of Eden*, Kazan fought for the right to portray the inside of a brothel. Although the PCA held firmly to the precedent that brothels were an absolute taboo, Kazan's portrayal of Kate's house was more realistic than any

previously accepted portrayal. See *East of Eden* file, Production Code Administration Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California; and *East of Eden* file, Warner Bros. Production Files, Special Collections, Doheny Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Also, see Jerold Simmons, "The Production Code and Precedent, or How Hollywood's Censors Sought to Eliminate Brothels and Prostitutes in *From Here to Eternity* and *East of Eden*," unpublished manuscript loaned to the author, April 1992.

31 Kazan to Warner, November 15, 1955, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers. Kazan itemized specific parts of the dialogue and some scenes that he would not edit because they clarified Archie's sex frustrations. He stated:

> I cannot eliminate Archie's going into the bathroom after his wife. . . . I cannot change the doctor scene. . . . I, above all, cannot eliminate the dialogue on page 77 starting with "How long did he have to wait?" etc . . . if I eliminate this passage or curtail it the audience won't have the vaguest idea what the hell the film is about.

32 Kazan to Warner, November 15, 1955, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers.

33 McDermid to Kazan, November 23, 1955, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers.

34 Milton Esterow, "*Baby Doll* in Dixie and Flatbush," *New York Times*, 26 February 1956, II, 5. For detailed description of both the Benoit and the New York locations, see "Production Notes on *Baby Doll*," *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers.

35 Kazan to Trilling, July 16, 1956, Steve Trilling letters.

36 Jack Vizzard, Memo for the Files, July 25, 1956, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers.

37 Kazan to Warner, July 25, 1956, *Baby Doll* file, Warner Bros. papers. In this light, Kazan requested from Warner a block long sign of Baby Doll, "that half-sleeping, day-dreaming, thumb-sucking, long-legged chick. . . ." Kazan commented that "it is hard enough to get them [the audience] into the bloody theatres" even with a "wild and strong and unusual" film. He argued that "pictures sort of slink in

now," but this sign "will be one big, bold, irresistible come-on."

[38] As quoted by Thomas M. Pryor, "How to Police the Movies is Under Debate Again," *New York Times*, 23 December 1956, IV, 8.

[39] The 1954 Code Revisions included: the elimination of the prohibitions against showing miscegenation and methods of smuggling; required that liquor and drinking be handled tastefully; and the branding of people or animals was no longer listed under "repellent subjects." Finally, "hell" and "damn" could now be used in moderation. See *Variety*, 2 February 1955, 10; and Jowett, *Film*, 420.

[40] Hollis Alpert, "Sexual Behavior in the American Movie," *The Saturday Review*, 23 June 1956, 9.

[41] "A Resume of a Detailed Memorandum to His Excellency Bishop Scully," author unknown, June 1956, Father John A. Devlin Collection, Legion of Decency file, Archdiocese of Los Angeles Archives, San Fernando Mission, Mission Hills, California (Hereafter cited as Father Devlin papers). Shurlock had met with Legion officials on May 22, 1956 to discuss potential changes to the Production Code. After their meeting with the Code director, Legion officials made note of his rather liberal approach to administering the Code.

[42] Other pictures that challenged Code strictures and increased the pressure for liberalization included *I Am a Camera*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Tea and Sympathy*, and *The Bad Seed*. For a detailed discussion of *I Am a Camera*, see Jerold Simmons, "The Woes of a 1950s Foreign Film Distributor: *I Am a Camera* and the Censors," unpublished manuscript loaned to the author, April 1992. Also, see Bosley Crowther, "The Anomaly of a Code: The Case of *I Am a Camera* Points a Problem for Screen Moralists," *New York Times*, 14 August 1955, II, 1; *New York Times*, 18 August 1955, 17; Bosley Crowther, "A Flexible Code?: Classification of Films Open to Discussion," *New York Times*, 28 August 1955, II, 1; and *Variety*, 19 October 1955, 7.

[43] The Board's denial forced a debate that suggested that because the Association's Board of Directors consisted mainly of the major movie companies, decisions rendered would not be fair to even the "outstanding independent" competitors, like United Artists. See Shurlock interview, 192-193.

[44] On Preminger's hopes and the movie's success, see *New York Times*, 7 December 1955, 48; and Bosley Crowther, "Changing the Script," *New York Times*, 16 December 1956, II, 3.

[45] Several taboos were eliminated, including the absolute prohibition against the handling of subjects having to do with narcotics, prostitution, abortion and kidnapping. Also, misceqenation could now be handled at the producer's discretion. Under the new Code derogatory racial terms were to be avoided and two unqualified taboos still existed: sex perversion and venereal disease, including social hygiene. For an itemized discussion of the particular changes, see Christopher North, "The New Production Code: Is Weaker Ideationally But Stronger Rhetorically," *Films in Review* 8 (January 1957), 20-25. Of the new Code, Johnston stated that it was "neither tighter nor looser than the old one," just more modern. He insisted that it still adhered to the idea of high moral standards and denounced movies that glorified "crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin." See *New York Times*, 12 December 1956, 51.

[46] The industry announced the New Code on December 11, 1956 and *Baby Doll* opened at the Victoria Theatre on December 18.

[47] "A Resume of a Detailed Memorandum to His Excellency Bishop Scully," June 1956, Father Devlin papers.

[48] "Minutes from Bishops' Meeting, Caldwell Hall, November 14, 1956, Father Devlin papers.

[49] For Shurlock's quotation, see Leff and Simmons, 220.

[50] For "realism" and "artistic integrity," see Mandel Herbstman, "*Baby Doll*: A *Film Daily* Review," *The Film Daily*, 5 December 1956, 6.

[51] See "The Production Code and *Baby Doll*," *America*, 29 December 1956, 367; Hift, "Review," 5 December 1956, 6; and "*Baby Doll*," *Catholic World*, January 1957, 302.

[52] Philip Hartung, "The Screen: Crazy, Man Crazy," *The Commonweal*, 28 December 1956, 335. Strictly negative reviews include: Bosley Crowther, "Screen: *Streetcar* on *Tobacco Road*: Williams-Kazan *Baby Doll* Is At Victoria," *New York Times*, 19 December 1956, L, 40; "Blunt and Banned," *Newsweek*, 17 December 1956, 106; "New Picture: *Baby Doll*,"

Time, 24 December 1956, 61; "*Baby Doll*," *Films in Review* 8 (January 1957): 32-33; and Janet Winn, "The Crass Menagerie," *The New Republic*, 21 January 1957, 21.

53 Harry Kurnitz, "Tennessee Williams' *Baby Doll*," *Holiday*, February 1957, 93.

54 *New York Times*, 12 December 1956, 51.

55 Fred Hift, "Legion & *Doll* Pose Code Dilemma; Positive Pic Biz Stand Is Asked," *Variety*, 5 December 1956, 86.

56 "Volunteer," *The New Republic*, 4. The article listed *The Moon is Blue*, *I Am a Camera* and *The Man with the Golden Arm* as those movies best representing the Code's and the PCA's weaknesses.

CHAPTER 4

BABY DOLL'S TRIUMPH OVER THE LEGION OF DECENCY

The Legion of Decency's stern response to *Baby Doll* represented the Catholic organization's increasing frustration over the rise of immoral movies. Reacting to the recent Code liberalizations and the Supreme Court's decisions limiting the authority of state and municipal censors, the Catholic hierarchy intensified its fight for film morality. As Code office rulings became more liberal a rift developed between the PCA and the Legion. The PCA and the Code came under attack by the Legion of Decency, and the once close working relationship maintained by Breen during his twenty year tenure disappeared. In May 1955, Father Thomas F. Little, the Legion's Executive Secretary, scored the Production Code for failing to "stem the increase in 'objectionable' films." He noted that since October 1954 "seventy-two of 196 Legion classified films have been objectionable in part."[1] He argued that these figures showed that Shurlock and his colleagues were no longer enforcing the industry's Code with sufficient vigor. An even more telling indication of this growing rift between the Legion and the Code was the fact that an increasing number of films carrying

the Code seal were initially condemned by the Legion, forcing the studios to re-edit the pictures to avoid the dreaded "C" rating.[2]

Many within the industry, outraged by the situation, railed against the Legion's "implied threat of economic losses."[3] Sarcastic comments abounded. One industry executive claimed, "if studios continue to listen to the Legion this way, we aren't going to have one code but two. It makes the industry's Code look pretty silly."[4] Another executive suggested that ". . . . we won't need a Code. We'll just submit our pictures to the Legion."[5] But in November 1955, when the Catholics assailed the industry again over the biggest increase yet of "B" rated films, the Hollywood studio heads and Eric Johnston remained silent.[6] Despite earlier signs that the industry would stand-up to the Legion, in late 1955 the latter appeared to have the upper hand.[7] The *Baby Doll* controversy brought this growing conflict to a head.

The Catholic "crusade" against *Baby Doll* officially began on November 27, 1956, when the Legion of Decency released this scathing condemnation of Kazan's first independent production:

> The subject matter of this film is morally repellent both in theme and treatment. It dwells almost without variation or relief upon carnal suggestiveness in action, dialogue and costuming. Its unmitigated emphasis on lust and the various scenes of cruelty are degrading and corruptive. As such it is grievously offensive to

> Christian and traditional standards of morality and decency.[8]

More importantly, the Legion also condemned the Production Code Administration:

> Although this film is an obvious violation of the spirit and purposes of the Motion Picture Code, it, nevertheless, bears a Seal of Approval of this Code Authority. The subject matter of the film indicates an open disregard of the Code by its administrators.[9]

The Legion's statement served as a war declaration targeting not just one film, not just one company, but an entire industry. In effect, it announced the Legion's intent to assume the primary burden of Code enforcement. As Jack Vizzard later recounted, "The Legion had thrown sham aside and had assumed a proprietary stance over the machinery of an American industrial entity."[10] The Legion's assertive posture was underlined by its unwillingness to consider any compromise on the matter of *Baby Doll*. Traditionally Legion officials made suggestions to studios, as they had done with *A Streetcar Named Desire* and more recent films, helping to bring them within the acceptable Catholic guidelines, but not with *Baby Doll*.[11] In fact, Father Little wrote to the *New York Times* emphasizing that contrary to Kazan's claims, the Legion had not requested changes in the film.[12] The Legion felt this film "to be of such a nature that neither deletions nor additions could salvage a basically bad theme."[13]

Although "painfully aware" that a "shoulder shrugging attitude" in response to the Legion's condemnation could

weaken the Code and strengthen the Legion, a *Variety* reporter noted that the Motion Picture Association in New York "could not bring itself to defend the actions of its own Code in public print."[14] Instead, the public information director for the Association issued a brief, non-committal statement: "The Production Code Administration obviously feels that *Baby Doll* meets the requirements of the Code or it would not have issued a seal to the film."[15] In other words, the Association leaders seemed to prefer to remain on the sidelines. Warners would have to do battle alone.[16]

Warner Bros. boldly defied the Legion's condemnation. Where studios usually kowtowed to the Catholics, this time one of Hollywood's major studios declared its willingness to handle a condemned picture. For Warners, *Baby Doll*'s receipt of "the customary Code seal of approval" was sufficient.[17] Since the *Streetcar* fiasco, the studio had done an about-face. Its new stance suggests that in adjusting to the rising competition from television and independent producers, Warner Bros. had ceased to fear the Legion's "C." In fact, Warner's executives felt such a rating could "stimulate attendance by rousing curiosity."[18] The success of *The Moon Is Blue* provided the impetus for Warner Bros.' bold step. Everyone would now have to wait and see if the Legion still packed the economic punch that could knock a movie out at the box office.

Like Warner Bros., Kazan hastily defended his first independent production. He stated:

> I made *Baby Doll* as I saw it. I did the best I could to get on film what I felt in the South. . . . I wasn't trying to be moral or immoral, only truthful. I did the best I could, and I like the film as is. I have no intention of being pressured. I cut my own films with the help of a good film editor of my own choosing.[19]

As for the Legion's judgement, Kazan insisted, "in our country all people finally will and should judge for themselves."[20] Kazan's position was as clear and as unyielding as the Legion's; that is, he would not be repressed by the Catholic strong-arm.

Undoubtedly Legion officials understood the threat posed to their organization by this controversy. Father William A. Scully, Bishop of Albany, Chairman of the Episcopal Committee on Motion Pictures and the Legion's Moderator, wrote to Catholic priests across the country issuing a call to arms. Catholic "protest and abstention from the picture," Scully wrote, "will seriously effect the box office and act as an effective voice in keeping back the flood of potentially immoral themes for . . . motion pictures." Yet his call also included a warning. "Should this picture have commercial success, it would strongly weaken the hand of the Legion in its negotiations with the major producing companies of this country."[21] Responding to his calls, Catholic leaders across the country searched for the best method to insure *Baby Doll*'s box office failure.

Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York, proved most vehement in his attack on *Baby Doll*. On his return from visiting troops in the Orient, Spellman expressed anguish at the news of this allegedly evil film and conveyed his despair from the pulpit in New York City's St. Patrick's Cathedral. Mounting the pulpit for the first time since February 1949 when he condemned the Communist jailing of Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty of Hungary, Spellman denounced *Baby Doll* as a "defiance of natural law." Significantly, because he had never before condemned a specific film from the pulpit (In 1951 he only wrote a letter condemning *The Miracle*.), Spellman's actions proved his belief that Kazan's film posed a dire threat both to the Legion of Decency and to American morality. His fierce words highlighted his sincerity. He found it "astonishing" and "deplorable" that this film had received a Code seal "under the so-called self-regulatory system" of the movie industry. "It is the moral and patriotic duty of every loyal citizen to defend America from . . . dangers which confront us at home." To add clout to the Legion's condemnation of the film, Spellman ordered all Catholics "to refrain from patronizing this film under pain of sin." Closing, he acknowledged that his zealous denunciation would provoke many people to see the film, but he roared, "If this be the case, it will be an indictment of those who defy God's law and contribute to corruption in America."[22]

Kazan replied to Cardinal Spellman's attack much as he had the Legion condemnation. Kazan defended the Code officials with his declaration that his film had been approved for a Code seal "by men of discretion and conscience." He also bragged that the film had been passed by the New York State Board of Censors. Questioning the Catholic Church's authority, Kazan finally reminded the cleric:

> in this country judgments on matters of thought and taste are not handed down ironclad from an unchallengeable authority. People see for themselves and finally judge for themselves. That's as it should be. It's our tradition and our practice. In the court of public opinion, I'll take my chances.[23]

Many people, clergy and laymen alike, rallied behind Cardinal Spellman. Following his lead, Catholics initiated various tactics to insure the film's failure. Foremost, Bishop Scully of Albany, who first recognized and warned Catholics of *Baby Doll*'s potential threat, banned Catholics in his diocese for six months from Albany's Strand Theater, which planned *Baby Doll*'s exhibition. In his call urging Catholics to reject "morally repellent" films and those theaters showing them, Scully encouraged other religious denominations to join the crusade.[24] Additionally, the Albany diocesan newspaper, *The Evangelist*, called the movie "moral contamination" that would "dirty you."[25] Three Connecticut prelates, in an unprecedented action, voiced a joint condemnation of *Baby Doll*. Archbishop Henry J. O'Brien of

Hartford, Bishop J. Shehan of Bridgeport and Bishop Bernard J. Flanagan of Norwich cautioned Catholics that seeing this film would be "a near occasion of sin."[26]

Laymen across the country enthusiastically joined this fight against *Baby Doll*. Joseph P. Kennedy, a prominent layman, banned the film from his circuit of twenty-three theaters in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. While Kennedy had not seen the film, he based his decision on a "very bad report" submitted by one of his company's reviewers.[27] Others took part in letter campaigns. Some utilized the "Committee of One" forms provided by some local archdiocesan councils, on which people could apprise theater owners of their strong disapproval of *Baby Doll*. The forms included comments like those of one San Antonio woman who told the Interstate Theaters that she disapproved of *Baby Doll* "simply because the Legion of Decency has condemned it."[28] Another warned the same theater, "God will punish you for it."[29] A follower of Cardinal Spellman promised that he would "not attend a Warner production for six months nor . . . attend a showing in any neighborhood theater that presents this film for six months."[30] A fellow New Yorker vowed a permanent boycott against all Warner Bros.' future pictures.[31]

In addition to these forms, other concerned citizens, especially members of Catholic organizations, swamped Warner Bros. and local theaters with letters of disapproval. The Corpus Christi Catholic War Veterans Post 173 told Warners

that if it persisted in releasing this film condemned by the Legion, we "will do all in [our] power" to assure a "financial fiasco for the company coffers and a grievous moral blow to Warner's reputation."[32] A woman from the Pittsburgh Diocesan Council of Women warned that releasing *Baby Doll* could "be financially dangerous." She also admitted she would use all of her resources "as a responsible member of the Legion of Decency to keep others from attending."[33] In Milwaukee, Wisconsin the Catholic War Veterans "promised: 1) to boycott the picture personally; 2) to persuade their families and friends to do likewise; [and] 3) to picket any showhouse that attempts to show the picture in the metropolitan area of Milwaukee."[34] In some cities organized campaigns were generated. For example, on *Baby Doll*'s opening day in Kansas City, one theater manager received a batch of 300 letters protesting the showing.[35] While these letter campaigns failed to prompt any theaters to cancel *Baby Doll*, telephone campaigns proved more successful. Four theaters in Philadelphia withdrew *Baby Doll* after being "swamped with telephone calls of protest" from concerned local Catholics.[36]

More aggressive protesters picketed theaters showing *Baby Doll*. However, one *Variety* article noted the rarity of this activity as compared to "the demonstrations against features previously 'C'd' by the Legion."[37] A more extreme form of protest was the bomb scare tactic. Three different

theaters exhibiting *Baby Doll* were threatened with phony bomb scares.[38]

In spite of these tactics, Kazan and Warner Bros. could take heart from the fact that religious leaders were far from unified in their opposition to *Baby Doll*. On the heels of Cardinal Spellman's statement, *Baby Doll* was approved for adults by Britain's Catholic Film Institute, the British equivalent to the Legion of Decency and likewise affiliated with the International Catholic Film Office. As director of the Film Institute, Reverend John A. Burke saw "no reason why adult Catholics should not see *Baby Doll*." In his opinion, Kazan's film was "a brilliant piece of work on a decadent subject."[39] Burke diplomatically stated that it would be "quite improper of us to give any comment on instructions given in New York by Francis Cardinal Spellman."[40] Yet the implications of his statement were clear. Devout Catholics could differ in their assessments of the moral dangers in *Baby Doll*. Following the British, the French and Italian Catholic movie rating organizations also classified *Baby Doll* for adults only.[41] This discord between Catholics over *Baby Doll* provoked a tongue-in-cheek letter from the editor of *Variety* to Pope Pius XII humbly requesting clarification on the differing opinions between the various review boards.[42] Furthermore, because the dissension over *Baby Doll* illuminated the different Catholic standards applied throughout the world, this issue became a major topic of

discussion at the World Congress of Catholic Motion Pictures held during the second week of January 1957 in Havana, Cuba.[43]

Confusion caused by the conflicting Catholic opinions spread when several high ranking prelates of other religious affiliations publicly opposed Cardinal Spellman. The Reverend Dr. William F. Rosenblum, a New York Rabbi, believed that Spellman had overstepped his bounds. While Rosenblum agreed that Spellman had every right to "advise his people," he professed that, "there is a great deal wrong with attempts . . . to extend the censorial dictum to the community as a whole."[44] Just one day later, Dean James A. Pike of the Protestant Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine (New York's Episcopal Headquarters) likewise criticized Spellman for his attempt to impose a minority group's views on the whole community. Pike commended Kazan for his honest description of sensuality and decadence. In contrast to Spellman, Pike insisted that although "many adults are ill-equipped to see this picture. . . . it is one of the privileges of adulthood in a free country to expose oneself to picturizations of life." From such opportunities, the church should not shelter its followers, but rather "provide them with the right cannons of interpretation." Like Kazan, Pike staunchly disagreed with Spellman's declaration that *Baby Doll* was unpatriotic. To him the Cardinal's actions seemed far more unpatriotic than the picture. "The true patriot," Pike declared, "defends freedom against

governmental authority and against majority or minority pressure groups, against volunteers in the cause of thought control."[45] As Jew and Protestant, Reverend Rosenblum and Dean Pike held no moral persuasion over Roman Catholics. Their views, however, dramatized the Legion's and its Catholic adherents' suffocative attitudes and measures.

Only *Baby Doll*'s box office success could verify that the Catholic Church and the Legion of Decency had in fact lost ground in the battle for control of the screen. Because of the Legion condemnation, some exhibitors waited and watched closely the returns from the opening run. Others, however, wanted the film immediately, and by early December Warner Bros. reported "some 100 key dates" had already been set for the film.[46] Three major exhibitors on the West Coast, Fox West Coast, Stanley Warner, and Paramount Theatres, ignored the Legion condemnation and booked the film.[47] Even after the rancor intensified, *Baby Doll*'s opening day gross at New York City's Victoria Theatre on December 18 was the "biggest" in five years, and its first week's gross exceeded $51,000. Warner officials also reported "high grosses" in other cities.[48] This success gave the "go-ahead-signal" to many of the leery exhibitors. By December 28, *Baby Doll* had been booked in 1,118 U.S. cities, and Warner executives expected strong box office returns from European play dates.[49] On May 24, 1957, approximately six months after *Baby Doll*'s premier, Kazan admitted that Catholic opposition to the film

reduced the number of national bookings. Still, by this date his first independent production had grossed $3,000,000 and was expected to gross nearly $5,000,000 in its first run.[50] The film had overcome the Legion condemnation.

Many people recognized that the Legion's "C" and all of the hoopla surrounding the film only provided an abundance of free advertisement for *Baby Doll*, thereby improving its box office appeal. One columnist noted that "in most cases" the action taken by Catholic leaders provided the studio with "promotional publicity that dollars could not buy."[51] Another observed that, while *Baby Doll* was a "strong money-maker" in most locations, the film actually did better in "areas where it was given the pulpit treatment."[52] Extreme reactions, like Cardinal Spellman's and Bishop Scully's, made headlines and drew people toward controversial films. For example, in a *Baby Doll* survey conducted by *Life Magazine*, a Brooklyn laborer conveyed his disappointment with the picture: "nothing happens, and I thought this would be really something to see after all the stuff I read in the papers."[53] Some prelates understood the "maxim that a scream from the pulpit is money in the box office," and acted accordingly.[54] No less anti-*Baby Doll* than Spellman or Scully, moderate clergymen and laymen seemed to better understand the general public. Thus, they did not make the "mistake of making headlines."[55]

For the Archbishops of San Antonio and Los Angeles, a simple reminder about the Legion pledge quietly persuaded their flocks against *Baby Doll*.[56] In Boston, Archbishop Richard Cushing insisted, "To be religious does not mean to be militant. . . . We must be careful not to allow our loyalty to our faith to degenerate into unreasonable intolerance."[57] Although not referring specifically to the crusade against *Baby Doll*, when faced with Kazan's film, Cushing's attitude remained the same. Unlike many other East Coast prelates, Cushing issued no protest against *Baby Doll* when it came to Boston theaters. Archbishop William O. Brady of St. Paul, Minnesota accentuated the positive. He advised Catholics in his archdiocese, to save their money for "some real good show," instead of *Baby Doll*.[58] The tactics of the moderates more successfully upheld the Legion's condemnation than those of the radicals. *Variety* noticed *Baby Doll* had "heftier" returns in New York and Baltimore where the canons were heard from than in Boston and Washington D.C., "where there was no ecclesiastical fingerpointing."[59]

As it had illuminated and widened the rift between the PCA and the Legion, *Baby Doll* and its success brought to light a growing division among American Catholics over film censorship. Many Catholics found the entire *Baby Doll* affair embarrassing. To them, the rigidity of the Legion and the pronouncements of Spellman seemed inappropriate in a pluralistic democracy. Jack Vizzard took up their cause (and

the PCA's) on his return from Havana, Cuba where he had attended the International Catholic film conference. He informed Legion officials that other representatives at the meeting deemed the Legion "too legalistic and negative." Furthermore, Vizzard "emphasized that the reported large earnings of *Baby Doll* would stimulate similar productions since it [indicated] the failure of the Legion of Decency and the campaign conducted in some cities," especially Baltimore. For Vizzard, *Baby Doll* reflected the Legion's declining influence, "even among Catholics," and to counteract this trend the PCA official recommended "a change in the title and methods of classification."[60]

Legion officials initially doubted the reported earnings of *Baby Doll* and showed no signs of changing their rigid methods.[61] However, within a year after *Baby Doll*'s condemnation, Bishop Scully announced a new system of film classification. The "B" and "C" ratings were unaltered, but the "A" classification was divided into three sections. It now included: A-1 - morally Unobjectionable for General Patronage; A-2 - Morally Unobjectionable for Adults and Adolescents; and A-3 - Morally Unobjectionable for Adults. According to the Legion, these changes would allow it to better accommodate adults and "modern adolescents."[62] Then on December 15, 1957, the Legion redefined its mission according to Pope Pius XII's call for emphasis on morally uplifting films rather than the objectionable.[63] Quoting the *Miranda*

Prorsus, a papal encyclical, of September 8, 1957, the Legion described itself as "patron and fostermother of the arts." As such, the organization's new goal was "to encourage and support everything which truly concerns a fuller enrichment of the mind."[64]

Having pulled out all the stops, the Catholic Church and the Legion of Decency still could not block *Baby Doll*'s financial success. The changes since 1948 that had so drastically altered the motion picture industry, as well as the regulation of movies, finally caught up with the Legion. In this new era, not even the Legion could stem the blossoming independents. Elia Kazan's daring first independent production, *Baby Doll*, proved that the Legion's posturing as a major economic threat had lost effectiveness. Unveiling this truth, *Baby Doll* forced the Legion of Decency's move towards modernization.

NOTES

[1] *New York Times*, 13 May 1955, 20.

[2] In May 1955, *Variety* reported those pictures which had been re-cut: *Battlecry*, *Three for the Show*, *Kiss Me Deadly* and *The Prodigal*. See *Variety*, 11 May 1955, 1; and Vizzard, 190-203.

[3] Fred Hift, "Studios Double-Talk Censorship Issue," *Variety*, 6 July 1955, 13.

[4] *Variety*, 11 May 1955, 1, 22.

[5] Hift, "Double-talk," 13.

[6] See *New York Times*, 23 November, 1955, 16; and Thomas M. Pryor, "Schary Upholds Rights of Movies," *New York Times*, 24 November 1955, 41. In their assault upon the film industry, Legion officials indicated that there were "more objectionable films produced last year (1955) than at any time in the 20 year history of the National Legion of Decency." See Father Little to Reverend and dear Pastor (probably sent to all archdioceses in the United States), January 16, 1956, Father Devlin papers. As reported by the *New York Times*, the Legion declared that thirty per cent of the films were classified "A-1," thirty-five per cent were classified "A-II," and about 33 per cent were classified in the "B" category; the latter, up eleven percent from 1954.

[7] In June 1955 Eric Johnston responded to Legion pressure quite assertively. He stated that the movie industry would not make "any concessions to anybody or anything." This attitude had faded by the end of that same year. See *Variety*, 25 May 1955, 25; and "Catholics and the Movies," *The Commonweal*, 3 June 1955, 219-220.

[8] Legion of Decency, Press Release, November 27, 1956, Warner Bros. papers.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Vizzard, 209.

[11] As *Variety* noted, the condemnation of *Baby Doll* represented the "first instance in many years of an important and well-exploited film, released by a major company, to draw outright Legion condemnation." While Howard Hughes' *Son of Sinbad* had recently drawn a "C" rating, the article continued, it was a production, unlike *Baby Doll*, lacking "inherent artistic value." Some important major productions had previously received both the Code seal and the Legion "C," but earned different classifications after the appropriate cuts were made. See *Variety*, 21 November 1956, 3, 11; and also, *New York Times*, 28 November 1956, 32. In this latter article the Reverend Thomas F. Little admitted that important films had been given both the Code seal and the Legion "C." These included *Forever Amber* and *Black Narcissus*, but after being re-cut, both films earned a different Legion rating.

[12] *New York Times*, 30 December 1956, II, 5.

[13] Letter from Bishop William A. Scully to Your Excellency, November 27, 1956, Father Devlin papers. This is the letter Reverend Scully sent to Catholic priests across the country warning them about *Baby Doll*.

[14] Hift, "Code Dilemma," 86.

[15] "Staff Information: Statements Regarding Baby Doll," November 28, 1956, Warner Bros. papers.

[16] Hift, "Code Dilemma," 86.

[17] Warner Bros. Press Release, November 27, 1956, Warner Bros. papers.

[18] For quotation, see *Variety*, 21 November 1956, 3. Bishop Scully also espoused similar claims in his letter sent to priests around the country. See Scully to Your Excellency, November 27, 1956, Father Devlin papers.

[19] "Staff Information: Statements Regarding *Baby Doll*," November 28, 1956, Warner Bros. papers.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Scully to Your Excellency, November 27, 1956, Father Devlin papers. Also, see *Variety*, 26 December 1956, 3.

22 As quoted in the *New York Times*, 17 December 1956, 28.

23 Ibid.

24 *New York Times*, 30 December 1956, 24.

25 *The Evangelist* editorial as quoted by Jay Emanuel, "*Baby Doll* . . . and Its Reception," *Motion Picture Exhibitor* 57 (January 2, 1957). Also, see *Variety*, 26 December 1956, 3.

26 *Variety*, 2 January 1957, 5, 13.

27 For discussions on Mr. Kennedy, see *New York Times*, 27 December 1956; and *Variety*, 2 January 1957, 5, 13.

28 Statement by Esther A.S. Vilagi, San Antonio, Texas, January 20, 1957, Warner Bros. papers. These "Committee of One" forms were received from all over the United States. While this author did not examine all of them, my records indicate that these letters of disapproval came from at least fourteen states.

29 Statement by Mrs. Francis Henk, San Antonio, Texas, January 18, 1957, Warner Bros. papers.

30 Statement by Mr. Marion O. Schoonover, New York, New York, April 18, 1957, Warner Bros. papers.

31 Statement by Marguerite Trifari, The Bronx, New York, December 18, 1956, Warner Bros. papers.

32 Commander Jerry Buckley, Corpus Christi Catholic War Veterans Post 173, Corpus Christi, Texas, to Warner Bros., December 4, 1956, Warner Bros. papers.

33 Mrs. Mary Jo Lilly, Chairman, Pittsburgh Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Warner Bros., December 13, 1956, Warner Bros. papers.

34 Vice Commander Gerald J. Dugan, Catholic War Veterans, Our Lady of Fatima Post, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to Warner Bros., December 21, 1956, Warner Bros. papers.

35 *Variety*, 16 January 1957, 15. Instead of sending batches of letters, some signed petitions against *Baby Doll*.

One from Sun Valley, California had twenty-four signatures, while another from St. Mary School in Phoenix, Arizona had 152 signatures. Both found in Warner Bros. papers.

36 *New York Times*, 10 March 1957, 76.

37 For quotation, see Gene Arneel, "Recent Omens Hint Catholics Will Tread More Softly on Censorship," *Variety*, 23 January 1957, 6. While many letter writers threatened to picket theaters showing *Baby Doll*, only one such incident was reported. A small group of men and women, identified at first as a "group of Raleigh citizens," picketed in Raleigh, North Carolina. Eventually, however, several admitted their membership in the Knights of Columbus and other Catholic organizations. See *Variety*, 16 January 1957, 15.

38 Bomb scares were reported in theaters in Manchester, New Hampshire and Hartford, Connecticut on December 27, 1956 and December 30, 1956, respectively. See *Variety*, 2 January 1957, 13. A third bomb scare was reported in New Haven, Connecticut early in January. See *Variety*, 9 January 1957, 8.

39 For his comments on Cardinal Spellman and *Baby Doll*, see *New York Times*, 21 December 1956, 18.

40 Ibid.

41 For the French decision, see *New York Times*, 7 January 1957, 29; and for that of the Italians, see *Variety*, 9 January 1957, 3. While the Italian Catholic rating system rated *Baby Doll* for adults only, many U.S. Italian-Americans felt Kazan's film slandered them. In the New York Legislature two representatives rebuked the producers and recommended that the Board of Regents exercise "greater care and supervision before approving similar pictures." The assemblymen also castigated the film for its lack of moral decency, but neither revealed his religious preference. *Variety* reported that this episode "was believed to be the first time such a two-pronged attack, racial and moral, had been delivered in a resolution presented for adoption by the Legislature." See *Variety*, 13 February 1957, 22. Similarly, in a letter to Warner Bros., the members of the Brooklyn Italian Historical Society of America expressed their outrage at the film's anti-Italian-American attitude. The letter continued that Italian-Americans planned a local and national boycott, and more importantly, the letter informed Warner Bros. that this group of Americans had begun a "whispering campaign . . . for the purpose of boycotting future Warner Bros. pictures." See Mary A. George, Anti-Discrimination

Committee, Italian Historical Society of America, to Warner Bros., February 26, 1957, Warner Bros. papers.

42 Joe Schoenfeld, Editor of *Variety*, Hollywood, California to His Holiness Pope Pius XII, January 9, 1957, Father Devlin papers. Upon making "discreet inquiries about this gentleman," Legion officials discovered that Mr. Schoenfeld was "not personally held in high regard," so his inquiries were not forwarded to the Pope. Instead, his letter was sent to either local authorities in Los Angeles or to Timothy Manning, Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles and a member of the Bishops' Committee on Motion Pictures. See Timothy Manning to His Excellency Most Reverend Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, D.D. of the Apostolic Delegation, Washington D.C., February 21, 1957, Father Devlin papers.

43 *Variety*, 26 December 1956, 3, 45.

44 As quoted in *New York Times*, 23 December 1956, 17.

45 As quoted in *New York Times*, 24 December 1956, 14.

46 *Variety*, 5 December 1956, 27.

47 *Variety*, 12 December 1956, 13.

48 For opening day figures, see "Should It Be Suppressed?," *Newsweek*, 31 December 1956, 59; and for its first week's gross at the Victoria Theatre, and in other cities, see *New York Times*, 28 December 1956, 17.

49 *New York Times*, 28 December 1956, 17.

50 *New York Times*, 25 May 1957, 25.

51 Emanuel, first page.

52 For quotation, see Arneel, 6.

53 "The Bitter Dispute Over *Baby Doll*," *Life Magazine*, 7 January 1957, 65.

54 Emanuel as quoting Reverend John Courtney Murray, S.J., from an article in *Books on Trial*. The Reverend wrote:

> To illustrate the maxim that a scream from the pulpit is money in the boxoffice a veteran showman told me: "Years ago showmen and exploitation agents could say anything.

> Today the Code and Better Business Bureaus limit how far they can go in their ads. To say a picture is 'spicy!' 'racy!' or 'Adults Only!' doesn't mean much today. The public's wise. Only the dumber ones and the kids fall for that sucker stuff. But if they can get some outside organization to say the same thing about a picture, then people will believe it."

55 Ibid.

56 For the similar approaches of the Archbishops of San Antonio and Los Angeles, see *Variety*, 16 January 1957, 15; and James Francis Cardinal McIntyre, Archbishop of Los Angeles to Reverend and dear Father, December 20, 1956, Father Devlin papers.

57 As taken from Archbishop Cushing's speech of December 2, 1956, as presented by Emanuel, second page.

58 *Variety*, 16 January 1957, 7.

59 Arneel, 6.

60 Memorandum from James A. McIntyre, Archbishop of Los Angeles, February 14, 1957, Father Devlin papers. In this memorandum the Archbishop outlined his meeting with Vizzard who met with him earlier that day.

61 Ibid.

62 John Alan Sargent, "Self-Regulation: The Motion Picture Production Code, 1930-1961" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1963), 173. For Legion ideas as to how these new classifications should be explained to the faithful, see National Legion of Decency Sermon Outline (Suggested Thoughts for Priests), December 15, 1957, 6, Father Devlin papers.

63 Arneel, 1. This new positive approach was discussed in a letter sent in the name of Pope Pius XÎI to the International Film Office in Havana.

64 These ideas taken from the Pope's *Miranda Prorsus* were espoused in the Sermon Outline for December 15, 1957. See Sermon Outline, December 15, 1957, 3, Father Devlin papers.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Since its inception the PCA had been shrouded in controversy. Rarely could those within and those close to the industry ever agree that self-regulation worked. Although Breen had for twenty years smoothly operated the PCA and effectively administered the Code, it soon became evident after his retirement that the industry's Code system was doomed. By 1954 changes had diminished the PCA's authority over film makers. Anti-trust litigation had freed the theaters from studio control. With their new freedom exhibitors had insured the success of sealless films like *The Moon Is Blue* and *The Man with the Golden Arm*. For many theaters the Code seal meant little; for others, its absence could mean a box office smash. The Supreme Court decisions since 1952 had hamstrung the state censors, so film makers no longer needed the PCA's protection from these nearly extinct agencies. Even a daring film like *Baby Doll* had very little trouble with state and local censorship boards.[1] Also, to draw audiences away from their television sets, the increasing number of independent film makers searched for provocative material. In so doing the independents took full

advantage of the weakening of censorial restrictions, which resulted in the increase of adult films that tainted the PCA's reputation and outraged the Legion of Decency. As a result, the early 1950s were marred by increasing controversy between film makers and the PCA, and between the latter and the Legion of Decency. Under the more liberal administration of Geoffrey Shurlock, clashes between the PCA and the Legion became more frequent, and more intense. Indeed, by late 1955 the Legion's leadership seemed convinced that their agency was the only remaining barrier to immoral pictures in America. *Baby Doll* represents the last great fray between these two agencies. And *Baby Doll*'s success served notice to both that they must move toward modernization and liberalization.

Baby Doll hit the PCA at a critical time. Opening just one week after the announcement of the major Code revisions in 1956, many "industry-watchers" questioned *Baby Doll*'s influence on this new document. Because it was approved under the old Code, others expressed amazement that it carried a seal. To all, *Baby Doll* signified that Shurlock and his colleagues were applying the Code more loosely. Conservatives, especially Legion officials, bewailed that *Baby Doll* assaulted "Christian and traditional standards of morality and decency."[2] For Hollywood liberals, films like *Baby Doll* suggested the need for a rating system. Under a classification system, like Great Britain's or Germany's,

both of which specified movies for adults, children and general patronage, "certain subjects now approached gingerly could be dramatized more realistically."[3] A debate ensued. Independent film makers, like Kazan, favored some films being rated for adults only. A rating system, Kazan believed, would allow for more truthfulness in films because Hollywood could portray life other than "politely."[4] The Motion Picture Association and Eric Johnston, however, continued to resist classification. In Johnston's opinion, classifying films could not work in the United States because there were no means of implementation or enforcement.[5] Concurring with Johnston, some exhibitors recognized that a rating system "would be merely voluntary and . . . would serve to attract the very crowd it means to exclude."[6] While most exhibitors agreed with Johnston, they were motivated by other factors, primarily financial concerns. They believed that Hollywood could not "afford to aim its output at any one audience group and that the loss of the juve[nile] patrons would be keenly felt."[7] No changes were made within the M.P.A.A. as a result of this debate, but *Baby Doll* convinced some cities and local theaters to label the film for "adults only."[8] While not widespread, these actions hinted at times to come; that is, the classification system adopted by the M.P.A.A. in 1968. As harbinger to the "*Lolita* (or the nymphet) Syndrome," *Baby Doll* set the fires of change burning under the PCA.[9]

For the Legion of Decency, *Baby Doll* represented the last large-scale attempt to browbeat the motion picture industry into conformity with the threat of economic losses. The new classification system adopted by the Legion in 1957 allowed for increasingly provocative material to pass Legion scrutiny.[10] By 1958 liberal Jesuits within the organization, lead by Father Patrick Sullivan, pushed the Legion further toward liberalization.[11] As assistant executive secretary of the Legion, Father Sullivan disagreed that "the Catholic conscience" should be used "to control the output of Hollywood."[12] This movement gained steam throughout the late 1950s and by November 1960, the Legion of Decency called for "self-imposed classification of films by the . . . motion picture industry."[13] Also, in an effort to divorce itself from the "excessively negative" tone of the original pledge, the Legion revised its annual oath. It stated:

> I promise to promote by word and deed what is morally and artistically good in motion picture entertainment. I promise to discourage indecent, immoral and unwholesome motion pictures, especially by my good example and always in a responsible and civic-minded manner.[14]

Since its disastrous campaign against *Baby Doll* in 1956, the Legion of Decency had done an about-face.

Baby Doll's success verified the power of the "Young Turks." Having overcome the usual censorship obstacles confronting the early independent directors, Elia Kazan's first independent production marked the end of Hollywood's innocence. *Baby Doll* was an important motion picture for

several reasons: it revealed the ever-increasing strength of the independent producer/director; it unveiled Kazan's determination, as one of the "Young Turks," to force the system to liberalize in order to meet the challenge of television; it showed the PCA's recognition of the need to modernize; it illuminated the growing rift between the PCA and the Legion of Decency; it proved the threat of economic losses imposed by the Legion upon the film industry was false; it verified the increasing insignificance of the state and local censor boards since the *Miracle* decision of 1952; and it revealed a general trend toward liberalization within the movie industry after 1956 and within the Legion of Decency after 1957.

Clearly, *Baby Doll* represents the crossroad at which the two significant movie monitoring agencies, the PCA and the Legion of Decency, decisively changed directions. In his doctoral dissertation, John Sargent discussed the adult era of films, which he suggested began in 1956 and was still in progress at the time he completed his dissertation in 1961. It is no surprise that Elia Kazan's *Baby Doll* came within the first year of this era. Kazan's film embodied the spirit and the audacity of the adult film era. A box office success, Kazan's daring production forewarned PCA and Legion officials of the treacherous waters that lay ahead. As such, the controversy over *Baby Doll* symbolized the PCA's and the Legion of Decency's "last stand" under the old rules and

shaped the future of American motion pictures.

NOTES

[1] *Baby Doll* was approved without any eliminations by the four remaining state censor boards in New York, Kansas, Maryland and Virginia. Several city censor boards, however, refused the film's exhibition until the proper cuts were made. These cities included Atlanta, Nashville, Memphis, Chicago and Providence, Rhode Island. With the first three censors, Warner Bros. representatives consulted at length in order to guarantee *Baby Doll*'s exhibition. All three agreed to "four cuts totaling about five minutes running time." See W.O. Williamson, Jr., Southern Sales Manager, Warner Bros. to Mayor Allen C. Thompson of Jackson, Mississippi, May 8, 1957, Warner Bros. papers. In Chicago, the Police Commissioner advised Warner Bros. executives that *Baby Doll* would be rated for "adult showing," but only after six cuts were made. See Albert S. Howson, Director, Warner Bros. Picture Distributing Corporation to Mr. Timothy J. O'Connor, Police Commissioner of Chicago, Illinois, November 1, 1956, Warner Bros. papers; also, see "Inter-Office Communication: *Baby Doll*," from Howson, November 12, 1956, Warner Bros. papers. Finally, in Providence the police License Investigation Squad suggested several deletions in the film before an exhibition license could be awarded. Although the contract with Warner Bros. prohibited deletions, the Providence Majestic Theatre cooperated with the local censors and showed the cut version. See *New York Times*, 5 January 1957, 11; and *New York Times*, 6 January 1957, 86.

[2] Scully to Your Excellency, November 27, 1956, Father Devlin papers.

[3] As quoting Thomas M. Pryor from his article "How to Police," IV, 8.

[4] For Kazan's views, see "Bitter Dispute," *Life Magazine*, 64.

[5] See Philip K. Scheuer, "*Baby Doll* Raises Issue of Theater Rating System," *Los Angeles Times*, V, page number unknown, Kazan file.

[6] *Variety*, 2 January 1957, 13.

[7] Ibid.

[8] For discussion of Chicago's and the Providence theater's decision to label the film for "adults only," see note 1. In addition to these cases, the Wiltern Theatre in Hollywood also displayed a sign for *Baby Doll*'s exhibition which read, "Children Will Be Admitted With Adults Only." See Scheuer, "Rating System," Kazan file.

[9] *Lolita* was based on the novel by Vladimir Nabokov, who also wrote the screenplay for the film. Succinctly, *Lolita* is the story of an older man (Professor Humbert) and his obsession with "near-pubescent girls." Humbert falls for Lolita, the young teen, who eventually seduces him. Finally, Lolita meets and falls in love with Clare Quilty, but insanely jealous, Humbert murders the young girl's new husband.

Before negotiations with the PCA began, the producers of *Lolita*, Stanley Kubrick and James B. Harris, assured Shurlock "that they would treat the sexual relationship inoffensively . . . and draw innocent humor from the conflict between a mature man and a gum-snapping adolescent. They promised Shurlock that they would make *Lolita*, not a sequel to *Baby Doll*." As quoting Leff and Simmons, 221. For a detailed discussion about *Lolita*, see Leff and Simmons, 214-240.

[10] A table from John Sargent's dissertation provides an excellent summation of the controversial films from 1956 to 1961. In 1958, the Legion gave *Anatomy of a Murder* its "Special Classification" rating because the film dealt with rape. A year later *Suddenly Last Summer* received the same classification because its story involved cannibalism and homosexuality. Then in 1960, the Legion again gave its "Special Classification" to *Girl of the Night* for its portrayal of adultery and prostitution. Aside from these "Special Classifications," after 1957 films with highly controversial themes and story lines, like premarital sex relations, adultery, rape, prostitution, and free love were not condemned by the Legion, but were given "B" ratings. See Sargent, 199, 212-213.

[11] The influence of these liberal Jesuits on the Legion of Decency can be surmised from various letters from Martin Quigley to assorted prelates. On January 21, 1958, Quigley wrote to Bishop Scully that Father Sullivan had "in his short period of contact with the Legion work succeeded in imposing a new and different approach to and concept of the Legion's function." See Quigley to Scully, January 21, 1958,

Father Devlin papers. Three years later, Quigley wrote to Reverend James A. McNulty, Bishop of Paterson, New Jersey, making similar claims. He reminded the cleric of his

> repeated assertions . . . that policies and procedures introduced in the operation of the National Legion of Decency since 1957 constituted measures likely to lead to a betrayal of the trust of the Catholic people and the destruction of the prestige, influence and service of that agency.

He continued, "This Jesuit clique which has dominated the conduct of the Legion office since 1957 is opposed to the condemnation of any motion picture--or any artifact--by a Catholic agency in this 'pluralistic society'." Quigley insisted that by not using the condemned rating the Legion of Decency had "senselessly laid away its most potent instrument" for its fight against immoral motion pictures. See Quigley to McNulty, May 5, 1961, Father Devlin papers.

[12] As taken from Leff and Simmons, 233.

[13] Quoting the letter from the Episcopal Committee for Motion Pictures, Radio and Television to Your Excellency (sent to archdioceses throughout the United States), November 23, 1960, Father Devlin papers. Apparently the Committee had decided on this plan of action almost two weeks earlier. See "Press Release of the Episcopal Committee for Motion Pictures, Radio and Television, Father Devlin papers. This document reveals that in its meeting on November 15, 1960, the Episcopal Committee had agreed that a "system of self-classification of films by the Industry cannot be lightly disregarded."

[14] *New York Times*, 26 November 1960, 41.

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Baby Doll (Newtown Productions/Warner Bros., 1956; 114 min.)

Producer . . . . . Elia Kazan for Warner Bros.

Director . . . . . .Elia Kazan

Screenplay . . .Tennessee Williams; based on his short stories "27 Wagons Full of Cotton" and The Long Stay Cut Short" ("The Unsatisfactory Supper")

Cinematography . . . . . Boris Kaufman

Editing . . . . . Gene Milford

Music . . . . . Kenyon Hopkins

Baby Doll . . . . . .Carroll Baker

Archie Lee Meighan . . . . . Karl Malden

Silva Vacarro . . . . . .Eli Wallach

Aunt Rose Comfort . . . . . .Mildred Dunnock