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Memories of the Blacklist Era

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Abstract:

*In the late 1940s and 1950s, the careers of more than three hundred writers and artists in Hollywood were destroyed by one of America's most insidious crusades. During the Blacklist Era, the HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee) relentlessly pursued members of the Communist Party, ex-Communists, or even acquaintances of Communists in the entertainment industry, and exerted pressure on the Hollywood studio bosses to ban them from the production process. Given the context of virulent anti-Semitism, an analysis of the blacklist experience must encompass the overrepresentation of Jewish intellectuals and artists in the blacklisted community. Though the blacklist was motivated by a wider tradition of American anticommunism, it gained traction in Hollywood amidst the conflict between right-wing Jewish studio executives and their Communist employees, many of whom were Jewish. This tension is linked to the politically charged aesthetic of film noir, spearheaded by Jewish directors who turned the American dream into an American nightmare. In this essay, I will examine the innovative Freudian-Marxist film noir, *The Locket* (1946), authored by Norma Barzman, one of the few blacklisted female screenwriters. A Jewish-American, New York-born Communist, Barzman offers a unique perspective on the blacklist, as she was denied opportunities not only because she was a Communist, but also because she was a woman. How does her work tie into the larger experience of Jewish Americans in Hollywood? How does it tie into the experience of American Communists in the mid-20th century?*

Given how steadfastly America fought fascism in World War II, it's reasonable to assume that America would counter, with equal vigor, fascist tendencies in its own government. But paranoia isn't rational. Desperately struggling to preserve its newfound status as the preeminent global superpower and the ideal republic, America developed a politics of acute anxiety during the early Cold War years. Directed towards those who countered the agenda of Senator Joe McCarthy during his 1947-1957 incumbency and his sympathetic partisans of the American Right, this anxiety found expression in a government-sanctioned crusade. And, following the pattern of centuries of anti-Semitism, the Jewish population took the hardest blow.

The generation of Jewish Americans, born around World War I and finding maturity in the Depression, were native to a background of severe political turmoil. Conditioned by the apparent bankruptcy of American capitalism of the Great Depression, the international struggle against fascism, and the battlefields of World War II, intellectuals of this generation spoke with a heavy political accent. The Jewish voice found itself at a moment of exigency as the ineffable cruelty of the Holocaust became clear with the defeat of Nazi Germany. Emerging from the tumult of these early decades of the 20th century, painfully accentuated by a 2000-year-long history of violent persecution and recurrent marginalization, Jewish intellectuals entered the contemporary moment charged with an irrepressible radicalism and abundant creativity.

As vocal advocates for radical change, many Jewish Americans turned toward ideologies of the Left, a large number of them becoming Communists during the 1930s and onward. But the earlier roots of Jewish leftism are found in the Russian Jewish immigrant community, where they maintained their Russian-Socialist affiliations in New York City, pioneering unionization movements and the American Socialist Party. For the Russian Jewish immigrants, an interest in

Socialist politics was as natural as the East Coast Irish immigrants' interest in Irish nationalism. But, in the 1920s, the anti-Semitic stereotype of the "Jewish-Bolshevik" was deployed against the Jewish population by anti-Communists and anti-Semites alike, as general "proof" of their alleged un-Americanism.¹ So, in the 1950s, as America fought a silent battle for global supremacy against the Communist USSR, the Communist commitments of these Jewish American citizens came into serious conflict with America's Cold War agenda.

At this critical juncture in American history, cinema was among the most influential and pervasive forms of media, and television was about to take off. Acutely sensitive to threats this form of media might pose to right-wing values, Republican politicians and activists used Congressional investigations to probe allegedly left-wing (and Jewish) influences in Hollywood in the 1930s. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) revived these investigations after the war, with particular attention to the alleged threat presented by members of the film industry who had been active Communists during the 1930s. The HUAC's targets, many of whom were Jewish writers and artists from New York City, represented a grave threat to their vision of a happy, prosperous, white picket fence, capitalist America. As the predominantly Jewish Hollywood studio chiefs sought to preempt interference with their industry by Congress and investigations by federal agents, they tacitly expelled Communist directors, actors, producers, and screenwriters from the production process. Eager to shed the "Jewish-Bolshevik" stigma and affiliations to old world Socialism, successful Jewish bosses were ready to comply with HUAC's anti-Communist agenda.

No matter how vague the suspicion or how talented the worker, anyone with the slightest trace of a Communist background found himself or herself without a job or subpoenaed by

¹ Powers, Richard Gid. *Not Without Honor: the History of American Anticommunism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998. 136-7.

HUAC. The lives of talented artists and actors, many of them war veterans who produced scores of beloved movies after defending America, were completely uprooted: they were suddenly unemployed, unable to support their families; some even committed suicide. This era of forced silence and oppression is remembered as one of the darkest moments in American history, during which American values and liberties were trampled by the very people who were waving the flag most conspicuously.

Film industry workers might find themselves unemployed with only a perfunctory explanation — though it was clearly known that Communists were totally unwelcome. They would be fired by complicit studio executives, and worse, overtly tracked by FBI agents. Led by HUAC, the FBI, studio executives, and informers, this mass eviction of some of the most thoughtful and intelligent creative artists and writers in Hollywood came to be known as the “blacklist.” Finding the investigations to be a flagrant violation of their First Amendment rights, ten members of the film industry, soon known as the “Hollywood Ten,” publicly denounced the HUAC at a Congressional trial.

Refusing to capitulate, some of these stalwart anti-Fascists were jailed for failure to comply with investigations they regarded as illegitimate, despite their right as American citizens to join the political party of their choice.

Of the Hollywood Ten, six were Jewish.



Figure 1: The Hollywood Ten. (Left to Right) Ring Lardner Jr., John Howard Lawson, Alvah Bessie, Albert Maltz, Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole, Samuel Ornitz, Edward Dmytryk, and Adrian Scott. 1947.

Though not all of the targets of the blacklist were Jewish, Jews were disproportionately represented among the victims.² Meanwhile, the 1940s and 1950s saw a wider intellectual trend fueled by Freud and Marx— two Jewish thinkers who pioneered the tides of modernity — helmed by German Jewish emigré directors fleeing from Nazi Germany, and practiced by Jewish leftists who sought to use cinema as a way of critiquing American capitalism. This political movement was aesthetically represented in film noir, the presiding artistic style of blacklist era Hollywood. Diverging from the glossy films endorsed by assimilated, capitalist Jewish studio executives of the 1930s, film noir inverted the American dream, instead depicting the American nightmare: corruption, scandal, crime, frenzy, and instability.

In this essay, I will examine the roots of HUAC and its enduring anti-Semitic connotations, framing anti-Communism in Hollywood as a facet of Jewish history. Likewise, I will examine how the cinematic trend of film noir was the artistic expression of Marxist political commitments, introduced to the American film scene by German-Jewish refugee directors.

That being said, the focus on the blacklist and the contributions of Jewish intellectuals and professionals in Hollywood is all too concentrated on the male experience. In this essay, I will examine the intersections of Norma Barzman's identity: a Jewish-American female screenwriter, blacklisted for her Communist affiliations. I intend to mine her memoir, *The Red and the Blacklist: The Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*, to understand not only the persecution she endured as a Communist and the disenfranchisement she endured as a woman, but also the resilience she demonstrated as she found ways to endure the blacklist and even to turn her experience of it into art.

² Due to the informal nature of the blacklist, there are no exact percentages of Jewish blacklistedees. However, six out of the ten members of the Hollywood Ten were Jewish, and the overlap between the overwhelming Jewish influence in Hollywood and Jewish representation in the Communist Party speaks for their predominance in the blacklist.

I: The Beginnings of the Blacklist

Though the vapors of anti-Communist sentiment emerged as early as World War I, the blacklist was specific to 1950s America. The wider value system of Postwar America was represented in the microcosm of the blacklist: crusades against Communism melted into imperialism; the banner of Democracy cloaked incipient fascist tendencies. As cinema became increasingly popular, American society became dominated or at least mediated by the glitz, glamor, and imagery perpetuated by the entertainment industry. But, despite its grip on the American imagination, the Hollywood film industry, which had flourished during the war, found itself threatened on multiple fronts: competition from the new technology of television; an antitrust attack by the Justice Department on Hollywood's production studios and theater chains; and an intrusive Congressional investigation into alleged Communist infiltration of the industry. Claiming to promote American ideals and values, the entertainment industry became a focal point of political debate during a period that witnessed the most intensive and sustained persecution of writers and artists in American history.

Under pressure from the House Un-American Activities Committee, or HUAC, Hollywood executives dismissed screenwriters, actors, directors, producers, and other members of the film industry due to past or suspected Communist affiliations. Assembled with the title "House Un-American Activities Committee" for the first time in 1938, the rhetoric of HUAC harkens back to the frightening history of witch-hunts and inquisitions. Its mission was not a particularly novel one: three successive special investigative committees had preceded the 1938 assembly, each with a specific anti-Communist agenda. The Overman Committee, created in 1918, was responsible for sniffing out any pro-Bolshevik voices in American society, with particular attention to illicit Communist propaganda. Disbanded in 1919, the Overman

Committee was succeeded by the Fish Committee, which launched an energetic crusade against the ACLU while restricting immigration laws to ensure that the American workforce and national boundaries were held tight against Communist influence.³ Directly preceding the HUAC was the McCormack–Dickstein Committee,⁴ beginning proceedings in 1934, whose mission was to gain "information on how foreign subversive propaganda entered the U.S. and the organizations that were spreading it."⁵

In 1938, Texas Congressman Martin Dies organized the House Un-American Activities Committee, which was entrusted with the duty of investigating alleged disloyalty and subversive activities on the part of private citizens and organizations with suspected Fascist or Communist ties. Formally known as the Dies Committee, but later popularized simply as "HUAC," it was responsible for the investigation and suspicion of Japanese Americans during World War II, directly contributing to anti-Japanese hostility. Dies enjoyed popularity during his time in office, endorsed by both the right — for his anti-Communist and anti-New Deal platform, and by the left — for his condemnation of the Nazis and far-right American movements. However, in his *New York Times* obituary, it is noted that "President Franklin D. Roosevelt excoriated [Dies'] effort as itself 'flagrantly unfair and un-American' in its very first year — 1938. The 6-foot 3-inch blond and energetic Texan was increasingly lambasted for allegedly flinging charges on

³ Ko, Daeha. "Chapter 2 Rough Beginnings." *Communist Party in Washington State: Rough Beginnings: The 1920s. Communism in Washington State History and Memory Project*, 2002. <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/ko.shtml>.

⁴ Known informally as the "Business Plot", the McCormack-Dickstein Committee examined the fascist objectives of Wall Street tycoons reacting against the Gold Standard and FDR's "socialist" policies. However, Communism remained at the crux: "We need a fascist government to save the nation from the Communists who want to tear it down and wreck all that we have built in America," said Gerald Macguire, a key conspirator. Ironically, the HUAC got its roots in anti-Fascist — though not necessarily pro-Communist — efforts.

⁵ Martinez, J. Michael. *The Safety of the Kingdom: Government Responses to Subversive Threats*. New York, NY: Carrel Books, 2015. 127.

often scanty bases with little opportunity for reply.”⁶ Dies, in other words, created the inquisitorial and often hypocritical model that would become associated with Senator Joseph McCarthy during the early 1950s.

While attempting to eliminate Communists from influential positions, HUAC proclaimed itself to be fighting fascism — the same claim held by most, if not all, Communists. While interning Japanese Americans, the government turned a blind eye to the domestic terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan — perhaps because of the influence of John Rankin, Klan member and notorious anti-Semite.⁷ HUAC’s penchant for duplicity and its eagerness to persecute dissidents continued throughout its reign. HUAC’s mission was to investigate what *they* suspected was subversive propaganda that supposedly posed a dire threat to *their* so-called American way of life. However, the nature of subversion and propaganda was especially fluid in a country that welcomed free speech and diversity. To decide the difference between diverse opinion and true subversion, HUAC decided that “anything [falling] under the suspicion of inciting or insinuating class conflict was necessarily considered to be subversive.” Even the ancient Greek playwright Euripides was accused, more than two millennia after his death, of proto-Communism and instigating class agitation during the trial of Hallie Flanagan, the first trial conducted by the Dies Committee.⁸

What was called into question by the HUAC were not just the parameters of “legal” opinion, but the limits of artistic expression and creative thought. Before the blacklist solidified

⁶ “‘Ex-Rep. Martin Dies, 71, Is Dead; Led Un-American Activities Unit.” *The New York Times*, November 15, 1972.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1972/11/15/archives/exrep-martin-dies-71-is-dead-led-unamerican-activities-unit-exrep.html>.

⁷ Powers, Richard Gid. *Not Without Honor: the History of American Anticommunism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998. 131.

⁸ Nightingale, Benedict. “MR. EURIPIDES GOES TO WASHINGTON.” *New York Times*, September 18, 1988.

in Hollywood, many of the individuals HUAC pursued were writers and playwrights involved with New Deal projects, or other left-wing intellectuals whose works commented on the general state of politics. So, it made sense that the HUAC targeted the artistic community of Hollywood; not only was it rife with Marxist or left-leaning intellectual engagement, but its influence stretched throughout American society. However, in its fervid attempts to define the parameters of free speech and artistic expression, the HUAC fell into the trap of a very un-American kind of hypocrisy: a hostility to critical thought in a country that supposedly guaranteed freedom of speech in its Bill of Rights.

The anti-Communist obsession of the HUAC certainly resonated with a hegemonic sentiment of 1950s America. However, to reduce the blacklist to a purely anti-Communist vendetta is to disregard other influences. Though the blacklist found its cause in eradicating the Communist voice, the reasons for the blacklist are, to this day, a subject of controversy. Its popularity in Hollywood was not totally reducible to an ideological agenda: the blacklist provided a financial incentive to an industry burdened by financial hardship; it provided a reason to offload surplus employees while also intimidating employees who tended toward guild-formation and unionization.⁹

The financial difficulties emerged in the late 1940s, in the wake of the Justice Department's revived interest in breaking up monopolistic studio trusts. The Justice Department sought to destabilize the alliance between the studios. The inter-studio conglomerate prohibited emerging studios from enjoying financial success, while maintaining a monopoly on both film production and distribution.¹⁰ The Justice Department insisted that the corporate conglomerate of

⁹Litvak, Joseph. *The Un-Americans: Jews, the Blacklist, and Stoolpigeon Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009. 8.

¹⁰ Lewis, Jon. *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2002. 2; 51-53.

the studio system was bad for the postwar economy, and sought to encourage independent distributors and support emerging production houses.¹¹ The Justice Department, with the help of the FTC and FCC, broke up their monopoly by introducing third-party intermediaries, like talent agents and box office workers.¹² The studio bosses' financial control was receding as films became more expensive to produce and distribute.

The rise and authority of industry guilds and unions was intensified by the introduction of third-party intermediaries, who joined with the guilds and unionization movements already at work in the lower-levels of the Hollywood hierarchy. Fortunately for the studios, the HUAC distributed lists — the early blacklist — of unionized writers, actors, and directors to studio chiefs. Under the guise of patriotic anti-Communist efforts, the studio executives were able to target left-wing Socialist-Communist union leaders and stewards who posed a threat to corporate profit through unionization movements. For them, anti-Communism meant anti-unionism.

Because this proto-blacklist was implicitly sanctioned by a House Committee, the names included on the lists could be fired without cause or severance pay, circumventing the authority of the National Labor Relations Board — both a symbolic jab at workers' rights and a flagrant disregard for industry workers.¹³ As the film industry found itself financially struggling, HUAC gave Hollywood a way to reunite itself with government interests, lower production costs, and exert power over the growing industry guilds.¹⁴

This shines a light onto why the studio executives were so entirely complicit in the blacklist: because it allowed them to combat unions during the disintegration of their monopoly, they took full advantage of the opportunity. But their willingness to participate in the blacklist

¹¹ Ibid, 59.

¹²Ibid, 34-38.

¹³ Ibid, 16-17.

¹⁴ Ibid. 2-3.

culture, rather than defending their employees — most of whom were also Jewish — encapsulates a wider history of how the blacklist tied into the anti-Semitic sentiments of the time. Leaders of the HUAC relied on old stereotypes conflating “Jewish causes” with Communism, unionism, and intellectualism.¹⁵ By aligning themselves with the HUAC’s anti-Communism, studio executives aligned themselves against what they saw as the problematic components of Jewish identity in mid-century America..

II. From Capitalism to Communism: A Generational Shift

But who were these studio executives, and how did they emerge from occupational discrimination to the peak of the film industry? The cohort of founding studio heads — Fox (William Fox), MGM (Samuel Goldwyn, Louis B. Mayer), Warner Brothers (Harry and Jack Warner), Paramount (Adolph Zukor), Universal (Carl Laemmle), Columbia (Harry Cohn), and United Artists (Joseph Schenck) — shared a remarkably similar heritage. William Fox and Adolph Zukor were both born in Hungary; Samuel Goldwyn and the Warners in Poland; Carl Laemmle in Germany; Louis B. Mayer in a Russian shtetl.

Emerging from a 500-mile radius in Eastern Europe, these *Ostjuden* immigrants would wind up in the same neighborhood in Southern California, and the same profession.¹⁶ All had grown up in poverty and all — except for Zukor, who grew up without a father — had *luftmenschen* for fathers. Their fathers, with precarious and flighty employment, were systematically prohibited from assimilating to the structure of Anglo-American gentile society.¹⁷ Even in America, the Jews were marginalized and alienated from society, a perpetuation of the

¹⁵ Ibid, 31.

¹⁶ Jacobovici, Simcha. *Hollywood: An Empire of Their Own*. A&E: DVD, 1998.

¹⁷ Gabler, Neal. *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. New York, NY: Random House, 1998. 4.

hostility to which they had been subject in their homeland. The suspicion and ostracization they faced, however, according to the brilliant economist Thorstein Veblen in his famous essay "The Intellectual Pre-eminence of the Jews," would contribute to their conspicuous intellectual and professional success in both Europe and the United States.¹⁸ Paradoxically, their persecution would facilitate their conspicuous success, and their conspicuous success would ensure persecution.

The historically Jewish amalgam of entrepreneurial boldness and abundant creativity formed a network of Jewish immigrant pioneers in New York City's nascent motion picture industry, where the studio heads got their start. With a strong desire to assimilate to their new home, complemented by their equally fortunate position as outsiders, this first generation of *Ostjuden* immigrants developed the skills necessary for the motion picture business: adaptable, gregarious, eager, they had the work ethic necessary for their tremendous success. Yet, their true capacity lay in their perspicacious eye, marketing skills developed in their beginnings as salesmen. Barred from higher education and employment in most "honorable" professions, the cohort of executives were shunted into sales industries, specifically as vendors of upper-class goods such as furs and gloves.¹⁹

Their experience in sales, however, would provide a fortuitous set of skills: still outside of the traditional socio-economic hierarchy, they maintained a hardworking and innovative

¹⁸ "It may be more to the purpose to note that this intellectual pre-eminence of the Jews has come into bearing within the gentile community of peoples, not from the outside; that the men who have been its bearers have been men immersed in this gentile culture in which they have played their part of guidance and incitement, not bearers of a compelling message from afar or proselytizers of enlightenment conjuring with a ready formula worked out in the ghetto and carried over into the gentile community for its mental regeneration. [...] The intellectually gifted Jew is in a peculiarly fortunate position in respect of this requisite immunity from the inhibitions of intellectual quietism. But he can come in for such immunity only at the cost of losing his secure place in the scheme of conventions into which he has been born, and at the cost, also, of finding no similarly secure place in that scheme of gentile conventions into which he is thrown." Veblen, Thorstein. "The Intellectual Pre-Eminence of Jews in Modern Europe." *Political Science Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (1919): 33-42. Accessed June 11, 2021. doi:10.2307/2141518. 37; 39.

¹⁹ Gabler, Neal. *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. New York, NY: Random House, 1998. 5-6.

immigrant ethos, while observing, understanding, and intuiting the taste of the average American citizen. Adolph Zukor, later co-founder of Paramount Pictures, got his start as a fur salesman who invented the famous status symbol for the upper-class woman: a fox stole with a clasp in the mouth.²⁰ Carl Laemmle, later head of Universal Studios, began as a clothier; Samuel Goldwyn, founder of the eponymous Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, was a glove salesman; Lewis Selznick, later a foremost pioneer in production, began in the diamond business.²¹ Though their paths to the top of the film industry would vary, their beginnings as merchants of upper-class goods would pave their way to success as merchants of the American dream.

Other Jewish professionals, excluded from employment in more prestigious sectors of the economy, found employment in the Nickelodeon industry — known for its grungy theaters and vulgar movies. It would be the ingenuity of the Jewish studio heads that would transform the film industry from a province of seedy entertainment to the most lucrative and alluring enterprise in the world.²² By the 1920s, in addition to their control on the exhibition side — where they remained as theater owners and managers — Jewish executives headed all of the major production studios: Fox, Columbia, MGM, Universal, Paramount, Warner Brothers, and United Artists.²³ Now major employers who were enjoying their power and status in a burgeoning and glamorous new industry, the studio heads invited other Jewish immigrants to work for them, some of whom would come to be the most prominent directors of the first half of the twentieth century: Ernst Lubitsch, E. A. Dupont, William Wyler, Charles Vidor, and Bertolt Viertel to name a few.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid. 16.

²¹ Ibid. 50; 44; 93.

²² Armour, Robert A. "Effects of Censorship Pressure on the New York Nickelodeon Market, 1907-1909." *Film History* 4, no. 2 (1990): 113-21. Accessed June 11, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814996>. 120; 125.

²³ Brook, Vincent. "Still an Empire of Their Own: How Jews Remain Atop a Reinvented Hollywood." Essay. In *From Shtetl to Stardom Jews and Hollywood*, 3–22. West Lafayette, India: Purdue University Press, 2017. 5-7.

²⁴ Brook, Vincent. *Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. 25.

The transformation from nickels to millions — from the Nickelodeon to Hollywood — is one of the most extraordinary examples of upward social mobility in American history; it was the epitome of capitalist success. In an almost self-referential way, the Jewish studio heads (who came to be known as “the moguls”)²⁵ sponsored tales of heroism and valor that not only captivated the American audience, but provided the basis for a coherent American canon, which the industry generally lacked. However, the Jewish producers, directors, and writers at work in the film industry would quickly provide America with its own story—a version of the American dream that combined admiration for bold individual initiative with a celebration of romantic love and family life.

Their almost preternaturally acute understanding of American desire, taste, and ideals — combined both with their enthusiasm to be accepted by the insider group and their control over the twentieth century’s dominant medium of popular entertainment — gave the moguls an almost unprecedented opportunity to shape American culture. Settling in the relatively underpopulated community of Hollywood, California, the moguls were able to foster their new industry by harvesting the potentiality of Southern California’s relatively uncharted territory. In spite of — or rather, because of — their being cut out of the Eastern, Southern, and Midwestern financial sectors, the Jewish studio chiefs were able to consolidate their vertiginous rise to power and wealth by creating what Neal Gabler calls “An Empire of Their Own” in Hollywood.²⁶

As the 1930s progressed, the *Ostjuden* executives would become some of the most powerful people in America. Leaning politically toward the Republican version of American

²⁵ Vincent Brooks mentioned, “The term mogul itself, derived from the word “Mongol” and coined specifically for the immigrant studio bosses, referred pejoratively to their ‘alleged Asiatic [read: alien] provenance and appearance, perceived boorish [read: uncivilized] behavior, and admittedly aggressive [read: unscrupulous] business practices,’” Brook, Vincent. “Still an Empire of Their Own: How Jews Remain Atop a Reinvented Hollywood.” Essay. In *From Shtetl to Stardom Jews and Hollywood*, 3–22. West Lafayette, India: Purdue University Press, 2017. 11.

²⁶ Gabler, Neal. *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. New York, NY: Random House, 1998. 1; 106.

capitalism, they took pride in their new status at the top of American society, enjoying all the perquisites of power and wealth, from palatial estates to trophy wives.²⁷ But, no matter how watertight their image of American prestige, respectability, and status, it could not cloak their Jewishness. They remained outsiders; they were effectively prohibited from the New England-Wall Street-Midwestern spheres of wealth to which the American elite belonged.²⁸ And, in the 1930s, despite their loyalty to Republican politics, the agenda of conservative politicians included a wary scrutiny of allegedly excessive Jewish influence in Hollywood.

By the late 1930s, the Communist influence on lower ranking film industry workers and creatives began to permeate the now well-established Hollywood industry, putting an immense strain on its social life. On the one hand, there was the Jewish inclination on part of the studio executives to extend warm welcomes to both Jewish and non-Jewish employees and foster an accepting environment. On the other, there was the stronger pull for studio executives to preserve their newfound semi-assimilated status, and for them to do this by isolating and ostracizing any Communist influences.

In an exchange between Warner Brothers executives Harry and Albert Warner and Maurice Rapf — son of preeminent producer Harry Rapf — the tension between the conservatism of the founding generation of Republican capitalist studio executives and the leftist leanings of the next generation become clear:

‘By the time he returned to Hollywood [from the Soviet Union], Maurice Rapf (son of Harry Rapf) had seen the future and been radicalized. ‘My father was very sad,’ he recalled, ‘but he couldn’t counter what I had to say. After all, I had been there, and he was very respectful. But he sent me to see a series of his associates and friends and let them talk to me ... and I had some really hair-raising experiences.’ Harry Warner, who had once been Harry Rapf’s partner, was barely

²⁷ Ibid. 6.

²⁸ Ibid. 5.

civil. ‘I don't want to talk to no goddamn Communist. Don't forget you're a Jew. Jewish Communists are going to bring down the wrath of the world on the rest of the Jews.’ [...] [Louis B.] Mayer argued that Maurice owed it to the Jewish people to forswear radicalism. ‘Everybody thinks that Jews are Communists,’ he said. Maurice thought, Everybody thinks that Jews are capitalists. I'll give up being a Communist if you give up being a capitalist.’²⁹

The split dynamic between the generation of the studio executives and their sons and new employees was not just political, it was emotional. It was a conflict between the moguls’ fierce determination not to rock the boat and the radicals’ loyalty to the neglected people with whom they shared a history. Jewish anti-Communism in America extends back to the immigration movement, where Russian Jewish radicals emigrating to America established Socialist organizations to support labor movements in New York City. This early association was never shed: anti-Semitic countersubversives would often typify Jews as the paradigm of American disloyalty, at once too patriotic to their Russian homeland while also attempting to subvert the ideals of American republican democracy with Socialist or Communist affiliations. The American Jewish Community directed its efforts to diminish the radicalism of poorer Jews and the general stereotypical connection between Jews and Communism.³⁰

So, during the Cold War, when Communist affiliations implied treason instead of mere subversion, anti-Communism became a critical juncture for the Jewish community. Jewish organizations across America actively aimed to combat the stereotypical affiliation between “Jewish” and “Communist,” and the Jewish community ostracized its radical members.³¹ Of course, this reverberated through Hollywood. There, however, the animosity the Jewish studio executives had for their Communist employees was not so much a part of an ideological tension,

²⁹ Ibid. 318.

³⁰ Powers, Richard Gid. *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 1998. 44.

³¹ Ibid, 46.

but a general fear that Jewish Communism in Hollywood would make all Jews suspect — after the studio executives had worked with such diligence to assimilate.³²

The willingness for the Jewish studio executives to so easily destroy the careers and livelihood of their Jewish Communist employees exemplifies a tension in the Jewish-American experience during that time: assimilated, right-wing Jewish professionals who found success in American capitalism were as unwilling to forfeit their political beliefs as the pro-Communist, pro-Union, left-wing Jewish intellectuals and working class. While this dichotomy cannot speak for all Jewish Americans, it was explicitly manifest in Hollywood. Between the Communist guildworkers, creatives, and other employees and the upper echelons of the executive class, each wanted to distance themselves from the other. But in the end, the studio executives — seeking to distance themselves from the remnants of the Judeo-Bolshevik stereotype that haunted them in New York City — won out. The political commitments of the Jewish Communist intellectuals and artists, however, could be easily erased. Their contributions to the film noir genre, closely linked to Marxist and Freudian ideologies, transformed American cinema from the curated idealism of the 1930s to the pioneering intellectual and artistic films of the 1940s and 1950s.

III. Film Noir

The fissure between assimilated and successful Jewish businessmen and their radicalized Jewish employees was reproduced in the difference between the sunny, pro-America films of the 1930s and the dark world of film noir in the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1930s, the Jewish moguls' capacity to understand and appeal to American tastes and their zeal for American popular culture took form in different ways at the different studios. MGM, under Louis B. Mayer, for example,

³² Gabler, Neal. *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. New York, NY: Random House, 1998. 345.

created tender, dreamy, romantic depictions of idyllic America for a middle and upper-class audience. On the other hand, Warner Brothers, under Jack Warner's direction, produced melodramas, thrillers, and heroic biographies that appealed to a more working-class audience.³³

In either case, glossy or gritty, the *Ostjuden* executives wove the fabric of the mythical, American dream. Sweet American homes and strong American heroes; incorruptible American values combined with indomitable American virtues: the Jewish owner-managers of the Hollywood film studios of the 1930s created and propagated the image of an ideal America that — ironically — the HUAC would later defend. In spite of — or perhaps because of — their outsider status, the myths, values, traditions, archetypes, and images of American prosperity were owned and created by Jews. They were, effectively, the Sandmen of the American dream.

By the 1940s, the solid moral setting and easily definable characters of the 1930s had slipped into a crisis of interiority, contemporaneous with the instability of so-called American values in the wake of the Depression, European Fascism, and the global descent into war. For the radicalized screenwriters, the political conscience and passion for justice was expressed in the noir aesthetic: vanguard leftists combined their politics with the cinematic avant-garde. The Jewish dimensions of this seismic shift in cinematic history cannot be underscored enough; as Vincent Brook points out, German-speaking Jews formed a disproportionate majority of film noir directors. On the side of the Austrians, there were Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Otto Preminger, and Edgar G. Ulmer. On the side of the Germans: Robert Siodmak, Curtis Bernhardt, Max Ophuls, and John Brahm.³⁴

Bringing with them the styles of German Expressionism and French Poetic Realism, these German Jewish directors introduced a dark, dreary, moody, and shadowy aesthetic,

³³ Ibid. 204-205.

³⁴ Brook, Vincent. *Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. 30.

complemented by a dark and discomfoting subject matter. As the antithesis to the semi-propagandistic films produced by Jewish studio executives, eager to paper over their Old World experiences for the sake of celebrating the American dream, film noir exposes the occluded side of American society, the return of the bifurcated subjectivity of the European Jewish intellectual. It was the American dream turned into an American nightmare: the ghosts of guilt, shame, and desperation haunting the patina of success and happiness.

The stylized American idealism of the 1930s was eclipsed by noir's stylized realism, showing the beleaguered self, astray and lost in a corrupt urban society whose mean streets were full of danger and temptation. Enhanced by political and psychological styles informed by Freud and Marx — two Jewish thinkers who all but entirely shaped the intellectual atmosphere of the 20th century — the noir movement encapsulated the political, intellectual, and artistic features of avant-garde Jewish secular culture. At once introspective and expository, personal and political, film noir explored the darker shades of the human experience — what most people sought escape from in cinema was suddenly laid bare on the screen.

Vincent Brook asks, “as for the deep psychological and moral ambivalence of the noir universe, who could possibly have experienced this aspect more profoundly than ‘wholly assimilated’ German and Austrian Jews?”³⁵ The schism between “A Jew at home, a gentleman on the street,” an old folk adage that largely captures their social experience in Germany, is a painful — even schizoid — tear in the Jewish identity. Yet that wound contributed to the sensibility that produced film noir. Constructed in the gap between dualisms like between German and Jew, Republican and Liberal, Capitalist and Communist, and executive and creative, film noir offers a multi-perspectival understanding of the two sides of the self.

³⁵ Ibid. 4.

This duality — and the corresponding ambiguity between oppositions — is perhaps the most noticeable hallmark of the aesthetic style and subject matter of film noir. First and foremost, the cinematographic attention to the dualism between light and shadow immediately emphasizes dramatic moments and characters, linking the story to its cinematic representation in a classic Weimar style that had not yet appeared on the American screen.³⁶ The camera's attentiveness to the play of light and shadow on the surfaces of things suggests the entrapment of the self in a web of illusion and deceit that is another hallmark of film noir.

The characters, plots, and general themes also engage with the duality and ambiguity: characters are both executioners and victims, killers and sweethearts, guilty and innocent. Death is at once an escape from the hell of reality and the greatest individual tragedy; the beloved is at once an object of desire and the perpetrator of malice. Police are just as corrupt and depraved as the so-called villains, who are often vindicated by their desperation: a sympathetic desperation either due to childhood trauma, unconscious defenses, or the many layers of corruption in a capitalist society. Evil and good are indiscernible, morality collapses, and what may appear as one thing will soon be proved to be its opposite.³⁷

The slippery dialectics of film noir often suggest a Freudian view of the self, informed by a Marxist critique of society. Not only are these ideologies distinctively Jewish in the sense that Freud and Marx were both Jews (although Marx was eager to rid himself of his Jewishness), but also in their Talmudic roots. It is no difficult challenge to find the genesis of psychoanalytic thinking in the Talmud, as it is riddled with ambiguity, open-ended questions, an acute attention to dialogue, and a profound understanding of the guilty and shameful self.³⁸ And was it a

³⁶ Noriega, José Luis Sánchez. "Psychoanalytical Culture in the American Film Noir." *J. Med. Mov.* 4 (2008): 27–34. 33.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 31-34.

³⁸ Brook, Vincent. *Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. 204.

coincidence that the master of dialectical thinking — Marx himself — was descended from long lines of rabbis? Moreover, Marx’s advocacy for the underprivileged, malnourished, marginalized, and socially enslaved directly speaks from the Hebrew people to the *Ostjuden* — many of whom were the earliest Socialists and Communists — and onto the workers of the world.³⁹

However, the proximity of the emigré directors to the ideologies of Freud and Marx was not born purely of their intellectual interests: as assimilated Jews, they shared a unique social experience on the fringes of German society — a line they continued to tread in the heated bastion of intra-Jewish relations in Hollywood. These thinkers and writers existed in a sort of “double marginalization”: unable to wholly assimilate due to their Jewishness, while unable to be wholly Jewish because of their assimilation.

In his 1958 essay, “The Non-Jewish Jew,” Isaac Deutscher proposed the idea that Jewish intellectuals’ familiarity with the occluded horrors of the self and society came with their “double marginalization”: “the very conditions in which they lived and worked did not allow them to reconcile themselves to ideas which were nationally or religiously limited and enabled them to strive for a universal *Weltanschauung*.”⁴⁰ The “epistemological advantage” of this particular form of sociality was derived from the fact that they were detached enough from a society to have an exterior perspective, immersed enough in the society to publish and finance their ideas, and willing to emancipate themselves from tradition in order to embrace the new. In many ways the Jewish intellectual was the architect of modern thought, a legacy that would continue in the film noir genre.⁴¹

³⁹ Jacobovici, Simcha. *Hollywood: An Empire of Their Own*. A&E: DVD, 1998.

⁴⁰ Deutscher, Isaac. *The Non-Jewish Jew*. London, United Kingdom: Verso Books, 2017. 34.

⁴¹ Brook, Vincent. *Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. 26; Deutscher, Isaac. *Non-Jewish Jew*. London, United Kingdom: Verso Books, 2017. 137.

If Freud and Marx spearheaded modernity by introducing alienation to intellectual culture, film noir did the same for the mass population. The significance of the Jewish influence, however, cannot be overstated. The bifurcated nature of the Jewish character, though developed over the course of centuries of abject suffering, allows for a more profound consideration of the public self and the private self, in turn facilitating an understanding developed in Freud as the sublimation of socially undesirable characteristics and in Marx as the consideration of the society that demands this sublimation. By using these ideologies to supplement a genre of film, the emigrés reacted to the cinema of the 1930s, a brand of Americanism that could be appropriately described as the offspring of a Jewish imagination that sought to create the imagery of a people from whom they desperately craved acceptance. The consequence of these dynamic relations, between the first wave of *Ostjuden* immigrants, who would become the studio executives, and their American audience; between the German-Jewish emigrés and their *Ostjuden* heritage they were forced to confront in Europe and again in America, and between the Republican studio executives and their Communist employees, was rich with the tension that came to constitute film noir.

IV. Norma Barzman

“There are no second acts in American lives,” - F. Scott Fitzgerald

In 1945, Norma Levor, a young journalist, 25 years old, produced one of the most unusual screenplays of the 1940s, the golden age of film noir. A film noir based on her screenplay, entitled *The Locket*, directed by John Brahm and starring Robert Mitchum and Laraine Day, appeared in 1946. Now widely regarded as one of the classics of the genre, it set the record for the most flashbacks in the history of Hollywood cinema, and was among the most intellectually and stylistically innovative noirs of the decade.

Sixty years later, in 2005, Norma Barzman (her married name) published *The Red and the Blacklist*, now widely regarded as one of the finest memoirs of the blacklist era in Hollywood history, when so many lives and careers were shattered by the studios' shameful complicity with the McCarthyite persecution of alleged Communists or former Communists in Hollywood. These two classic works, written six decades apart, are the bookends of Norma Barzman's career as a writer. Norma Barzman proves F. Scott Fitzgerald wrong; her life not only has a second act, but many more after that. As a mother, wife, artist, writer, and expatriate, her versatility and diverse experiences demonstrate that an encore is possible, but reinvention is necessary.

During the six decades between the groundbreaking film noir screenplay, written at the tender age of 25, and the mature writer's memoir, published when she was 85, Norma Barzman published very little. Here is a puzzle: how do we account for what appears to be one of the longest writers' blocks in the history of American Jewish literature, comparable only to the long gap between Henry Roth's classic novel *Call it Sleep* in 1934 and his second novel, *Mercy of a Rude Stream*, published in 1996. Both writers were marginalized in part because of their Communist leanings, but there is another reason for Norma Barzman's six-decade-long hiatus in her writing career: she was, after all, one of the very few women screenwriters in Hollywood during the 1940s. Perhaps we can think of her as a precursor of Nora Ephron, who also began her career as a journalist and migrated into screenwriting. But in spite of many obstacles, Nora Ephron was able to sustain her career as a screenwriter and a director whereas Norma Barzman was not able to do so.

Why not? Nora Ephron worked in a different era of Hollywood history, when it was easier for women to flourish as screenwriters and even as directors. But clearly, the key difference is that Nora Ephron was never blacklisted. To explain the long gap in Norma

Barzman's career, as a writer in Hollywood and a commentator on Hollywood history, we will need to address both the history of the blacklist and her experience as one of the very few female screenwriters of her era.

V. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman

When Norma Barzman met her husband, Ben, she threw a pie in his face. At a Los Angeles dinner party with 200 members of the Hollywood left-wing community, Ben took it upon himself to inform Norma, “Films are more complex now, technically way too tough for a woman.” Norma wouldn't have it. “Mabel Normand? [...] Y'know? The silent film star? [...] It was *she* who invented’ — I pitched the pie into his face — ‘pie-throwing!’” Norma retorted.⁴² Little did he know that Norma herself would go on to write the screenplay for *The Locket*, one of the most complex and technically rigorous movies of not just the 1940s, but cinematic history.

Norma belongs to a unique group of individuals: highly intelligent and innovative women who were ignored and discredited by the male-dominated film industry. These women found themselves locked in a painful predicament: their brilliant and promising careers overshadowed by the oppressively boisterous camaraderie of their male colleagues, their legacies erased from history. Norma would not get credit for *The Locket*, written and produced in the 1940s, until decades later. Nor would she be credited for any of her numerous contributions to screenplays until she herself exhumed them in her autobiography. Some would remain as drafts, some would be stolen, some would receive credit under her future husband Ben's name or that of another male screenwriter. Even when she didn't get credit for the screenplays, it was *her* ideas that shaped some of the celebrated films of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

⁴² Barzman, Norma. *The Red and the Blacklist: the Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005.



Figure 2: Norma, 17, on the roof of her dormitory at Radcliffe.

Even before meeting Ben, Norma was ambitious and irrepressibly driven. When Norma met Ben at that fateful party, she was only 21. And at 21, she was already dissatisfied with her achievements. After a cosmopolitan childhood spent shuttling between Paris and the Upper East Side of Manhattan, Norma attended Radcliffe College. There, she majored in Government. Screenwriting was not yet on Norma's mind; in her junior year, she married the luminary scholar Claude Shannon, later dubbed the "father of

information theory." During their marriage, Shannon had pioneered an altogether new field of study, inventing binary code and groundbreaking innovations in cryptanalysis and telecommunications, sitting around a table with Albert Einstein, André Weil, and John von Neumann as Norma poured tea. But she was clear on one thing: she most certainly did *not* want to pour tea.⁴³

While married to Shannon, Norma got a job as the only female economist at the League of Nations, which she kept during the early years of World War II. A progressive from a young age, Norma's sensitivity to imperialism, war, and social injustice was heightened at this job, priming her for her future commitment to the Communist party. Involved directly with work done on business cycles and economic depressions, this job was crucial to solidifying Norma's left-leaning politics — as well as her capacity as a female professional amidst global misogyny

⁴³ Feinberg, Scott, and Norma Barzman. Blacklisted Screenwriter Norma Barzman Interviewed by Scott Feinberg. Other, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgeTqhtLPiw>.

in the working world.⁴⁴ Yet Norma neither wanted to work in the League of Nations, nor to stay married to Claude Shannon. So she convinced her sister — the only female law student at Columbia — to get Shannon to sign the 20-year-old Norma's divorce papers. Determined to write, she fled with her mother to Hollywood, where she was taken in by her cousin, Henry Myers.⁴⁵

Henry was one of the founders of the Screenwriters Guild, founded in 1933. Norma came from a family of left-wing intellectuals, each more immersed in theater than the next: her paternal grandfather was a Shakespearean actor, and her mother ran away from her wealthy family to become an actress at sixteen.⁴⁶ Familiar with the perils and precarity of low-level work in the film industry, Henry was an avid advocate for workers' rights. Before the Guild, screenwriters had no minimum wage, no medical insurance, no pension plan; writers could be fired without warrant or notice, they could be laid off without pay while still under contract, their paychecks were in a state of constant uncertainty, and their creations could be rewritten and reworked at the whim of a producer or actor. Because of these often treacherous working conditions for members of the film industry, many of the writers and administrative workers shared an especially leftist bent. However, even before the HUAC vendetta hit Hollywood, right-wing studio heads were avid Republicans, eager to purge any Reds. The Communist community had to keep their politics as quiet as possible in the public eye.⁴⁷

Amongst themselves, however, the Hollywood Communists formed a collective comparable in spirit and intellectual activity to mid-century Paris. Her first day there, Norma was flung into this community; Henry had brought her along to a party. In attendance were hundreds

⁴⁴ Barzman, Norma. CSULB Human Rights Forum - Norma Barzman. Other, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gv7ywg1H0Q>.

⁴⁵ Barzman, Norma. *The Red and the Blacklist: the Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005. 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 10-11.

⁴⁷ Ibid 10-12.

of people, all of whom were members of the progressive community, some of whom were members of the Communist party, most of whom would later be named by the HUAC. It was also where she fatefully met Ben Barzman, who had just sold an original story to Paramount. Despite the pie-in-the-face fiasco, Norma and Ben married three months later.

Like many Jews of this generation, Ben became a radical in college. As a Catholic man might convert upon marrying a Jewish woman, Norma joined the Party upon her marriage to Ben, despite her reluctance to wind up on the wrong side of politics. But, an innate progressive and feminist, Norma couldn't argue with Communism's support of the working class and feminist movements. Moreover, Norma notes that it was the *spirit* of Communism, rather than the *doctrine* of Communism that attracted her. She fell in love with the sheer joy of fraternity, the electric current that ran through the hopeful and hardworking Hollywood community. "I don't think there was ever a community like this, maybe Athens where intellectuals, creative people helped each other," Norma remarked. "And were excited about each other's projects and didn't expect anything for themselves. It was an atmosphere that we don't know about anymore."⁴⁸

The incendiary kinship nourished Norma's marriage to Ben, but soon after they were married tensions quickly arose. Norma was genetically allergic to housewifery; she came from a family of women who founded factories and were proud of the fact that they didn't know how to cook, but Ben was raised by a Russian-Jewish mother who waited on him hand and knee.⁴⁹ To escape the trap of a domestic life for which she had little patience or skill, she got a job — without any background experience — as the *Los Angeles Examiner's* first female reporter. "I write like a commando fights," Norma had said on her resume. She was hired on the spot.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Barzman, Norma. CSULB Human Rights Forum - Norma Barzman. Other, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gv7ywg1H0Q>.

⁴⁹ Barzman, Norma. *The Red and the Blacklist: the Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005. 24.

⁵⁰ Barzman, Norma. CSULB Human Rights Forum - Norma Barzman. Other, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gv7ywg1H0Q>.



Figure 3: *The commando at the LA Examiner.* Norma spent her bonus from Hearst on this plaid gingham suit. 1944.

To the dismay of her male colleagues, she flourished as a writer, gaining plaudits from not just the newspaper community, but from the owner, Mr. William Randolph Hearst himself, who personally gave Norma a bonus. Despite her quick success, however, anti-Communist sentiments were brewing — especially beneath Hearst’s anti-Communist eye. With a double revolver in his pocket, Hearst’s own private Communist investigator would survey her office daily and compiled a detailed report which claimed Norma and Ben were well known Communists in Hollywood. Norma’s bosses saw no place for her in the office, and, of course, they also needed an easy excuse to get the only female writer

fired. Despite demands for her termination, her editor, Jim Richardson, defended her to Hearst at the last minute. “If she goes, I go,” said Jim. Despite being anti-Communist himself, Hearst responded, “I don’t care if she is a Red. I don’t care *what* she is. I never fire a good reporter.”⁵¹ Norma was one of the few people whose talent saved her from the early blacklist. This was not normally the case, especially for a woman.

But, the writing she did at the newspaper didn’t satisfy her desires. As she continued at the *Los Angeles Examiner*, Norma proposed that she and Ben collaborate on a screenplay. A good-for-nothing husband and his wife get a divorce. Their nine-year-old daughter tries to make him jealous by sending a photo of her mother to a Marine overseas. He comes back, starts

⁵¹ Barzman, Norma. *The Red and the Blacklist: the Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*. New York, NY: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2005. 35.

helping around the house, taking care of the daughter, and falls in love with the wife. The movie would later become *Never Say Goodbye*, a 1946 film starring Errol Flynn. But, despite the fact that it was more Norma's story than Ben's, Warner Brothers stipulated that it would only buy the rights for the picture if Ben was the sole screenwriter. And Ben, more eager to get a job than to defend Norma, did nothing to protest this decision.⁵²

Discouraged, Norma stopped writing fiction. This would be one of the first screenplays for which she received no credit, despite her critical role in its development. She subsequently became pregnant. This would become a pattern in Norma's career; often, if she had hit an obstacle in her writing career or was suffering from a lack of creative inspiration, she would have a child. Her first was Luli Barzman. Norma never returned to the newspaper after her maternity leave, which, it should be noted, was the first maternity leave ever taken at the *Los Angeles Examiner*.

Facing writer's block and a general sense of creative stagnation, Norma gave birth to another child. Norma cites the suggestions of Soviet educator Makarenko as critically important to her family structure: having children close enough together in age to be friends, but far enough apart to foster a sense of responsibility and leadership for the older children.⁵³ Though deeply Communist in form, the reality of the Barzman marriage was much different. Ben demanded that she stay at home and raise the children as he went out to work, despite her own capacity for employment in a creative field.

Disappointed with the domestic expectations of her so-called "progressive" husband, Norma bolted to the home of Janet Stevenson, a fellow Communist writer. Norma proposed that she and Janet should collaborate on a screenplay called *With this Ring*. For Norma, it was a way

⁵² Ben, however, did not initially receive credit for the film due to early blacklist sentiments, but was given credit in the 1970s.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 73.

of working through her problems with her jealous and myopic husband, and even the Communist party. Though she believed in the Party, its androcentric atmosphere had severely injured her sense of individuality and stifled her own desires.

With this Ring is about a woman, her incompetent husband, and a car accident in the snow. She gets help from a driver, who takes her to the next town. “Now what I want to happen,” Norma explains to Janet, “is that during the next few days while the car is being fixed, the young man treats her as an equal, assumes she’ll help him with his work — I don’t know exactly what the work is — but something where she can be of real assistance.”⁵⁴ The man who helped her would be a politically progressive soil conservationist with FDR’s newly installed Department of Agriculture. She studies under him, learns the ropes of the work, and stays to work with him until her husband returns to her. By the time the husband shows up, she’s totally different.

Here, the plot thickens. Norma doesn’t just take the standard storyline approach of a woman discovering her autonomy and leaving her husband. It’s far more complex. The woman realizes that she has become exactly what the conservationist wanted her to be — a dutiful and impressionable student. Although her quiet domesticity has been replaced with competence in a particular professional field, she discovered and cultivated this competence under the gaze and directorship of her soil conservationist mentor. Still, she hasn’t realized her own desires as an autonomous woman. The movie ends with her decision to take time apart from these men and figure out for herself what she wants, on her own terms.⁵⁵

It’s a brilliant idea: a New Deal version of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*. And here, we see for the first time, Norma’s gift for storytelling in a feminist key. She is subtle, imbuing her

⁵⁴ Barzman, Norma. *The Red and the Blacklist: the Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005. 73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 73-75.

screenplay with her personal and political beliefs. Though explicitly feminist, the screenplay deals with the complexity of a female subjectivity shaped by male desire. It reveals how a competent woman, adept as she may be, has acquired her skill and technique as a man's apprentice. So, how can her technical knowledge be feminine? How can it be emancipatory when it comes from a man, precisely the source from whom she is seeking liberation?

When Norma and Janet met with Milton Sperling, in-law of the Warner brothers, he immediately wanted to buy it. But he saw a completely different story. The soil conservationist, "smacking too much of Roosevelt," according to Sperling, would have to become a ski-instructor.⁵⁶ The husband became a chivalrous knight, battling a snowstorm to rescue his wife. Norma and Janet wouldn't sell it. Emotionally bruised and pregnant, Norma began to see a psychoanalyst. Here's where her own story of female individuality begins.

VI. A Feminist, Freudian Film Noir Classic: *The Locket*

In January 1947, Norma and Ben went to see the 1942 rom-com, *Take a Letter, Darling*. Though under a different title, the screenwriters stole its plot right from one of Norma's own drafts, a screenplay entitled *Justice is a Lady*. Norma couldn't make sense of how her story, how her idea, had made it up onto the big screen. She eventually realized that Ben's agent, George Willner, had circulated Norma's screenplay around Hollywood without her consent or knowledge after she shared the idea at a dinner party. Despite the blatant plagiarism, there was nothing Norma could do to get credit. She couldn't sue, she couldn't complain. She couldn't even chastise George Willner on the phone, because he was Norma and Ben's only shot at employment. The film industry, at this point, seemed lethal. *Never Say Goodbye* was accredited to Ben. *With This Ring* was cruelly dismissed. *Justice is a Lady* was stolen. Caged in by industry

⁵⁶ Ibid. 78-79.

obstacles and disappointments, the pair were effectively paralyzed. Norma went to psychoanalysis.⁵⁷

As with *With this Ring*, the process that began Norma's creation of *The Locket* derived largely from Norma's concern about the status of her and Ben's marriage and her own psychological state. Prior to the movie, the pair had worked on an original screenplay, called *Lost Memory*, which didn't sell. Influenced by her experience in psychoanalysis, Norma wanted to demonstrate how relationships, specifically those between a man and a woman, are determined in part by events that happened during one's childhood.

Freudianism and Marxism were both popular ideologies among intellectuals, especially within the Jewish Hollywood community during the 1940s. But the Communist party—the CPUSA—had banned its members from attending psychoanalysis. Freud and Marx were regarded as antithetical. Freud was the investigator of the private domain, Marx of the public. The goal of Freudian analysis was quiescence and understanding, the goal of Marxism was revolution and insurrection. Norma's analyst, Dr. Isidore Ziferstein, explained that “there were ideological reasons for feeling that being psychoanalyzed was not the Marxist thing to do: you were subjecting yourself to the propaganda of the enemy. Psychoanalysis is basically the tool of the class enemy to justify the inequities of society by attributing them to flaws in personality rather than the system.”⁵⁸ The Party feared that the analysand would be analyzed out of his or her political convictions. Moreover, the requirement that the analysand must reveal everything to the analyst was seen as a potential security threat to Communist organizations. However, Freud could not be repressed after appearing on the scene, and, though his ideology might have been

⁵⁷ Ibid. 79-85

⁵⁸ Ibid. 86-87.

contradictory to Marx's, many Party members in Hollywood and other creative intellectuals were engaged with his theoretical framework.

After attending psychoanalysis, Norma began *What Nancy Wanted*, later renamed *The Locket*. The Freudian-Marxist film noir analyzes a class-induced trauma that lies at the knot of the main character's neurotic complex. At first, Norma hid her screenplay from Ben. The experience with *Never Say Goodbye* had proven that collaboration was ill-suited for Norma's goals. But at lunch with Ben's agent, future blacklistee Johnny Weber, Norma proposed her idea.

“I've been puttering around with a psychological thriller. A guy meets a girl in Acapulco. They don't know anything about each other. They fall in love. [...]They marry. When the bride brings her husband home, her mother looks at the two of them strangely. The heroine Nancy, is a little off. [...] I made Nancy a kleptomaniac. She's not aware that she steals. The husband returns the things she takes but her behavior threatens their marriage. He doesn't like the idea of psychoanalysis, but finally, in desperation, gets her to a shrink.’ Johnny grinned. ‘Psychoanalysis is ‘in.’ It wouldn't surprise me if the studios would go for something like that—’

‘In a succession of distorted flashbacks,’ I continued, ‘one within another—’ Ben's voice was stern. ‘Flashbacks should only be used to advance the story—’ ‘Not these,’ I interrupted. ‘They're how she remembers. A defense. The work of a sick mind.’ ‘Flashbacks,’ Ben said, ‘aren't—’ ‘Let her explore,’ Weber said. He looked from one to the other of us and laughed. ‘Why don't you two go home and work it out. Ben, ‘putter around’ with Norma, at least until I find you a job.’ ‘A gold antique locket,’ I said, ‘is the one tangible thing that finally convinces the husband that Nancy's delusions have a basis in reality.’ Ben looked at me squarely and then turned to Johnny. ‘Johnny,’ Ben said, ‘if Norma and I write this, and William Morris sells it, will you for Chrissake see to it the two of us have a job writing the screenplay together?’ I had a moment of elation.⁵⁹

At this point, Norma was extremely invested in the atmosphere of art, culture, and intellect in Los Angeles. It was July 1947, right before the HUAC trials began, and German-Jewish emigrés were making their way into the Hollywood scene. She remarks that “aside from the birth of our son John, the high point of 1947 was the gala premiere of Brecht's *Galileo*.”⁶⁰ It was the year of Norma's revitalization: not only was she actively writing, but she

⁵⁹ Ibid. 96.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 88.

found herself engaging in a thrilling intellectual and creative circle. Salka Viertel — one of the few other female Jewish screenwriters, Charlie Chaplin, Kurt Weill, Ingrid Bergman, Charles Boyer, John and Robbie Garfield, Jack Berry, Gene Kelly and the Barzmans gathered together on a hot LA night to watch one of the most highly anticipated performances of the decade, a performance that established the preeminence of German-Jewish emigrés in the Hollywood sphere. Despite not receiving initial credit for the film, Norma’s screenplay for *The Locket* would be picked up by John Brahm, a notable director among this circle of emigrés.⁶¹

Turner Classic Movies' resident film critic, Eddie Muller, also known as the “Czar of Noir,” asks of *The Locket*, “Did Nancy manipulate her return to the place where all of her troubles began, or is it merely a fateful coincidence? [...] What drives characters to their ruination? Twisted machinations of the human mind? Or the cruel vagaries of fate?”⁶² This ambiguity is a defining feature of film noir; a genre that problematized the analysis of diabolical behavior. Norma’s introduction to Freud, combined with her involvement in the Communist party and Marxist beliefs, contributed to her preparation for entry into the world of film noir and the cinematic interrogation of the sinister side of the humane experience. Additionally, her use of complicated, nested flashbacks contributes to *The Locket* as a pioneering noir film. Yet, though it conforms to the usual conceptions of film noir, *The Locket*, written by a Jewish female screenwriter, is unusual and innovative in its ambitious mode of storytelling and nuanced understanding of psychoanalytic technique. Enter *The Locket*: Norma’s self-described “childish attempt to reconcile Freud and Marx.”⁶³

⁶¹ Ibid. 88.

⁶² Muller, Eddie. “Eddie Muller's Intro to ‘The Locket’ (1946) on TCM Noir Alley.” YouTube. Carney Tynes, December 8, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdhcf4l-ErU>.

⁶³ Though the interview has since been taken off YouTube, Barzman very memorably said this with a laugh at a 2014 speech given at UCLA.

The story begins on the day before the wedding of the main character, Nancy. Nancy had two previous lovers before her present fiancé, John Willis: Dr. Harry Blair, a psychiatrist, and, before him, Norman Clyde, a painter. The plotline of the movie is driven by three layers of flashbacks: Dr. Blair's narration of his relationship with Nancy to John Willis; Norman Clyde's narration of his relationship with Nancy to Dr. Blair; and Nancy's narration of her childhood to Norman Clyde.

Willis is visited on the day before his wedding day to Nancy by Dr. Blair. Cue the first flashback, where Dr. Blair warns Willis not to trust the seemingly innocent and angelic Nancy. Dr. Blair recounts how he, too, fell for her charms, ignorant of the warning delivered by Norman Clyde, Nancy's ex-fiancé before Dr. Blair. Cue the second flashback, where Clyde recounts his own relationship with Nancy to Dr. Blair, trying to explain to Blair that Nancy was a murderer. At the beginning of Clyde and Nancy's relationship, Clyde found that Nancy had stolen a bracelet. Demanding an explanation, Nancy responds with an account of her traumatic childhood. Cue the third flashback. Nancy recalls being the child of a housekeeper for a wealthy family. She was traumatized by being falsely accused of stealing a locket from the child of the wealthy family by the matriarch of the house. Though she did not steal the locket, the matriarch fired Nancy's mother, sending her and Nancy into destitution.

Cue a return to the second flashback, Clyde's narration to Dr. Blair. Clyde pitied Nancy's story, and anonymously returned the stolen bracelet. However, when he and Nancy returned to the home from where the bracelet was stolen, Nancy was caught in the same room where a gunshot had gone off, murdering the host of the dinner party, Mr. Donner. The following day, a newspaper reported that the Lombard Diamond had been stolen from the very room where

Donner was killed. Clyde pushed Nancy to testify, as she had been in the upstairs when the murder had happened. But Nancy interpreted this as an accusation; furious, she fled from Norman's home to Miami, where she would meet and marry Dr. Blair.



Figure 4: Clyde's portrait of Nancy, left, as the mythical Cassandra.

Cue a return to the first layer of flashback, Dr. Blair's narration to Willis. Having heard Clyde's story, Dr. Blair, a psychiatrist, accused Clyde of being paranoid, jealous, and the fabricator of a nasty tale, believing Nancy's innocence. Clyde, unable to convince Blair of Nancy's past, kills himself by jumping out of Blair's window.

After Clyde's suicide, Nancy and Blair move to the English countryside to recuperate in the home of a wealthy family, but on the day of their departure from the rural mansion, their hosts report that a locket had gone missing. Later, Blair finds the missing locket and the Lombard Diamond in their apartment. Blair confronts Nancy, who lies to his face despite the evidence in his hand. He realizes that she is a schizophrenic, a realization that would cause Dr. Blair to lose his mind. Nancy commits him to a mental asylum.

Cue a return to the present moment. Willis doubts Blair's story, citing his years in the mental asylum as evidence of his insanity. Willis marries Nancy the next day. Right before Nancy is about to walk down the aisle, Willis's mother arrives to deliver a gift to Nancy. It is Karen's mother, the mother who wrongfully accused Nancy of stealing the locket in her

childhood. The gift is the locket, which had belonged to her dead daughter (Karen) and was a family heirloom. As she walks down the aisle, Nancy collapses. We never know if Willis stayed with Nancy, or if he just walked her out the door. The movie ends with John's mother closing the door.⁶⁴

VII. The Barzman Effect: Russian Doll? Or Human Mind?

In both structure and content, the movie is rigorously psychoanalytic. The story of Nancy's childhood trauma and subsequent crimes dredges the depths of our innermost mechanics: childhood trauma, the fated "lost object," its subsequent repression, and subsequent return, the blurred boundary of guilt and innocence, trust and deceit. Yet, what is remarkable about this film is not just the content, but the way the story is told. Can any narrative be trusted?

What sets *The Locket* apart from its contemporaries is the fact that it goes beyond questioning the clarity of the lines between victimizer and victim by explaining apparently immoral behavior through the lens of childhood trauma. Rather, it questions the *questioning* by asking, "How can we trust Blair's recounting of Clyde's recounting of Nancy's recounting of her childhood memory?" Operating on a representational level removed three times from the raw material of Nancy's childhood memory, the mode of explanation and rationalization becomes dubious.

Though used before in the 1944 war film *Passage to Marseille*, which delves two-layers deep into a flashback, the nested flashback technique of *The Locket* stands out for its extraordinary psychoanalytic content and form.⁶⁵ It is structured psychoanalytically in the most

⁶⁴ Barzman, Norma. *The Locket*. United States: RKO, 1946.

⁶⁵ Bordwell, David. "Chinese Boxes, Russian Dolls, and Hollywood Movies." Web log. *David Bordwell's Website on Cinema* (blog). David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson, June 6, 2011. <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2011/06/06/chinese-boxes-russian-dolls-and-hollywood-movies/>.

nuanced sense — one only needs to reference the literature that attempts to dissect Freud’s extremely complicated concept of *Vorstellungrepresentanz*, or the “representation-of-representation.” This concept, ignored until later psychoanalysts Jacques Lacan and Andre Green picked it up in the 1940s, delves deep into the untrustworthiness of any explanation, rationalization, or representation. These preeminent psychoanalysts ask the same question Norma asks in her screenplay: When all you are representing is another representation, how can you get to *the real thing*? How trustworthy can a person be when every story is but a fabrication? Is Nancy really the villain when both of her lovers — Dr. Blair and Norman Clyde — were equally insane?

Norma also offers insight into the mimetic nature of repetition-compulsion: not only did Nancy repeat her childhood trauma throughout her life, but traumatized her partners. She passes on her trauma to Norman Clyde — who was so afflicted he took the death drive to its absolute limit, killing himself in Dr. Blair’s office. And Nancy, by proxy of Clyde and vice versa, passed it right on to Dr. Blair, who was carted away to a mental asylum. We will never know the fate of John Willis; did he sentence himself by remaining with Nancy? Or did he break free of the accursed chain by ending things with her? By pointing out the mimetic tendency of repetition-compulsion, Barzman understands the bridge between self and sociality far beyond the simple Marxist-Freudian critique of society: our neurotic compulsions form the society that forms the neurotic compulsion.

Norma’s psychoanalytic skillset preceded the 1949-1953 trend of “pathological noir” films, characterized by intense “psychotic action and suicidal impulses.”⁶⁶ *The Locket* predates this trend by three years — five if you count its conception at Barzman’s screenwriting. It was

⁶⁶ Brook, Vincent. *Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. 145.

the final movie made by John Brahm in his own series of pathological noirs.⁶⁷In an “outbreak as intense as it is ephemeral,” Brahm produced four other psychoanalytic thrillers: *The Lodger*, 1944; *Guest in the House* (1944); *Hangover Square*, 1945; and *The Locket*, 1946.⁶⁸

VIII: The Barzmans and the Blacklist

The groundbreaking cinematic accomplishment of *The Locket* was eclipsed by the first subpoenas issued by HUAC. The following year, in 1947, newspaper headlines read: “*HUAC ISSUES SUBPOENAS TO 19! COMMITTEE WILL QUESTION THEM AS TO THEIR POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS!*”⁶⁹

Norma recounts a 1999 phone call with Academy Award winning screenwriter Abe Polonsky, “How could we have lived through eight months of the year without realizing what was happening? I couldn’t fathom it. We lived as if nothing were wrong until September, when the subpoenas arrived. ‘You were naive,’ Abe cried. ‘You were romantic! The way you always were about everything!’ He was screaming at me. ‘You only had to look. The signposts were everywhere.’”⁷⁰

Over the next few months, the blacklist burned through Hollywood. Sheriffs were monitoring Norma and Ben, their phones were tapped, and the studio heads were firing their friends and comrades in droves. But amidst all of the turmoil, Norma and Ben found work. Norma sold *The Locket* to RKO, but, of course, received no credit. Despite the turmoil raging amid their Hollywood community, Norma started working on another screenplay, *Amnesia*. It’s

⁶⁷ Ibid. 147.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 148-149.

⁶⁹ Barzman, Norma. *The Red and the Blacklist: the Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005. 91

⁷⁰ Ibid. 92.

another psychoanalytically informed drama-comedy about a man who falls out of a window, realizes he almost died, and abandons his suburban life, only to turn up years later in a northwestern state with the same exact life. It didn't sell, so she got to work on another original, *Young Woman with Ideas*, about her sister's experiences as a lawyer. Though Ben would later receive credit for the production of this movie, it didn't immediately sell. And of course, Norma didn't receive credit.

Norma was subject to her own blacklist because she was a woman in a male-dominated Hollywood. But, the anticommunist blacklist soon eclipsed her personal tribulations. Norma and Ben fled to England to escape the HUAC subpoenas, following their names being leaked by Edward Dymytryk, their close personal friend and FBI informer. Before they left, they visited Ben's mother. Mumma, as she was affectionately called, had fled to Canada when the Russian pogroms broke out. When Ben and Norma informed her of their emigration to Europe, she saw no difference between the Cossacks attacking Russian Jews and the federal agents attacking Hollywood Communists. "Your Cossacks, they're anti-Semitic?" she asked Ben. "It's not obvious," Ben replied. "Up-to-date Cossacks." Mumma nodded. "Too smart to be openly anti-Semitic. Smart Cossacks are the most dangerous." "Listen Mumma," Ben said. "These are United States congressmen." "Cossacks come in all shapes and forms," she replied. "Cossacks don't have to be on horses to be Cossacks."⁷¹

Her experience as an expatriate in Europe was difficult. Over the course of the next thirty years in France, especially in the early years, "there were times when [they] had to move every 3 or 4 months. I'm telling you this because the FBI, when I called for the FBI files, had addresses that we had been living at. [...] You can see there were about 15 places [...] it was many, many

⁷¹ Ibid. 112.

addresses. They tracked us.”⁷² Despite the more liberal — or less persecutory — regime in France, American officials were mandated in France to survey the blacklisted in exile, and ensure that no expatriate ever got too comfortable. She recalls, in 2012, “No matter how hard it is for a man to face exile, it is always doubly hard for the woman who must hold it all up and keep the ship from sinking. The wife, the mother who must also buoy up the spirits of a neurotic artist husband.”

Despite the tumult of exile, Ben and Norma established a production company of blacklisted expatriates, Riviera Films. There, Ben and Norma returned to an old project about a female student in an all-male Columbia Law School. Called *Young Woman with Ideas*, the story was based on Norma’s sister, the first woman to attend Columbia Law School. Norma was quickly invited to work on another project with fellow expatriate Bernard Vorhaus, called *Finishing School* (later retitled *Luxury Girls*). Norma never received credit, but at least this time it was because she was an expatriate Communist, not a woman.

Meanwhile, Ben took over the screenplay for *Young Woman with Ideas*. He had put his own spin on it: rather than basing the screenplay on a woman, struggling in an all male law school, he made it a story of a young man studying for the bar exam with a brilliant female law student. The young male student had problems with his wife, who was needlessly jealous of his female peers. It was renamed *Young Man with Ideas*. MGM paid Ben \$40,000 dollars for the screenplay; though Norma received credit for *Luxury Girls*, she was never paid.

Though Riviera Films, based out of Italy, offered a brief refuge from the woes of exile, Italy’s American ambassadors — Henry and Clare Booth Luce — were rabid right-wing anti-Communists eager to bring the blacklist to European soil. The Barzmans fled to Paris, but there, their passports were revoked upon arrival. The Barzman family was backed into a corner.

⁷² Ibid.

The U.S. government had ordered France to revoke their passports and only give them back if they were on a ship returning to the United States. But if they went to America, both would be called to trial, and at least one of them would be incarcerated. French authorities were expelling any emigrés with less than a day's notice. Neither Norma nor Ben nor any of their fellow expatriates had long-term residence permits, and the Barzmans' residency was set to expire in October of that year.

Without a solid European residence, the Barzmans, along with their community of exiles, devised a desperate plan to move to Israel. But even Israel wouldn't take them; the wealthy studio executives donated large sums of money to the young Israeli state, and the expatriation of Hollywood Reds to Israel would be a considerable offense to these benefactors. With rampant expulsions, the community of expatriates became closer than ever. But, despite the pressing threat, working in such close proximity to the community of exiles would prove very beneficial for Norma. At last, she was given writing assignments for television shows like *Adventures of Robin Hood*,⁷³ *Orient Express*, and *Foreign Intrigue*. And Norma, now a reputable screenwriter who had sold three screenplays to MGM, was more than included. With director Jack Berry (soon to be blacklisted), she rewrote the script for the film noir *He Ran All the Way*, the last film in which John Garfield, one of the major stars of the 1940s, appeared. Garfield died in 1952 of a heart attack at 39, under pressure to testify before HUAC.

The collective of writers became a localized Communist experiment. What they founded in Europe was not just a writers' collective, but a community structured around Communist

⁷³ Hannah Weinstein, fellow member of the Communist party, created *Adventures of Robin Hood* with the intention of providing employment to blacklisted exiles in Europe. *Robin Hood* "became an ideal cipher through which the Hollywood radicals could continue to express their views on social justice, while the prevalence of plots hinging upon threats of informing and betrayal likewise shows the mark of the HUAC investigations." Prime, Rebecca. *Hollywood Exiles in Europe The Blacklist and Cold War Film Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014. 21.

values. They lived within close proximity, and shared not only work, but their income. From each according to his (or her!) ability, to each according to his (or her!) needs. Each family would be allocated a certain amount of money, determined by a voting system in which each member would participate. And, most significantly, Norma was treated like an equal. She was writing and working with renowned directors and screenwriters, sharing her ideas in a place where they could be heard.

Ben, however, floundered beneath this Communist model — a testimony to the difficulties in realizing the Communist ideal. His hostility became more and more corrosive as factionalism emerged in differences over intellectual property, accreditation, and authorship. Quickly, the Barzmanns'



Figure 5: *Hollywood Expatriates*: [Left to Right] Adrian Scott, Norma, Jeanie Lees, Bobbie Lees, and Anne Shirley (Adrian's wife) on the floor.

relationship to the collective deteriorated. Ben claimed that he had a problem with sharing his money with other families, but Norma attributes his discomfort to her participation in the writer's work as an equal. Rather than contributing small quips at the dinner table, Norma was proving her capacity as an author, rather than some inert, domestic muse. Ben was jealous that she was working with other men, and excelling at it. She was regularly employed when he wasn't. She was working with his collaborators as he was working at home. And worst of all, the money that would be his was going to these men who were effectively stealing Norma away.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Barzman, Norma. *The Red and the Blacklist: the Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005. Chapter 21. "The Herring Barrel."

The collapse of Communism in the Barzman family resulted in Ben's demanding that Norma move the family from the "herring barrel" Paris collective. In the next decade, however, all Communists were forced to reorient and rethink their radicalism following Khrushchev's 1956 report on the hideous tragedies of Stalin's regime. Ben decided to work on a movie, *The Ceremony*, in order to reconcile his radical sympathies with the newfound conflicts about Communism and his guilty sense of privilege; Norma began working on a book called *Be Your Sylph*, a book on dieting, party culture, and having a woman's life outside of the family. Instead of reconciling with Communist failure, Norma decided to wrestle with the difficulties of accepting a high-calorie cocktail at a party. Her answer? Throw it in a potted plant when no one's looking.⁷⁵

The "sylph" is a flighty air spirit who serves as the mythical condensation of female vanity, emotionality, and charm. Of course, if a feminist like Norma was going to write a book about dieting and hospitality, it was going to be laden with irony. But, as her works so often are, it is indicative of her sense of self. Norma found joy in being a *chatelaine* of the social scene. She relished in her slim body and chic lifestyle, indulging in a newfound attention to her appearance, something that previously held very little importance for her. Though lightheaded — literally, from all of the dieting — she engaged shamelessly in the joys of being a pretty socialite.

But she no longer believed in herself as a writer, despite her accomplishments. The vapidness of her socialite status was becoming more and more apparent, to the point where she found herself particularly injured by Joe Losey's drunken attack, "You've sold out for a swimming pool with a pump that doesn't work! I used to think *you* were different. But you're no better — in your doll's house with a pool. You don't deserve to write. What would you write? It wouldn't be

⁷⁵ Ibid. 296. Chapter 23. "Be Your Sylph."

worth reading or seeing.” Her relationship with Ben was suffering. His work was his life and Norma was excluded from any intellectual work of her own. Though she wanted to write, there were other parts of her life, namely, her relationships, to which she felt compelled to tend.⁷⁶

So, in July of 1966, when the Barzmans were offered the opportunity to go to the Soviet Union, they jumped. Norma was thrilled to engage with her Communist commitments of her past, seeking out an intellectual re-awakening. Unfortunately, they were met with the stagnant remnants of Stalin’s regime. The people they met had “no curiosity about content, theory, technique,” just questions about how residuals worked, how the screenwriters got paid, how much they got paid.⁷⁷ The intellectual conditions were so bad that Ben attributed the cause of his heart attack, which came in October, to the dismal world of post-Stalinist Russia.⁷⁸

And then came May of 1968. She notes that “For Americans, May ‘68 was just a student revolt. [...] But it became a revolution of the whole of French society.” It also became a revolution for Norma. “May ‘68 waked me out of a twenty-year stupor. I slammed into activity, suddenly aware of the needs of our four young ones still at home.”⁷⁹ The walls of Paris were covered in posters bearing slogans like “Imagination Is King!” or “Demand the Impossible!” Twenty thousand students marched down the streets demanding the release of four students who had been arrested and singing the Internationale.

Following Ben’s recuperation and the thrill of May 1968 in Paris, Norma began to finally have the career she had worked for, with fewer diversions. She and Ben wrote a bestselling

⁷⁶ Ibid. 334-336.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 407-408.

⁷⁸ Barzman, Norma. CSULB Human Rights Forum - Norma Barzman. Other, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gv7ywg1H0Q>.

⁷⁹ Barzman, Norma. *The Red and the Blacklist: the Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005. 423.

novel, *Rich Dreams*, a satirical twist on the sex, drugs, and rock n' roll life of their friend, author Harold Robbins. Bookstores couldn't keep it in stock. Norma and Ben began collaborating on films and screenplays, few of which actually got produced. They returned to Hollywood, said goodbye to their life in France. And then, Ben's health began to fail.

For the next two decades, Norma turned her attention back to her family. Her and Ben lived a far more quiet life; their house in France was ransacked by burglars, so they did not return. They continued to write screenplays, one on May '68 that was "too American for France and too French for America."⁸⁰ They collaborated more on little projects, but both were kept busy by family duties and a return to the life that they had left behind thirty years earlier.

In 1989, Ben Barzman died. In an interview, later on, Norma reported that after Ben died, she blossomed. She returned to reporting, authoring an incredibly successful newspaper column on aging, called "The Best Years."⁸¹ And then she wrote her autobiography. Her work, her experience, the ambition that crystallized into an erratic but intermittently successful writing career, always had primary importance for her. Yet, the shine of her illustrious life, which had taken her from the Hollywood of the film noir era to the glittering capitals of Europe, had until now occluded the thoughtful and incredibly intelligent woman underneath.

But, despite the recent retrospective efforts in Norma's life which illuminated her rich — though largely uncredited — filmography, why was Norma unable to sustain a career as a writer, despite her talent, ambition, and industry connections?

On IMDb, Norma is accredited for the movies *The Locket*, *Never Say Goodbye*, and *Finishing School* and an Italian television series called *Il Triangolo Rosso*. On her Google page,

⁸⁰ Ibid. 429.

⁸¹ Ibid. 436

she is credited as the author of *The Red and the Blacklist*, *Rich Dreams*, and *The End of Romance*. She has elsewhere received acclaim for her work at the *Los Angeles Examiner*, both in her early career and her mature return to the paper with the column “The Best Years.” Though this is already a sizable legacy, there is so much that remains absent from her officially recorded filmography and bibliography. Moreover, for decades, Norma received no credit for these films; it would take decades for her to get any credit at all.⁸²

Her collaborative work on television shows like *Orient Express*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *Foreign Intrigue* has gone unrecognized, as have her collaborative efforts with Jack Berry on *He Ran All the Way*, Lee Gold on *International Airport*, and Joe Losey on *Chance Meeting*. And then there are her screenplays and storylines that went unpublished or unfinished: *Once Upon a Timeclock*, *Amnesia*, *Justice is a Lady*, *With this Ring*, and *Young Woman with Ideas*.⁸³

It isn't just a tragedy for Norma that these films didn't get produced; it's a loss for feminist cinematic history and female audiences in general. Within Norma's movies are two common themes: a well-informed interest in psychoanalysis and the operations of the human mind and a strong yet deeply introspective sense of feminism. Had Norma the opportunity to produce *Justice is a Lady*, *Once Upon a Timeclock*, *Amnesia*, *Young Woman with Ideas*, and *With this Ring*, one of the most respectable filmographies of psychoanalytic, feminist works would be accredited to Norma Barzman.

Moreover, Norma's decades-long writer's block that followed these films is an extension of this unfortunate shortcoming. Why was Norma unable to sustain her career as a writer, despite

⁸² Barzman, Norma. CSULB Human Rights Forum - Norma Barzman. Other, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gv7ywg1H0Q>.

⁸³ Barzman, Norma. *The Red and the Blacklist: the Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005.

her obvious talent, drive, and wide-ranging film industry connections? She began her career burning with ambition, creativity, an unwavering belief in herself, and, most importantly, the capacity and desire to commit herself to work. She had all of the qualities of a good writer. So, what stopped her from *being* a writer at all?

An analysis of Norma's life provides lived evidence of the still insuperable obstacles faced by female writers. There is no doubt that her position as a woman — and all the baggage adjacent to that position — complicated her ability to write. Furthermore, she was a blacklisted screenwriter, effectively barred from an accredited career, at least during the 20th century. Norma faced, on two sides, a double marginalization that prevented her from realizing her full potential as an artist.

Her memoir details a problematic story painfully familiar to all women with ideas, a story that details the pitfalls of having desires and responsibilities that come into conflict with a career that demands *all* of one's attention. In a way, this is a problem particular to many women. The obligations to which a woman must commit herself to are multidirectional: she is tasked with the domestic responsibility of being a mother, wife, and housekeeper; the social responsibility of being a supportive partner, a beautiful fantasy-girl, and an organized *chatelaine* — in addition to the personal responsibility of following her ambition and goals. These obligations were explicit demands made of American women during the early to middle of the 20th century.

So, when a creative job in the film industry is the goal at hand, things get complicated. The film industry is one of the few places in the economic sector that lucratively rewards artistic creativity. In exchange, it demands total rigor, total attention, and total drive. There is a certain myopia that is essential to success in this field; likewise, there is a certain myopia essential to being a good wife. Norma's autobiography seems to illuminate an experience in which both

domestic duties and creative work can very easily demand an inexorable unidirectionality, a labor of love, an either-or position. To be a good wife and mother you must not have a career, to have a career you must not be a good wife and mother. Despite the draconian inflexibility of this chiasmus, this continues to be the case.

While the HUAC trials and the national drama of the blacklist solidified anticommunism as America's first vendetta, the first American blacklist was waged against women. Norma exemplifies this. How is a woman expected to pursue individual ambition when it causes such jealousy in her male partner, around whom she has built a life and with whom she has built a family? How does she mitigate the very real sensitivity and empathy she feels, when this sensitivity is directly antagonistic to her drive and ambition? How does she claim agency as an individual when this would cause her to abandon her family, rendering her alone and guilty; but, on the other hand, how does she provide the emotional support for this family while maintaining her own ambition? It's an irresolvable contradiction.

Without necessarily taking full responsibility, without deferring the fault to Ben, and without blaming a rather misogynistic industry, Norma points out this general trend that — despite the feminist advances in the past half century — women are, for whatever reason, unable to flourish on an equal basis with men in Hollywood. Her answer, however, resonates with optimism. In a talk she gave at UCLA after the publication of *The Red and the Blacklist*, she responds to her interlocutor, who asks her if Ben played a role in her barren period. “There were plenty of things that Ben did; he didn't stand up for me with *Never Say Goodbye* — [...] and I didn't stand up for myself.”⁸⁴ She then cites a statistic published in the *LA Times* that says only

⁸⁴ Barzman, Norma. CSULB Human Rights Forum - Norma Barzman. Other, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gv7ywg1H0Q>.

21% of directors are women. “We have come a long way, but we also haven’t come a long way,” she remarks.⁸⁵

In the book, Norma tells the story of a different kind of blacklist. She forthrightly admits her complicity, before ever even listing any other contingent factors. “I blacklisted myself,” she says. “It wasn’t the children. [...] I had a lot of little children in the first five years in France when I was writing television like mad and wrote a film and worked. [And] I seemed to always be entertaining, our house was 10 minutes from the Cannes Film Festival and became the center of international film folk, but that doesn’t explain anything either.”⁸⁶ Norma is forthright about her own capacity to prohibit herself from enjoying the same career as her husband and the men in her life; but she does not regret anything. Rather, the varied experiences of her life — rather than the unidirectionality demanded by her husband — offered richer experiences.

As Norma says, “Perhaps it’s harder for a woman to have a successful career, but easier for her to have a fulfilling life. Perhaps the important skills are the ability to adapt and not be too fixed on a single goal.”⁸⁷ In any case, Norma Barzman’s career ended with the vindication of her widely admired autobiography, certainly one of the best memoirs of the blacklist era. Having been exiled from Hollywood, and having struggled to sustain her creativity in Europe, she had, during the ninth decade of life, triumphantly recovered her voice.

Conclusion

Norma Barzman, still alive at 102 years today, is living proof against the repression inflicted by the blacklist. Like so many other screenwriters who were displaced due to their Communist affiliations, Norma emerged triumphant with a second act. While other screenwriters

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

returned to Hollywood in the late 1960s and 1970s, Norma returned with an autobiography. Though numerous memoirs have emerged from the blacklist era, Norma's story stands out. It is one of the few autobiographies from this era written by a woman.⁸⁸ She demonstrates with grace, wit, and optimism how an artist can persevere towards triumph in spite of — or perhaps because of — their persecution and marginalization.

Having endured a witch-hunt that chased her into Europe, Norma was able to emerge victorious with a very satisfying and rewarding form of revenge: having the last word. Despite the powerful positions they wielded during the 1940s and 1950s, no one really remembers the lives of the members of the HUAC committee. Instead, we have powerful testimonies to the trials of the blacklist era, and, through the genre of the memoir, powerful examples of the writer's recovery of his or her voice after a period of enforced censorship.

The irony, however, is delivered in the fact that, in the same motion that America claims to defend its constitutional freedom, America enforces a mass suppression of the creative voice. The Jewish voice specifically has been repeatedly forced to defend itself. While the HUAC was not overtly anti-Semitic, the overrepresentation of the Jewish artists and writers on the blacklist is a cause for suspicion. It was not merely a conflation of "Jewish causes" with "pro-Communism" and "un-Americanism." Though the "Jewish-Bolshevik" accusatory narrative often deployed against Jewish Americans was certainly an element of HUAC's regime, the blacklist gained traction in the tension between assimilated, Jewish studio executives and their Communist and Jewish employees. Furthermore, it was a mode in which financially burdened studios in Hollywood, authorized by Congressional authority, could circumvent labor regulations and dismiss employees against the precedents of the labor unions and guilds.

⁸⁸ Other autobiographies include Vera Casper's *The Secrets of Grown-Ups* (1979) and Ruth Gordon's *Myself Among Others* (1971).

That being said, though the blacklist was perhaps one of the more nefarious domestic developments of postwar American politics, it was not ultimately successful. The indelible mark that film noir made on cinema history is made evident in the cult following and prestige it maintains today, a testimony to the success of German Jewish emigrés and Communist or left-leaning artists. Though HUAC attempted to suppress these artists' voices by depriving them of a livelihood, income, and a sense of normal life, it could not take away the artist's resilient capacity to turn catastrophe into art.

The blacklist era is another iteration of a common theme in Jewish history — a history of survival in oppression, success in marginalization, and intellectual triumph in the face of persecution. However, the blacklist era is an important aspect of American history, as well; it is a reminder that, even in a country that constitutionally boasts the protection of free speech, suppression and enforced silence are commonly deployed tactics to attempt to preserve that so-called freedom.

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Figure 1: *The Hollywood Ten*. Photograph. *Brandeis NOW*. Washington D.C. : Brandeis University, July 8, 2018. Public Domain.
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Figure 2: Barzman, Norma. *The Red and the Blacklist: the Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 200.

Figure 3: Barzman, Norma. *The Red and the Blacklist: the Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 200.

Figure 4: Still from Barzman, Norma. *The Locket*. United States: RKO, 1946. (19:19).

Figure 5: Barzman, Norma. *The Red and the Blacklist: the Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 204.