Arthur Miller: Marilyn Monroe & McCarthyism

In 1956, Miller divorced the mother of his two children, Mary Slattery, and married Marilyn Monroe.

As crummy as that is, how many people can say that their spouse left them for *Marilyn Monroe*? That's a dinner party story if we've ever heard one.

The marriage thrust Miller into the public eye. Monroe was one of the most famous actresses in America and her love life was tabloid fodder. Shortly after their marriage, Miller was called before HUAC, an event that could've ruined both his and Monroe's careers.

Members of the entertainment industry had behaved in strikingly different ways when called to testify before the committee. Some refused to answer questions and were blacklisted. Others, like Walt Disney, complied and named others they suspected of Communist leanings.

Rumor has it he threw Goofy under the bus.

Miller was adamantly opposed to the hearings and appalled by those who cooperated. In 1952, his Marilyn-dumping friend (and former Communist) Elia Kazan named eight other artists to the committee. The two did not speak for a decade, and their friendship never fully recovered.

For any interested parties, you can actually watch the Miller-Kazan feud play out on the big screen. Before their break over HUAC, the two planned to collaborate on a film whose working title was *The Hook*. Kazan would direct, Miller would write the screenplay, and together they would produce a film that exposed corruption among the organized labor on Brooklyn's docks.[8](https://www.shmoop.com/arthur-miller/citations.html#8) HUAC, however, had different ideas.

The committee pressured Columbia Pictures to change the film's villains from union bosses to pirate zombies.

...Just checking to see if you're actually reading. They actually pressured them to change the villains to communists.

What a surprise.

An outraged Miller quit the film, but neither man dropped the project—Miller took the idea and wrote 1955 play [*A View from the Bridge*](https://www.shmoop.com/view-from-the-bridge/), and Kazan made the classic 1954 film *On the Waterfront*.

Almost unbelievably, HUAC chairman Francis Walter privately offered to let Miller off if he agreed to have his famous wife pose with Walter for a campaign poster. Miller refused.

We kinda wish Marilyn had done it, just so she could've clocked Walter right in the kisser.

The committee questioned Miller about his supposed communist leanings and probed him for the names of other communists. Despite the pressure, Miller refused to name names. For his stubbornness, he was convicted of contempt of Congress in 1957. "I don't believe that a man has to become an informer in order to practice his profession freely in the United States,"[9](https://www.shmoop.com/arthur-miller/citations.html#9) Miller told reporters after the verdict. The following year, his conviction was overturned on appeal.

Though Marilyn Monroe stood by Miller during the scandal, her marriage to the playwright didn't last.

Wow. A Hollywood marriage that didn't last? Never saw that coming.

In 1960, the couple collaborated on a film called *The Misfits*, with Miller as screenwriter and Monroe as the star. Filming in the sweltering Nevada desert was riddled with problems, including Monroe's increasing dependency on drugs. The film premiered in 1961 and the couple divorced soon after. Monroe later said of Miller, "I think he's a better writer than a husband."[10](https://www.shmoop.com/arthur-miller/citations.html#10)

We bet another one of Miller's ex-wives would drink to that.

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