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**McCarthyism and Red Scare as Portrayed in  
*Trumbo* (2015)**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for a **Master's degree in Literature and Civilization**

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## ABSTRACT

The present research study aims to provide a comprehensive cinematic examination of Jay Roach's film *Trumbo* (2015) and its portrayal of the Blacklist era in Hollywood; through mainly centring on the film's portrayal of the personal and professional struggles faced by Dalton Trumbo, a prominent screenwriter during the Red Scare. With the unfolding events of the Cold War and the rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy; along with his McCarthyism, rampant and resentful anti-communist sentiments soon gripped the American population, letting thus ground to intense fear and hysteria. This being said, by analysing the movie within its historical context, this research shed light on the period's significance and its impact on the film industry and American society, so that the film's historical context was achieved, and its authenticity was measured. The study undertook a thorough film analysis, incorporating a contextual, thematic, narrative structure, poster, as well as *mise-en-scène* analyses. As a result, the study, through aligning with selected ideas of historian Robert Rosentone, who advocates the use of films in telling history, comes to determine the faithfulness and authenticity of the film, which makes it thus a reliable historical source.

Key Words: Anti-communist, Cold War, Dalton Trumbo, Hollywood, Joseph McCarthy, Red Scare, McCarthyism.

## **DEDICATION**

This study is lovingly dedicated, first, to my parents Karim and Nabila Brahimi, and my little brother Ghiles, whom I profoundly cherish and praise. They have been my constant source of inspiration and have given me the drive and discipline to tackle this task with enthusiasm and determination.

I also dedicate this work to Sabrina Bourai who provided me assistance and guidance during all the period of my studies.

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## **Film Terminology**

**Close-up/close shot:** a detailed view of a person or thing, typically with little background information. A filmmaker may use it in order to accentuate a gesture or facial expression while also drawing attention on a specific intended thing.

**Cross-cut:** editing that switches between shots taken concurrently in two or more different locations.

**Diegetic sound:** Any sound that a character in the film can possibly hear, such as when they talk or cough; this category covers background noise, traffic, and character conversation. Nearly the same thing is heard by both the viewers and the characters.

**Dissolve:** Similar to a fade, it is when an image slowly begins to fade away before being replaced by another image slowly fading in.

**Eye level shot:** An eye level shot is one in which the camera is positioned such that it is level with the characters' eyes. In order for a shot to be termed eye level, the actor does not have to look directly into the camera or for the audience to be able to see the actor's eyes. Eye level images mimic standard human vision.

**High-key lighting:** this type of lighting uses bright, often white backgrounds and produces images with little accentuation on shadows, contrast and dark tones.

**Long shot:** a view of a scene that is shot from a considerable distance, as the object/person on the screen appears small.

**Low angle/low-angle shot:** the camera is below the subject.

**Low-key lighting:** a type of lighting style that tends to accentuate shadows, high contrast, and dark tones.

**Medium close-up shot:** the shot frames the subject from just above their head down to approximately midway down their torso. The purpose of a medium close-up shot is to keep

some of the backdrop while yet allowing you to clearly see the actor's emotions and facial expressions.

**Medium shot:** believed to be the most typical and realistic of the three shots, it arguably falls somewhere between a long and a close picture. The medium shot, in contrast to the two others, may not often convey much in the way of cinematic effect; it is best described as a type of “neutral shot”.

**Nondiegetic sound:** any sound that is not a part of the film's surroundings and is just meant for the audience.

**Shot:** It refers how the object will be positioned within the shot, or how much of the frame of the movie screen the object will occupy.

**Slight low angle shot:** a camera angle in which the camera is positioned slightly below the subject's eye level.

**Voice-over:** it is a dialogue, typically narration that is delivered by a character, narrator, or off-screen voice. It is an illustration of non-diegetic sound, which the audience can hear but not the movie characters.

**Zoom:** The focal length of the lens varies when the camera zooms, giving the impression that the object is moving closer to or further away from the camera.

## **List of Abbreviations**

**CFA:** Committee for the First Amendment.

**FBI:** Federal Bureau of Investigation.

**FRG:** The Federal Republic of Germany.

**GDR:** The German Democratic Republic.

**HUAC:** The House Un-American Activities Committee.

**MGM:** Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

**MPA:** Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals.

**NATO:** The North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

**RKO:** Radio-Keith-Orpheum.

**SPSI:** Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.

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## **General Introduction**

Less than a year after WWII, the world had seemingly more surprises in store. When erstwhile allied United States and Soviet Union rose to prominence as the two surviving superpowers of the post-war world, tensions between the two were inescapable, for indeed years of mutual distrust could not be eliminated by the WWII convenience alliance. Engulfed in hankering and greediness, each engaged in a Cold War that would end up designating the power that would reign over the world. In fact, lasting more than four decades, the Cold War was a long period of tension between the democracies of the Western World and the Communist countries of Eastern Europe. As expected, the West was led by the United States and the East by the Soviet Union. Despite not being a direct armed confrontation, their long-lasting, convoluted rivalry nonetheless bent the world to its whims. In fact, the superpowers rather waged in what is known as a proxy war; wars featuring other countries, each of which is militarily or financially assisted by a different superpower; just like the Korean conflict, the Vietnam War, or the Cuban missile crisis, along with others.

Communism, launching from Lenin's October Revolution and spreading to China with Mao Zedong's rise to power and to Cuba, with Fidel Castro's takeover, Communism saw a symbolic rise throughout time. Under Stalin's leadership, soon after WWII, Communist regimes were installed in Eastern Europe, and Soviet-occupied East Germany, and continued to spread its wings across the world; which made it thus an immediate threat to the Western bloc. This being said, belligerent anti-Soviet sentiments soon gripped the American government and the American population. In such atmosphere, Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin engaged in a demagogic approach which eventually brought considerable hysteria and agitation within the American society. The demagogue, in an effort to demonstrate alleged Communist infiltration in various areas of the American government, he initiated a slew of investigations and hearings in the 1950s. Despite his incapability of presenting a

plausible argument against anybody, his flamboyant and skilfully presented complaints led to the dismissal and condemnation of people.

One of the areas that have been poignantly affected by McCarthy's sharp allegations is none other than the motion picture industry. In an attempt to raze Reds in Hollywood, The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), an investigative committee of the U.S. House of Representatives, designated ten suspected screenwriters and directors. What will later be known as the Hollywood Ten, end up heavily indicted, to the extent of receiving prison sentences and being disallowed from working for any major Hollywood companies. Among the Ten is Dalton Trumbo, the highest paid screenwriter of his times, who despite the blacklist fought for his freedom of expression, and desperately upheld his position.

## **2. Background of the Study**

The academic field of Film Studies addresses multiple theoretical, historical, and critical approaches to films. Its primary objective resides in exploring the narrative, artistic, cultural, economic, and political implications of cinema. In fact, the study of film has become increasingly popular since the development of film as a medium of entertainment and communication in the late 19th century. On account of this, films can constitute an effective and powerful tool for comprehending history. They are capable of providing a visual portrayal of historical events, enabling viewers to interact with the past in a manner that is very proper and unique to them; compared to other media. Being a form of storytelling, it bears the power of shaping perceptions and building understanding of the world around us. Besides, when it comes to politics, films are used to disseminate political concepts and ideologies, increase the public's awareness of social and political concerns, as well as shape public opinion.

## **3. The Review of Literature**

Tensions between the victorious nations of WWII rose shortly after, thus leaving place to nearly two perilous decades that governed the fears of mankind, and would have, at some

point, wiped out the planet. In “The Cold War and the International History of the Twentieth Century”(2012) , Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler, state that by examining the multiple contexts of the Cold War, we can better grasp its long-term causes, outcomes, and consequences. They contextualize the position of historians that attempted to define and situate Cold War. For instance, they explain that the term Cold War was primarily used by American Historians who claimed that the West—primarily the United States and Britain—was perceived as protecting itself and the principles it upheld while the Soviet Union conducted a cold war against it. In other words, the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and the oppressive Communist regime he had established imposed the Cold War on the rest of the globe (3). Following its expansion in the 1960’s to Third World countries, radical historians in the West found a larger audience for their criticism of the US engagement in the battle as a result of the Cold War's spread to the Third World in the 1960s, particularly as a result of the American defeat in Vietnam these critics asserted that the United States, had at least as much to do with the beginning and ongoing of the Cold War as the Soviet Union. Some of them believed that the American government's objectives were driven by the country's economic requirements as the “global capitalist superpower”. Others maintained that Vietnam demonstrated that the United States was just not fit to work for change overseas and that it should instead have focused on advancing a progressive political agenda at home to address discrimination against people of different races, genders, educational backgrounds, and economic levels (Westad and Leffler 4).

Cold War era witnessed the rise of a manifold of political figures who each stood for something specific and played a significant role in shaping the socio-political landscape. It is no wonder that one of the most influential figures of the time is none other than Joseph McCarthy. Though McCarthy’s accusations against government officials lacked evidence, his legacy proceeded to influence American politics for many years, so that fears over

Communist infiltration continued to persist. In fact, McCarthy was solely the tip of the iceberg, and the one put forward. As left-wing historian Howard Zinn declares in his book *A People's History of the United States* (2003), McCarthy's unwillingness to testify before a Senate Subcommittee on Privileges and Elections and his verbal abuse of an army general during his hearings were the only minor issues that the censure resolution focused on; it avoided addressing his anti-Communist falsehoods and exaggerations. In fact, the author declares that Government liberals were themselves excluding, persecuting, firing, and even imprisoning Communists. McCarthy just went too far, targeting liberals as well as Communists (Zinn).

Politically and socially, the Red Scare had an extensive and impactful effect on American nation. Maximiliano E. Korstanje in his "Constructing an American Fear Culture from Red Scare to terrorism" (2013) tracks the development of political scares, from red scares to terrorism starting in the late 19th century, so that the concern with terrorism is demonstrated to be an offshoot and offspring of previous, anti-communist hysteria in the USA. He admits that "[B]oth the post-war red scare and the terrorism scare campaigns recognised the central role of driving popular fears to make the masses do, or not do, what the elite desired" (7). Both of them profited from having the key to influence "public consciousness". This crucial tactic is based on two behavioural patterns: fear both motivates and directs action. Korstanje explains that what distinguishes these moments from earlier periods of fear is their construction of a "fear culture" (8).

The story of the Hollywood Ten and other victims of the Red Scare in the motion picture industry remains a crucial part of Hollywood's history. With films as propaganda, many cinematic productions of the period reflected the political climate of the time, with themes of anti-communism and patriotism being prominent, and Communism being portrayed as an evil force that threatened the American way of life. In her thesis "Anti-communist

politics of the Second Red Scare and how it affected Hollywood and the types of movies being made” (2021), Maddy Everson focuses on whether movies had either overt or covert anti-communist themes. Besides, the author looks for films from this era to learn more about the themes they attempted to convey. This being said, the author explains that The United States’ government was never in a position to impose restrictions on the kind of movies that may be distributed. Their claim of “free media” had to be maintained. However, the government used the distinction between “us” and “them” as a potent tool to exert pressure on filmmakers (qtd.in Everson 4). Everson further believes that *Walk East on Beacon* (1952) can be safely categorized as propaganda. Supporting the FBI, the film recounts a federal agent who uncovers communist subversion by tracking down nuclear secrets that were revealed to have been leaked. This being, Pro-FBI themes were present in the film, which sought to convince viewers that the FBI was there to safeguard them (5).

Speaking of the role of film, apart from the standard idea of them as mere means of entertainment, they can serve as a platform for highlighting societal problems and issues. In addition to this, they can be an appealing means of engaging, telling and shaping our understanding of the past. Paul B. Weinstein in his 2001 “Movies as the Gateway to History: The History and Film Project” explains his interest to adopt film in the classroom. With the innovations of our times, the author declares that “[W]e should acknowledge film and television as the great history educators of our time.” (27). In fact, constraints do exist. The historical accuracy of movies intended for mass consumption and commercial release is not required. Facts can be misrepresented, timeframes can be mixed up, and conclusions can be changed to satisfy the audience, in the movie industry, profitability is more important than accuracy. In spite of this, the author reveals that these drawbacks can be turned to advantages when teachers and students use film as a “gateway to history.” (28).

The productions of a number of films about the infamous Hollywood blacklist; Concerning *Trumbo*, this serves as a potent visual representation of the post-war red fear and the blacklisting's injustice. In the *Hollywood Reporter*, Gary Baum writes that “[O]f all the writers blacklisted in Hollywood during the 1940s and 1950s, Trumbo, the long-uncredited author of such Oscar-winning classics as *The Brave One* and *Roman Holiday*, is the most famous and revered. [A]t any rate, he’s the one big enough to get his own biopic, even if it did take more than 50 years to bring his story to the screen”(Baum).

#### **4. Thesis Statement**

The dissertation holds for main topic the historical periods of Red Scare and McCarthyism in Hollywood as portrayed in the film *Trumbo* (2015). Through an overall filmic analysis of *Trumbo*, that includes a thematic, poster, narrative structure and *mise-en-scène* analyses. And, through determining the film's portrayal of the Red Scare and McCarthyism, and incorporating selected ideas of historian Robert Rosenstone, the central argument revolves around evaluating the film's faithfulness compared to actual historical events and the nuanced nature of the era, taking into account Rosenstone's concepts and perspectives.

#### **5. Research Question**

The present research paper will try to find the answers to the following questions:

1. To which extent does *Trumbo* portray the period of McCarthyism and the Red Scare?

#### **6. Contribution of the Research**

We hope, through this dissertation, enable the students of the department to be more acquainted with Film Studies and ultimately enrich the library of the faculty with an additional contribution.

#### **7. Research Method and Material**

In order to achieve the objectives of this research work, an analysis of the movie *Trumbo* will be carried out in order to determine the historical context hovering over it. The movie's study will be conducted by shedding light on the arguments of Robert Rosentone, who adheres to the integration of film to engage with history.

## **8. Limitation of Research**

The theme of the research is believed to be interesting, and rich in terms of information. However, the allotted page number hinders an in-depth extensive study.

## **9. Structure of the Research Paper**

To find answers to the research question, this dissertation entitled “McCarthyism and Red Scare as Portrayed in *Trumbo* (2015)” will be dealt with in two chapters. In the first chapter, we will first provide an account of the Cold War during its early beginnings and the major events that overwhelmed the United States and the USSR. In addition to this, an in-depth understanding of McCarthyism, and the Red Scare will be provided. After that, lines will be dedicated to Hollywood’s intervention and involvement into the atmosphere in attempt of silencing Reds from its industry, through centring on the Hollywood Ten and Dalton Trumbo. As regards the second chapter, we will be dedicating its lines to selected ideas of the historian Robert Rosenstone considering the integration of films in telling history. After that, an overall filmic analysis of *Trumbo* will be furnished, involving, a contextual, thematic, poster, narrative, and *mise-en-scène* analyses.

## **Chapter I: Cold War: An Event with Tremendous Impacts**

### **1. Introduction**

The Cold War was undoubtedly a crucial part of the world modern history as it impacted nations' politics, economy, and arts. It partitioned the world into rival camps, influenced economic policies, and affected creative expression. Domestically, the United States, following its engagement in an ideological conflict with the Soviet Union over Communist expansion, witnessed a pervasive climate of fear and suspicion, with the government putting emphasis on the threat Communism could constitute.

With that being considered, the present chapter examines the major happenings of Cold War during its beginnings. In addition to this, it provides an insight of Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose crusades against alleged communist sympathizers led to investigations, blacklists, as well as infringement of civil liberties. Furthermore, particular attention is also given to the intense anti-communist hysteria that affected the centre of the American film industry, Hollywood, coming thus under scrutiny, and sheds light on the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which eventually began investigating alleged Communist infiltration in the entertainment industry and called actors, directors, and screenwriters to the stand, in order to reveal their Communist affiliations. Moreover, the chapter delves into the injustice of The Hollywood Ten, and mostly Dalton Trumbo, a prominent screenwriter who, refusing to cooperate and naming names, was subsequently held in contempt of Congress, sentenced to jail and blacklisted from the industry.

### **2. An Account of the Cold War During its Beginnings**

The three great Allied Powers of WWII—Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union— substantiated their respective powers through forging a grand alliance that assured victory. Succeeding the Yalta Conference of February 1945, Churchill, Stalin, and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt convened a meeting following Germany's capitulation

on May, 8, 1945 to settle the post-war borders in Europe. Accordingly, the Allied leaders decided to meet in Potsdam during the summer to pursue the deliberations that had started at Yalta (Office Historian). However, in April 1945, Franklin Roosevelt died suddenly, significantly altering the political landscape. Though nothing truly predestined him to acquire such position during unsettled times, Harry Truman, within three hours of Roosevelt's death, officially becomes the 33<sup>rd</sup> president of United States ( Lançon 1:22) . In fact, during the short period he served as vice-president, Truman seldom encountered Roosevelt and received no briefing on the progress of the atomic bomb or the impending tensions with Soviet Russia, and, it is judicious to mention that, it was no secret that Truman was not truly prepared to such unanticipated announcement for he clearly told reporters that "I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me."(White House). However, despite Truman 's unreadiness, he successfully challenged the stereotypes and presided over some of history's most significant judgments so that his policy certainly established some of the basic principles and commitments that marked American foreign policy for the remainder of the twentieth century.

At the second day of the Potsdam conference's negotiations, the American delegation welcomed the agreeable news considering the Manhattan project (the project designates the code name for the World War II project undertaken by the United States to develop an operational atomic bomb),stating that "little boy" is a great success (Lançon 11:38). As might be expected, the "Little Boy" in question designates the atomic bomb; a brand-new lethal weaponry which would eventually culminate US sovereignty, and thus put the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic in a pronounced disequilibrium. But the truth is that, despite the drastic measures of protection and confidentiality undertaken by US government, Stalin, was cognizant of the matter. In fact, the Soviets were enough qualified to permit the infiltration of

spies on The Los Alamos base, where the Manhattan Project was being elaborated (Lançon 13:29).

Cold War had long roots. The World War II alliance was surely not sufficient to efface decades of mutual suspicions; for in fact, the single factor that united the United States with the Soviets was their shared enemy; Nazi Germany, and without that common enemy there was little chance for collaboration. During World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution toppled the Russian tsarists. In attempt to drive out the Bolsheviks, the United States, as a reaction to the 1917 Russian Revolution, took part in the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War with the World War I Allies rooting for the White movement. Succeeding the foundation of the Soviet Union, President Woodrow Wilson preferred to deny its recognition, for in fact, following the October Revolution; the Bolshevik government confiscated American property in Russia, disregarded previous treaty commitments with other countries, and refused to pay back obligations to the United States accumulated by the Tsarist regime. Wilson's successors upheld his policy of not recognizing the Soviet Union, up until Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, who ended almost 16 years of American non-recognition of the Soviet Union after striking a bargain with the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Maxim Litvinov (Office Historian).

In fact, many officials on both sides were persuaded that shortly after the war, Soviet-American relations would leave ground to severe antagonism, and, it is no surprise that the upcoming events would come to establish evidence. In July 1947, George Frost Kennan, US Ambassador to Moscow, published a scathing critique of Soviet foreign policy and diplomatic practices under an assumed identity in the US journal Foreign Affairs. Kennan declares that "It is clear that the United States cannot expect in the foreseeable future to enjoy political intimacy with the Soviet regime", because for Kennan, U.S must maintain a firm view of the Soviet Union, seeing it as a "rival" rather than a "partner" (9).

Stalin hastened to install communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Following this considerable propagation, Truman came up with the so-called Truman Doctrine, an American foreign policy whose stated purpose was to counter Soviet geopolitical expansion during the Cold War. Truman solicited aid for Turkey from Congress. (Office Historian). In his speech before congress, Truman sharply exhibited the “serious course upon which we embark” and resentfully states his unappreciation towards the matter, declaring that “The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died. We must keep that hope alive.” (6).

Europe did not recover yet from its wounds following the war. Famine struck a substantial part of continental Europe, snowstorms and extreme cold stopped the production of coal, industries shuttered, and a considerable rise of unemployment was witnessed. Within this context, the communist parties in France and Italy increased their representation in their national legislatures by over a third. American leaders feared that Soviet propaganda would take advantage of the poor masses in Europe. This being considered, secretary of state George Marshall delivered a speech at Harvard University on June 5, 1947 in which he stated that “the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health to the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace.” In response to prospective detractors, Marshall had indicated that his proposition “was not directed against any country, but against hunger, poverty . . . and chaos,” but the truth is that this Marshall Plan was clearly designed for the sake of restoring Western Europe, expanding markets, but most notably gaining support for capitalist democracies across Europe ( American Yawp 260) .

In the meantime, Germany has been divided into two distinct countries; communist East Germany and capitalist West Germany. Following the creation of The Deutsche Mark in

June, 1948; intending to restrict the ability of the United States, Great Britain and France from getting access to their respective sectors of Berlin, which integrally lay within Russian-occupied East Germany, the Soviet Union instigated the Berlin Blockade. (American Yawp 261).

The reason residing behind the initiation of the Berlin Blockade is concerned with Stalin's furiousness over, first, "Bizonia" (name for the combination of the American and the British occupation zones during the occupation of German) which came to facilitate the administration of U.S and British zones. Second, under the Marshal Plan, The United States provided commodities to German retailers for workers to purchase, which was indeed a good approach to impress the communists and show that the capitalist economy in America was thriving. Third, the Allies were assisting Germany in rebuilding its economy by using funds from the Marshall Aid program. This meant a new, stable currency and additional employment opportunities in Western sectors (BBC). In response, the Western Allies conducted a massive airlift to assist West Berlin (NATO).

Stalin envisioned that the Blockade would have the effect of forcing West Berliners to emigrate and join the East, or somehow push America to withdraw completely from Berlin, and thus granting the Eastern Block's communist takeover. However, to no avail, on May, 12, 1949, Stalin ended up lifting the Blockade (BBC). Following the events, The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was officially renamed on May, 23. Later that year, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was established in the eastern Soviet region. Berlin, which was positioned within the GDR, was split into two halves; and from August 1961 until November 1989 popularly divided the Berlin Wall (American Yawp 261).

Heightened tensions and fear over further communist encroachment spurred the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the summer of 1949; a mutual defence pact drawn up by the United States, Canada, England, and other West-

European countries. In response, in 1955, the Soviet Union will formally ratified its own collective defence pact known as the Warsaw Pact, which eventually comprised Soviet Union, Romania, Poland, East Germany, along with other West-European countries (American Yawp 262).

Taking a closer look in history, it is clear that the United States overcrossed a very challenging period which came to trouble its relations at home and abroad. Fear over Communism is deep-rooted in America for in fact, for about twenty years before Cold War, from 1917 and 1920; the United States witnessed its first anti-communist panic, commonly known as Red Scare, which struck from the events of World War I and the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. Taking account of the rampant cold-war-communism, the US was not immune from encountering a second Red Scare; and this is exactly what happened. The alleged threat presented by Communists in the United States led to a number of decisions that affected the American government and society in significant ways. Out of this came the likes of Joseph McCarthy, a Senator from Wisconsin who exploited the troubled atmosphere to sneak into the political arena and make a name for himself.

### **3. Joseph McCarthy, McCarthyism and the Red Scare**

Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957) was a United States senator from Wisconsin who rose to national prominence in the early 1950s by making sensational allegations that there were large numbers of communists and sympathizers within the U.S. government, military, and society. Becoming the most visible public face of a period in which Cold War tensions fuelled fears of widespread Communist subversion, McCarthy proved his resentment towards Communism, so that serving in the Senate from 1947 to 1957, the demagogue did not hesitate to forcefully expose his disinclination towards the matter.

Richard H. Rovere in his book *Senator Joseph McCarthy* declares that McCarthy “was in many ways the most gifted demagogue ever bred on these shores. [N]o bolder

seditionist ever moved among us --- nor any politician with a surer, swifter access to the dark places of the American mind” (3). In fact, the Republican had a great sense of eloquence and expressiveness that pushed him to assert himself and leave his presence felt. Despite the shortness of his career, the latter remarkably escalated only three years after McCarthy’s integration of the Senate, and came to an end when the Senate enacted a resolution of censure against him in 1954 (Rovere 3). As might be perceived, his ascent and downfall unfolded with astonishing quickness, and as Rovere announces in his book “[A]t the start of 1950, he was a Jackstraw in Washington. [T]hen he discovered Communism. . .as Columbus discovered America, as James Marshal discovered the California gold” adding that “he was a towering figure. . . no man was closer then he to the centre of American consciousness or more central to the world’s consciousness of America” (4).

In the days where Communism was rampant and growing, Joseph McCarthy burst in this atmosphere and seized the opportunity that would permit him to alter the course of his career. In a speech to the Ohio County Republican Women's Club in Wheeling on February 9, 1950, in a celebration of the one hundred forty-first birthday of Abraham Lincoln, Joseph McCarthy took advantage from the occasion to openly express what he deemed to be considered the perils of Communism. Declaring that “As one of our outstanding historical figures once said, ‘when a great democracy is destroyed, it will not be from enemies from without, but rather because of enemies from within.’” (2), and adding that “. . . the bright young men who are born with silver spoons in their mouths are the ones who have been most traitorous.” (2) Wisconsin Republican by stating so intended to prepare the ground to his upcoming greatest announcement. Speaking about the topic at hand, McCarthy waved a sheet of paper in the air and proclaimed: “I have here in my hand a list of 205 . . . a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department.” (4).

Since an actual list was not in McCarthy's possession, the initial number kept changing, becoming thus, fifty-seven, then, fifty one (American Yawp 269).

The Republican Representative of Wisconsin, two days after his famous Wheeling address, undertook the mission of writing a letter to President Harry Truman. In the telegram, McCarthy reaffirmed possessing the names of Communist-leaning State Department employees who were working against US interests. However, by this time, the Republican altered the number of names he initially exposed during his Wheeling speech, stating thus owning 57. He further underscored the necessity of the President to handle Communist infiltration within the State Department by taking proper measures (1).

Speaking of President Truman, it is of great significance to note that, following prevalent anti-Communist hysteria that engulfed Cold War America, the Democrat undertook the mission of issuing in March 1947 a "loyalty order", which eventually came to evaluate the loyalty of both current federal workers and any prospective candidates for employment with the government. In fact, as tensions kept mounting between the USA and USSR, safeguarding the country from the enemy was a must. In addition to this, the FBI came up with extensive investigations of conceivable "security risks" among Foreign Service officers. Furthermore, hearings examining communist influence in American society were held in Congress by the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (SPSI) and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) (American Yawp 270). This being said, one may consider the measures undertaken by President Truman were meant to bar the dissemination of Communism. However, Senator McCarthy had a way more radical approach, for in fact, the latter eagerly wanted to make a name for himself, to the detriment of Communism.

As Senator McCarthy's pronouncements and accusations regarding pervasive communist sympathizers in high-ranked positions dominated the news of the early Cold War years, "Enemies from Within" speech most notably served to mount an attack on Truman's

foreign policy agenda by charging that the State Department and its Secretary, Dean Acheson, harboured “traitorous” Communists. In her article “McCarthy Versus Acheson: Opportunism Versus Integrity”, Linda Bolt sharply examines this issue. In fact, McCarthy spent a significant amount of time bashing the State Department, in particular Dean Acheson. Being an opportunist, McCarthy avidly sought to rise to fame and make it to the top; for indeed, his major preoccupation was his political aspirations (Bolt 48). On the other hand, Bolt clarifies that The State Department's functioning was impeded by McCarthy's accusations and the uproar they caused. And, according to Acheson, it took years for the country to recover from the “sadistic pogrom.” (qtd.in Bolt 48). In point of fact, Acheson saw that his responsibility as Secretary of State was to assist the Truman administration in maintaining international safety, that being so, the enormity of his responsibilities prevented him to fret over a newcomer like McCarthy (Bolt 48). In addition to this, McCarthy, in Acheson's opinion, was only an instrument for the Ohio U.S. Senator Robert A. Taft-led Republican clique, which was out to discredit the Truman administration in any way possible (Bolt 48-49).

Going back to the telegram of McCarthy to Truman; in fact, Truman viewed Acheson as a trustworthy and important government official, unlike McCarthy who was just a political bully who fuelled Cold War fear (the Gilder Lehman). Accordingly, as a response to the telegram, President Truman pronounced that “[Y]our telegram is not only not true and an insolent approach to a situation that should have been worked out between man and man but it shows conclusively that you are not even fit to have a hand in the operation of the Government of the United States”. Truman further stated that “[I] am very sure that the people of Wisconsin are extremely sorry that they are represented by a person who has as little sense of responsibility as you have” (1). Nevertheless, the response was presumably unsend.

Succeeding his attempts to raze Reds, McCarthy initiated the so-called Army-McCarthy Hearings. Appointed chairman of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in 1953, McCarthy held televised hearings of the committee, enthraling thus the country for six weeks in 1954. Accordingly, the ABC and Du Mont television networks carried live coverage of these Senate hearings from April 22 to June 17, 1954. (Boston Public Library).

In fact, speaking of the hearings, these were intended to investigate supposed subversives in the military. Patrick J. McNamara in his article "McCarthy and McCarthyism" explains that when Army charged that McCarthy and his chief counsel, Roy Cohn, had advocated for preferential treatment for David Schine, a member of McCarthy's committee who had just been inducted into the military, McCarthy's reputation was tarnished, leading thus him to lose any sense of "credibility" (85). By December 1954, the Senate voted to censure McCarthy due to his irreverent denunciatory attitude, a measure remarked by McNamara as being "the *coup de grâce* for his political career" (85-86).

As can be observed, McCarthy acted without any restraint, for it is of the utmost importance to admit that for many Americans, 1947–1954 proved to be nightmarish times. In fact, he had so much effect that his name integrated the jargon of the –isms. This being said, the period which characterized McCarthy's spread of communist fear through largely public allegations, often based on little to no evidence, came to bear his name, being thus called McCarthyism. Despite the fact that they are often used interchangeably, it is worth mentioning the difference between McCarthyism and Red Scare. As McCarthy is named after accused many Americans of being Communists, the former points at the practice of accusing someone of being a Communist and therefore avoiding or not trusting them. And, the latter coincides with the hysteria over the perceived threat posed by Communists.

Stuart J. Foster in his article “The Red Scare: Origins and Impact”, declares certain principles uncovering that “[A]s the quintessential political opportunist of the age, Senator McCarthy rode the tidal wave of fear, suspicion, and anti-communist hysteria and became the focal point of red scare politics” (5). Indeed, McCarthy had surely marked the era and manifested himself as the archetype of anti-communism. Nonetheless, Foster provides a counter explanation of the matter, stating that, despite all that can be believed, Senator Joseph McCarthy was solely “the tip of the anti-communist iceberg”, for in point of fact, the Red Scare existed long before he rose to fame and eventually continued to escalate even after his censure in 1954 and death in 1957 (5). In addition to this, “McCarthy was the product of America's Cold War politics, not its progenitor.” (qtd.in Foster 5). However, McCarthy’s quick ascent to renown serves as a remarkable instance of the intensity and influence of anti-communist convictions in mid-century American society (Foster 5-6).

As Historian J.Ronald Oakley observed, McCarthy was “a man without principles, scruples, beliefs, or proof of his sensational allegations. [H]e never uncovered a single communist in the government yet he had the support of millions”(qtd.in Foster 6).Considering this, one may question the intriguing reason that helped McCarthy to be believed and let his influence be exerted. As far as the historical context is concerned, there are in fact certain factors that truly assisted in building McCarty's reliability and enhancing his standing on the American political arena. In fact, around the time of McCarthy's Wheeling speech, Americans faced a constant and unsettling bombardment of troubling news. His infamous accusations were made less than a year after the Soviet Union had developed the atomic bomb. A British scientist engaged in the Los Alamos atomic bomb weapons program, Klaus Fuchs, was accused of espionage for the Russians four months prior to McCarthy’s address. Just a few weeks earlier, Communism seemed to have prevailed in China. Three weeks before, Alger Hiss, a State Department officer who had previously been charged with treason, received a

five-year jail term for perjury. Ten days earlier, President Truman announced to proceed with the development of the Hydrogen bomb. Besides, with the outset of the Korean War, local and worldwide events seemed to be in full favour of McCarthy, underpinning thus the latter's credibility (Foster 7).

As can be observed, the Red Scare was distinctly marked by fierce anti-communism that quickly enveloped all facets of society. For instance, when it comes to education, the latter went through a rocky road. In Stuart J. Foster's aforementioned article, he explains that the post-war era was typified by constant and disruptive attacks on school staff as well as educational policy and practice, adding that Right-wing radicals, through tough Red Scare approaches, disrupted various educational systems (1). This being said, examples can be listed as follows:

“[I]n New York, at least 300 teachers fell victim to the city schools' ideological purges . . . [B]ooks were burned in Salupa, Oklahoma, for their alleged subversive portrayal of sex and socialism. [T]he Texas legislature ordered educational institutions in the state to remove any and all literature published by the Soviet Union found in school or university libraries. [L]egislative act number 888, in Alabama, required all authors and publishers of “instructional materials” to state that their work, or works cited by them, were not the offerings of a “known advocate of communism or Marxist socialism.” . . . [I]n dozens of towns and cities across the United States, boards of education and administrators withdrew from use textbooks identified and criticized as subversive, school tax were frustrated, and curriculum materials and teaching practices were subjected to vigorous and debilitating scrutiny.” (Foster 1-2).

As might be presumed, the American society had been spared nothing when it came to anti-communist hysteria. In fact, Hollywood had been subjected to considerable hindrance that eventually had potent effect on the motion picture industry. The impact of the Red Scare

on Hollywood was profound, with creative expression stifled and many careers destroyed. In spite of that, it also sparked a wave of political activism and resistance, with screenwriters, filmmakers and actors fighting back against repression and censorship.

#### **4.Red Scare and Hollywood**

The film industry is a thriving system in the United States, and Hollywood is the epitome of movie production equated with the highest-grossing films in the world. As any other art form, cinema quite often reflects the community in which it is produced and its socio-political concerns. Considering the topic at hand, in other words, Red Scare and anti-communist paranoia, Hollywood brought forth a manifold of films designed to portray the critical position in which America was submerged.

“Movies and Propaganda” is an article authored by Leo C. Roten set in times where the House Committee on Un-American Activities was gearing up to convene hearings in Washington on allegations of Communism in Hollywood and “Communist propaganda”. In his article, Roten argues that, following the intensification of the socio-political issues, it is very likely to individuals to grow more troubled about the content and ramifications of a vehicle as “dramatic”, “significant”, and “influential” as feature film. However, on the other hand, since that Hollywood is covered by nearly every national and international publication, it is to be presumed that persons seeking exposure and attention would continue to hold harsh criticism towards it, whether their so-called condemnations are driven by “genuine concern” or by “vested-interest” or “political ambition”. (Roten 116).

Film is a creative endeavour that is said to transcend the realm of aesthetics. It is influenced by the context in which it is produced and consequently conveys specific messages and ideological stances. On account of this, Roten further discusses the propagandistic stance which can be attributed; or not, to these cinematic productions. In fact, the author claims that the determination of whether something is "propagandistic" depends on the audience's

intellectual commitments as well as the creators' intentions when issuing the product. This being said, by way of illustration, a movie released in Moscow extolling the virtues of Communism, the correctness of the Politburo, or the holiness of Stalin is a “patriotic” endeavour for Russians; nevertheless, the same movie would be regarded as propaganda in the United States (Roten 118).

Film is an artistic form of expression and a cultural product which mirrors society, its ideology, its cultural representations and the political climate hovering over it. As addressed by the German film critic Siegfried Kracauer in his essay “The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies”, as he states that “films are the mirror of the prevailing society” (291). Therefore, following the attacks held against Hollywood, which was supposedly said to be denigrating the American way of life, for failing to criticize the menace of Communism at home or abroad, and for employing known subversives, the film industry significantly came to supplement the atmosphere with a considerable number of productions, committing thus itself to producing anti-communist films. In his “Hollywood Agit-prop: The Anti-Communist Cycle, 1948-1954”, Thomas Dohert remarks that “[B]etween 1948 and 1954, in a gesture dictated by political expedience rather than commercial exigencies, Hollywood released some 40 anti-communist films into the American marketplace. . . "anti-commie" films remain vivid testimony to the impact of a now-fabled series of attacks on the motion picture industry in the early years of the Cold War.” (15). On account of this, one can tell that Hollywood’s initiation into anti-communist productions was not dependent on its own will.

Speaking of these anti-communist productions, Dohert further argues that except for Disney and Universal-International, each major studio obediently provided movie editorials hostile to Communism (15). Examples are as follows:

Twentieth Century Fox fired "the first shot in the cold war against Russia" (Crowther 31) with *The Iron Curtain* (1948) . . . Howard Hughes's RKO produced *I Married a*

*Communist* (1948) and *Whip Hand* (1951) . . . MGM responded first with a re-issue of *Ninotchka* (1939) in November 1947, and then with *The Red Danube* (1949) . . . *The Hoaxters* (1952); *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951) and *Big Jim McLain* (1952) were Warner Brother's entries. . . Columbia invested in *Walk a Crooked Mile* (1948) . . . Paramount was a bit tardy, but in 1952 came forth with *Peking Express*, *My Son John*, and *The Atomic City*. (Dohert 15)

As can be observed, Hollywood reacted accordingly to the accusations of infiltrated communists to the industry. However, remarking on these incriminations, an in-depth explanation of the matter is needed to be established. That being so, in the interest of safeguarding the film business from communist infiltration, the organization of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals (MPA), urged HUAC to probe into communism in Hollywood so that Members of the MPA made a deposition before the committee on the topic at hand during closed hearings (First Amendment). Therefore, the HUAC, aiming to wipe out any linkages between Hollywood and the Communist party, called the witnesses to the stand, so that in 1947 the HUAC followed a series of official inquiries regarding Communist Party infiltration into the Hollywood film industry.

Martha Minow indicates in her “Storytelling and Political Resistance: Remembering Derrick Bell (With a Story about Dalton Trumbo” that witnesses were asked; “Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?” When the given witness decides not to answer, the Committee member responds “It is a very simple question. Anybody would be proud to answer it—any real American would be proud to answer the question” (Minow 4).

The author further exhibits that:

“The targeted individuals included then-current members of the Communist Party, people who had in the past been members of the Communist Party but had withdrawn,

some who had been sympathetic but never joined the Party, and others who had no connections to the Communist Party. The HUAC pressured witnesses to name colleagues associated with Communist activities and often made vague and sweeping accusations, assuming an individual's guilt" (Minow 4).

In "Hollywood Ten in History and Memory" Arthur Eckstein explains that "in the course of these inquiries dozens of 'friendly' Hollywood witnesses denounced hundreds of people as secret members of the Communist Party, while dozens of 'unfriendly' witnesses refused to discuss their politics with the Committee." (424). Therefore, for at least ten years, it was nearly impossible for anybody who had been openly or covertly accused of being American Communist Party members to find jobs within the film industry. In fact, those who've been subjected to such impediment were later known as the "unfriendly Ten" or most notably the "Hollywood Ten", — "the original group of 'un friendly' witnesses - mostly screenwriters - who refused to give political information about themselves before HUAC in October 1947." (Eckstein 424). The Hollywood Ten comprised: Albert Maltz, Alvah Bessie, Samuel Ornitz, Ring Lardner Jr., Lester Cole, Herbert Biberman, Edward Dmytryk, Adrian Scott, and Dalton Trumbo.

The terms "Red Scare" and "McCarthyism" indicate a time in American history where the government and business leaders were so frightened of Communist influence that they used both formal and informal methods to eradicate it from American society, even at the expense of people's right to their own privacy, freedom of speech, and freedom of association. Äthan G. Theoharis in his "A Lawless Agency: The FBI and the 'Hollywood Ten' " further explains that when it comes to the Hollywood Ten's unwillingness to respond to HUAC's inquiries regarding their involvement with the Communist Party, their refusal was determined by The First Amendment, used as a the justification; so that they contested HUAC's authority to ask about their political leanings and beliefs and denounced this probe "as a witch-hunting

attempt to censor artistic freedom.” It is noteworthy to mention that the Committee for the First Amendment (CFA) was established by a group of Hollywood liberals to assist the "unfriendly" witnesses (First Amendment). As a forceful response, the HUAC, first presented proof that the Ten had membership cards for the Communist Party and then charged them with contempt of Congress. On November 24, 1947, “the full House approved the contempt citations”, besides this, the Justice Department successfully prosecuted John Lawson and Dalton Trumbo in April and May of 1948, ending thus respectively convicted, in 19, April 1948 and May, 5, 1948 (415). When it comes to the remaining eight, Theoharis declares that in anticipation of a judicial review of Lawson’s’ and Trumbo's verdicts, defence and government counsel had agreed to delay the trials of the other eight defendants, and, both sides concurred that the final court decisions would apply to the cases of the remaining eight (415).

The Hollywood Ten's First Amendment plan had not only failed them to avoid their indictment, but it had also left them open to the charge that their true motivation was to conceal their involvement in a “foreign-directed conspiracy”. Therefore, officials in the film industry banned the Hollywood Ten, declaring that “none would be rehired until ‘he had purged himself of contempt or been acquitted or declared under oath that he was not a Communist.’”. In addition to this, the author explains that “the film executives also affirmed their future intent not to ‘knowingly’ employ communists”. (Theoharis 415).

Hedda Hopper, an American gossip columnist and actress and strong supporter of the HUAC, appeared to supplement the atmosphere with her anti-communist leanings. In her “Hollywood Gossip as Public Sphere: Hedda Hopper, Reader-Respondents, and the Red Scare, 1947-1965”, Jennifer Frost reveals that “[S]yndicated in eighty-five metropolitan newspapers during the 1940s, Hopper's column had an estimated daily readership of 32 million by the mid-1950s (out of a national population of 160 million) and remained influential into the next

decade” (85). That being so, the notoriety and exaltation she succeeded to implement served as a potent vehicle to defend the anti-communist cause, so that as exposed by Frost “[A]lways a conservative and an active member in the right wing of the Republican Party, Hopper's location in Hollywood and her work as a gossip columnist gave her a means and method to promote her political agenda, at the core of which was anticommunism” (86).

The blacklist frequently worked in secrecy. In the meantime, “fixers” arose to assist people be “unofficially pardoned” by anti-Communist organizations and the heads of the film industry, making them employable again. Out of this came the likes of Ward Bond, an American film character actor (Eckstein 424). In addition to this, “fronts” emerged, designating persons who pitched studios screenplays prepared by authors on the blacklist but presented as their own work in exchange for official script credit and often a share of the fee; one of the examples of such a "front" was Philip Yordan, being also a screenwriter himself. ( qtd.in Eckstein 424).

Over the years, as communist paranoia kept mounting, more people sought to report names to safeguard their reputations, more names were eventually added to the blacklist. In fact, it is no wonder that the blacklist system caused several cinematic careers to be completely ruined; an example would be Mickey Knox and Howard Da Silva’s (qtd.in Eckstein424). Besides, being unable to perform or direct under assumed identities, actors and directors are said to have more endured during the period than screenwriters, for in fact, when it comes to scenarists those ones were able to employ the “front” system, which allowed the best among them to continue writing screenplays. Yet, as appointed by the author, among screenwriters in Hollywood, the Communist Party of the United States “had made its largest inroads” so that many of their careers withered substantially or came to an end. (Eckstein424).

Following a time of unemployment or odd jobs, apart from the Fronts system, many blacklisted artists opted to return to filmmaking under fictitious names. Ela Sabnis in her “The

Hollywood Ten” reports that many rendered-unemployable screenwriters adopted the option (4). Nonetheless, operating under a pseudonym meant much lower pay and no way to get credit for one's contributions. As an instance, the author relates the case of Alvah Bessie pertaining to the Hollywood Ten, who from 1947 to 1950, worked under an assumed name and received half of his regular pay. Other examples would involve Ring Lander Jr. and Dalton Trumbo. Speaking of Trumbo, the latter was the original author of *The Brave One*, *Gun Crazy*, and more (qtd.in Sabnis 4). Sabnis further remarks that although many blacklisted artists were able to find employment, the whole experience was “degrading” due to their inability to achieve respectable wages and credit (4).

By the late 50's and early 60's, as Senator Joseph McCarthy's fame and influence dwindled, the blacklist began to lose its relevance, letting thus several ex-blacklisted artists to resume their careers (Sabnis 4). Moreover, blacklisted artists received credit for the works they produced while they were on the blacklist. As an example, Sabnis exposes the case of Trumbo, who was granted credit for every script he wrote under the alias Robert Rich, and once the blacklist was overturned, he continued working under his actual name, winning the 1957 Academy Award for Best Story, the Writers Guild of America Award in 1970 and the Oscars Awards (4-5).

Taking a closer look at the life of Dalton Trumbo, the screenwriter is perceived as an emblematic figure, influential personage in his domain, and surely the most acclaimed member of the Hollywood Ten. In fact, an in-depth understanding would be necessary to truly dive into his life and understand his political and ideological leanings, which subsequently comes to categorize him as a Communist sympathizer.

In “Sides of the Angels: Dalton Trumbo, the Hollywood Trade Press, and the Blacklist”, Tim Palmer provides a recontextualization of Dalton Trumbo through *reviewing* some of Trumbo's personal archives which would eventually aim at tracing his ideological

and political inclinations. In fact, considering Trumbo's initial integration into the writing world, he started composing and submitting movie reviews to the magazine *Film Spectator*, prospering thus to become its managing editor (59). In 1939, *Film Spectator* changed its title to become known as *Hollywood Spectator*, a seemingly more regional and specific appellation (60). Palmer reveals that at this stage, Trumbo's visibility witnessed a significant increase so that his featured articles started to frequently appear on the front of the Magazine (60). The author further remarks that since the start of his professional life in print, Trumbo's comments on American cinema and the state of the industry "typically took the form of scathing attacks" (60). This being said, Palmer explains that:

"[M]any of his early writings centred on a dichotomy. [O]n one hand, Trumbo expressed a fierce hostility toward Hollywood's industrial constitution, which he characterized as fundamentally corrupt. [H]e described its upper hierarchy as consumed by an insatiable lust for dollars—a financial rapaciousness that was, moreover, endemic to U.S. big business. [O]n the other hand, Trumbo claimed that cinema's potential as an art form remained unfulfilled. Hollywood's largely anonymous workforce, its grass roots, was where Trumbo situated the true centre of filmmaking as an honest, vigorous craft" (60).

As can be perceived, Trumbo's earliest affiliations with the Hollywood world have not always been rosy. However, Martha Minow in her "Storytelling and Political Resistance: Remembering Derrick Bell (With a Story about Dalton Trumbo explains that in 1934 Trumbo had indeed been a member of the Communist party, but drifted away later, besides, he did not view this decision as impactful (5). In spite of this, Minow notes that "[P]eople who observed Trumbo noted that organizational loyalty did not motivate him; instead, he was devoted to personal independence and adherence to his own word. [H]e valued freedom and brotherhood;

he wanted to resist fascism during the war; he did not especially believe in the theories of Karl Marx” (5).

By the late 1940’s Trumbo’s career witnessed great uplifting so that he became “one of the highest paid writers in Hollywood” (Minow 4). However, considering his former affiliation with the Communist Party, such act in the mid of a Cold War did not leave the HUAC indifferent. Assuming that the investigation into his personal opinions was a violation of his First Amendment rights, Trumbo ended up cited of Contempt of Congress, carrying prison terms

As time passed, Minow tells that:

“Eventually, with the support of leading actor Kirk Douglas and producer Otto Preminger, Trumbo gained work, first anonymously, and then by name in two highly successful films, *Spartacus* and *Exodus*. These successes, combined with the courage shown by Trumbo and his friends, helped to dissolve the Blacklist. Eventually, Hollywood welcomed Dalton Trumbo back. He wrote scripts for many successful films, including *The Sandpiper*, *Hawaii*, *Papillion*, *The Fixer*, and the film based on his own novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*. In 1970, the Writers Guild presented Trumbo with its Laurel Award” (7)

## **Conclusion**

Taking everything into account, the aftermath of WWII initiated a period of intense political and ideological tension between Eastern and Western powers. In the meantime, Republican Senator of Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy rose to national prominence and took advantage of the fragile situation of his nation to make a name for himself and use his power to hold allegations against suspected communist sympathizers in the government. Great fear of communist infiltration and subversion fuelled a campaign of political repression; what comes to be known as Red Scare. Hollywood witnessed heightened scrutiny and censorship

as different members of the motion picture industry received charges for being subversive and holding Communist sympathies. Out of this came the Hollywood Ten, and most notably Dalton Trumbo who faced severe consequences for defiance, including imprisonment and a long-lasting ban from working in the film industry.

With that being said, it is worth mentioning that through reading the above chapter, an unconscious summary of our film under study is attributed.

## Chapter II: Analysing *Trumbo* – A Multifaceted Cinematic Exploration

### 1. Introduction

Films are works of art that go beyond the realm of aesthetics. They are impacted by the environment where they are created and, as a result, transmit particular meanings and ideologies. When it comes to history, the art of filmmaking has the opportunity to convey historical events, characters, and themes, offering interpretations and perspectives of the past, in such ways that other media cannot.

With that being said, the present chapter delves into some selected ideas of the American author, historian, and acclaimed international specialist committed to studying the relationship between history and visual media, Robert Rosentone that are crucial in understanding to which extent films can manage to convey history. In addition to this, this chapter aims to undertake a comprehensive analysis of *Trumbo* by examining its various elements, including its contextual, thematic, poster, narrative structure, and *mise-en-scène* aspects.

### 2. Film and History

As mentioned earlier, Robert Rosenstone is a prominent American author and historian specialized in the field of history and film. Practically speaking, Rosentone has also worked as a historical consultant for the American epic historical drama film *Reds*.

The relationship between film and history may be very delicate for the majority of historians. In fact, the most common idea of films implemented in the society is that of films as mere means of entertainment. However, aside from this, films can also enlighten, educate, challenge, provoke, or inspire audiences. From this angle, one may consider film as a powerful medium for communicating history.

Conventionally, historians have ensued written records, artifacts, and other forms of tangible proof in order to establish narratives about the past. However, speaking of film, the

latter, being only been around for a little over a century, is a relatively new medium that has not always been regarded as a legitimate and reliable source for historical research. Nonetheless, they can be a valuable tool for engaging people with history and helping them to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the past. Therefore, the ideas and perceptions of Robert Rosenstone come to challenge the stereotypes through giving full credit to film as a historical endeavour. Thus, a few of his ideas will be enumerated.

In his book *History on Film/Film on History*, Rosenstone argues that “. . . as long as screens, large and small, are a major medium for showing and telling us about our world, then film will be one way of rendering the past.”(160). He further declares that regardless of our opinions, we must acknowledge that movies provide us a “new sort of history”—what we can refer to as “history as vision”. Compared to the “poetic relationship to world” of oral history, and the “scientific relationship” of written history, films come to alter the general run of things, creating thus “its own sort of truth”. And, in fact, undoubtedly, the historical world that a movie creates is bound to be far more intricate than that of a written text, so that “several things occur simultaneously - image, sound, language, even text - elements that support and work against each other to create a realm of meaning as different from written history as written was from oral history. So different that it allows us to speculate that the visual media may represent a major shift in consciousness about how we think about our past.” (Rosenstone 160).

Later in his book, Rosenstone extends his argumentation through providing a comparison between written texts and historical films, which eventually would lead to the same result, establishing thus equivalence between the two means. He claims that what we see on the screen is not a window onto the past but a “construction of a simulated past”, not a “literal reality” but a “metaphorical” one, and in this sense exactly like written history (161).Nevertheless, Rosentone admits that indeed, in recent years, a number of theorists have

made compelling arguments against the idea that recorded history might serve as a metaphor; however, even those who disagree with the idea that metaphor is essential to historical comprehension have come to understand that historical works cannot accurately recreate the past but can only incorporate traces of it into a verbal construction, a text that tries to explain long-gone individuals, events, moments, and movements to us in the past (161). That being so, the unwelcomeness among historians of film as a medium of conveying history cannot be established since even books of history cannot reach total accuracy.

In his essay “The Historical Film as Real History”, Robert Rosenstone further extends the aforementioned idea admitting that indeed, no matter how “literal” the image on the screen appears to be or how "literal" its setting, a film can never accurately depict historical events. It, as well as the written page, can never be an exact copy of what transpired. Of course, historical accounts must be founded on as much accurate information as possible. But the recounting itself can never be literal because of the constraints of time and space, neither on a screen nor in writing (8). The point is that, both are inaccurate representations of the past that can be put in the same mould.

To truly understand the way one should look at films, Rosenstone explains that new standards of reading films should be set. He clearly admits that we must acknowledge right once that movies cannot be viewed as windows into the past. What occurs on television can never be more than an approximate representation of what was said and done in the past; rather than portraying the events of the past, what occurs on screen just alludes to them. Besides, Rosentone explains that:

“This means that it is necessary for us to learn to judge the ways in which, through invention, film summarizes vast amounts of data or symbolizes complexities that otherwise could not be shown. We must recognize that film will always include images that are at once invented and true; true in that they symbolize, condense, or

summarize larger amounts of data; true in that they impart an overall meaning of the past that can be verified, documented, or reasonably argued.” (9).

This quote reveals that, in fact, filmmakers encounter challenges in the sense that they often need to condense large amounts of information into a manageable narrative, which can thus consider leaving out certain details or compressing events into a shorter timeframe. In order to do this effectively, filmmakers may need to use their creativity to invent new ways of representing complex information or symbolizing the underlying themes and ideas. Therefore, it is pretty much necessary for viewers to evaluate how films convey information. We suggest that such practice entails using critical thinking, in order to analyse and evaluate data and perspectives presented in the film. Besides, one should also be aware of the filmmaker's point of view and take into account how it could affect the way historical events are portrayed. Additionally, viewers should question the accuracy and completeness of the information presented, and considers how the film may be influenced by cultural and social biases.

The author further answers the question “[A]nd how do we know what can be verified, documented, or reasonably argued?” (9). the answer would be that such must be reached from “ongoing discourse of history”; from the pre-existing corpus of written texts, basing on their data and arguments. All of which is to suggest that every “historical” film, like any piece of written, or oral history, contributes to a corpus of already established “knowledge and debate”. Rosenstone further affirms that just “[L]ike any work of history, a film must be judged in terms of the knowledge of the past that we already possess. Like any work of history, it must situate itself within a body of other works, the ongoing (multimedia) debate over the importance of events and the meaning of the past.” (9).

It is no wonder that to welcome films as a new media of engaging with history must be a very delicate practice for historians, and even Robert Rosenstone admits that his argument for using films to tell history may be difficult for conventional historians to digest. Even so,

he declares that “Accepting the changes in history that mainstream film proposes is not to collapse all standards of historical truth, but to accept another way of understanding our relationship to the past, another way of pursuing that conversation about where we came from, where we are going, and who we are.” (10). He argues that films neither replace nor add to recorded history, but come to stand next to it. Rosentsone then calls historians to support and recognize film as a new kind of history” (10).

### **3. *Trumbo* Synopsis**

*Trumbo*, based on the 1977 biography *Dalton Trumbo* by Bruce Alexander Cook, is a biopic distributed by Bleecker Street and released in 2015 by Groundswell Productions and ShivHans Pictures. Compared to other Hoolllywoodian Blockbuster movies, *Trumbo*’s production costs were only of \$10 million, and reached a box-office of over \$13.3 million.

In the mid of chaos and uncertain times, anti-soviet figures in the entertainment business rose to condemn people involved in the industry for their previous allegiances with the Communist Party. Hence, the film follows the life of one the most famous screenwriters, whose irreproachable talent places him among the elite of Hollywood; Dalton Trumbo. The movie faithfully exhibits Trumbo’s “un-American” political and ideological inclinations, which eventually ensued his imprisonment and left him blacklisted. The film is directed by Jay Roach and stars Bryan Cranston as Dalton Trumbo, Diane Lane as his wife, Cleo Trumbo; Helen Mirren as gossip columnist Hedda Hopper; John Goodman as Hollywood producer Frank King; and Michael Stuhlbarg as Edward G. Robinson. The cast also includes Louis C.K., Elle Fanning, Alan Tudyk, Stephen Root and Adewale Akinnoye-Agbaje.

### **4. Contextual Analysis**

Jay Roach, the film director, was most notably renowned for his work in comedic films such as *Dinner for Schmucks* (2010), *Meet the Fockers* (2004), or even *Austin Powers* (1997). But recently Roaches’ career took another trajectory for considering his recent films;

these have sought to bring hotly debated political and social concerns to the big screen, and out of this came the likes of *Recount* (2008), *Bombshell* (2019), and *Trumbo* (2015). This in fact does not align with his usual style of directing and moves to another direction. One may consider that this surprising transition, from being a comedy director to a political director, unveils the position and interest he holds towards politics and the influence they can exert on his cinematic productions. And, when it comes to *Trumbo*, the film, apart from tracing the life of former blacklisted screenwriter, Dalton Trumbo, it also portrays American cinema and the measures undertaken by the HUAC in times where the Red Scare encapsulated fear, and international relations witnessed great instability.

The independent production company that produced *Trumbo* is also highly significant to the film. As mentioned in their official website, GroundSwell Picture is a production company chiefly dedicated to creating challenging, and thought-provoking films, in order to bring notice to significant social and political issues in an attempt to inspire and engage audiences in bringing about change in the world. Indeed, GroundSwell Picture is renowned for its socially conscious cinematic productions such as *Super-Size Me*, which sheds light on the inconveniences of fast food and obesity, or *An Inconvenient Truth* which tackles issues of global warming. This being considered, our film under study comes to tonify GroundSwell Picture's commitment to world change, so that it aligns with the political and social issues explored in *Trumbo*. Besides, when it comes to evaluate both the film and its production at the same level, one can arguably consider the fact that Groundswell Productions, being an independent production company, has more creative flexibility and autonomy over the movies it makes, equivalent to the sort of creative freedom that Trumbo sought during the Blacklist era. In addition to this, the independent status of GroundSwell Picture enabled it to take risks and explore contentious subjects without being restrained by the commercial interests of the major studios. This being so, *Trumbo*, like the rest of GroundSwell's contributions, offers

unsettling and troubling images of reality, which are aimed to make re-evaluate key concepts, and inspire to take action.

## **5. Thematic Analysis**

### **5.1 Americanism**

Picturing the United States as patriotic is not surprising. It has deep roots in American history, arguably dating back its origins to the Founding Fathers. These patriotic sentiments reigned over the country for years and have subsequently been cultivated throughout time. This being considered, the film under study pays tribute to the love and devotion of the American government along with its representatives in Hollywood. Their resilience and potency aimed to obstruct Communism, which constituted an imminent danger to American democracy, from extending its tentacles across the country.

This fervent fight against the enemy is showcased in different scenes. Right from the beginning of the movie when Edward G. Robinson is performing on set (Dalton Trumbo is also present), and suddenly Robinson's gun's cylinder dislodges from the barrel, letting bullets clatter on the floor, as he said "Sorry, Sam. Sorry, everybody. Of course, the one day the author's among us", Sam Woods, the film director reposts "among us". "Sure ain't one of us". (00:03:26- 00:03:40). This remark alludes to the dissociation of Trumbo as a Communist and "us" as people whose country's good will is of the utmost importance. The first person plural pronoun is also displayed in the scene where Trumbo and inmates are watching a war movie starring John Wayne in which the latter proudly states "*We* don't lose, do we? *You* lose" (00:44:11). Once more, the "We" is highlighted in order to expose shared feelings of belonging; the "You" points at the Other who is belittled and deemed to failure in a fight against such an unmatched nation as that of the United States. Moreover, the use of first-person plural pronoun can be considered as a form of appropriation and impersonification of a beloved collective American identity.

Confronting Louis.B Mayer, producer and co-founder of MGM, Hedda Hooper states “Forty years ago, you’re starving in some shtetl, the *greatest country on Earth* takes you in, gives you wealth, power and the second we need you, you do nothing” (00:25:59). Here, the picture of America going to the rescue is reinforced by its glorification as being the “greatest country on Earth”.

John Wayne is displayed as a true patriot. Along with his right-wing beliefs, physically speaking, Wayne represents the typical movie icon, blue-eyed six-feet, four inches American, endowed with great allure and posture. He has undoubtedly been chosen to symbolize America’s grandeur. His fervent determination to serve his country is manifest in the role he takes with The Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideal to safeguard the country from any unwanted intrusion; Communism in our case. As he stands to deliver his speech, his sense of heroism and patriotism are further reinforced as he asserts, “...But I love America!” And when we talk about America I’m talking



about freedom! The kinda freedom we just fought a world war to save!” (00:10:40). The filmmaker bolsters the scene through a long shot, within which is framed the American flag along with two panels of red, blue and white lightning disposed on the two corners of the stage, as well as members and supporters of the Motion Picture Alliance. This cinematic technique aims at displaying every detail of the scene, accentuating thus relationships between people and their surroundings; in this case John Wayne and his peers of the Motion Picture Alliance.

In a scene exhibiting Hedda Hooper, Wayne and few others meet in Wayne's office (00:47:19), his mission is further unravelled. The film director, initiates a medium shot with a slight low angle (00:48:04). The shot reveals more of the surroundings, and permits to draw out attention on the tie



around John Wayne's neck which is designed with the three American colours; blue, white, and red, beautifully contrasting with the American flag behind. The slight low angle shot accentuates the manly posture of Wayne so that it gives him the impression of a powerful figure.

Another remarkable character that raises question over the patriotic concerns of America is Virgil Brook, the Black, aggressive inmate. From the outset, he seeks to firmly assert himself as he archly says to Trumbo "\*\*\*\*\* is wrong with you people? This is a great country" (00:40:50). In the language of



cinema, once again the filmmaker employs a low angle shot in order to endow the character with an authoritative attitude. Interestingly, the choice of a Black character supporting his country over Communist threat promotes the image of American unison regardless of races and ethnicities.

*Trumbo* depicts a period of national crisis where representatives of the motion picture industry did their best for their nation in order to obstruct communist conspiracy in film, which constitutes a pure source of propaganda. Therefore, Americanism is an underlying theme that extends throughout the entire narrative.

## 5.2 Political Survival

*Trumbo* recalls US dark political history. In the mid of a political oppression, the propensity to continue existing under critical circumstances seems predominant in *Trumbo*, for in fact; this sense of survival coincides with the protagonist's journey towards acceptance within a society that avidly seeks to preserve its American ideals by erase the Other's traces from its industry.

Bryan Cranston marvellously succeeds in playing Dalton Trumbo. The screenwriter is displayed as a complex and flawed individual, a brilliant author who cares deeply about both his writing and his convictions. He is also shown as being stubborn and unyielding, eager to speak his mind and stand up a fight for what he believes in even if it means risking everything. This idea is reinforced in the scene where Arlen Hird and Trumbo stand by a lake, conversing about the tumultuous situation in which they embarked; as they were about to go to trial, Trumbo firmly states "I'm not willing to lose it all -- *I'm willing to risk it.*"(00:20:25). (From "lose it all" Trumbo refers to his own family and properties).

Besides, the film showcases Trumbo's considerable gestural, which eventually coincides with his political activism, confidence, and determination to fight. In (00:06:16), when Hedda Hopper exposes footage of Dalton Trumbo addressing studio picketers, Trumbo's gestural



language is showed as expressive and animated, with marked facial expressions and hand gestures that describe his passion and conviction. At the same time, through a cross-cut and an eye level shot, the scene parallelly exhibits Dalton Trumbo as he watches Hedda Hopper exposing him as a "dangerous radical".



Generally speaking, the shot is neutral; however, this seems to tell more about Dalton Trumbo's vulnerabilities and insecurities. His gestural language is revealed as he avoids eye contact, and seems very concerned with the situation. This in fact adds depth and nuance to the portrayal of the character and sheds light on the upcoming wave of hostility he will be subjected to.

In the mid of the American government's crackdown on suspected Communists during the McCarthy era in the Hollywood industry, *Trumbo* depicts the tension between political ideology and freedom of speech. In his attempt to survive within this critical situation, Dalton Trumbo uses the First Amendment as evidence to defend his case for he believed that the latter protects his right to hold political beliefs, and the entire inquiry into his personal beliefs violated his First Amendment rights. In the scenes displaying Trumbo's confrontation with members of Motion Picture Alliance (00:11:26) and his testimony before the HUAC (00:21:03), the spectators can notice that despite the fear, censorship, and intimidation tactics used by the government and the film industry, Trumbo's resilience to fight, commitment to free speech and artistic expression took over. Trumbo's utterances come to bolster this idea so that during his testimony with Congressman J. Parnell Thomas, Trumbo vehemently states "You believe this Committee has the right to compel testimony, indict opinion, criminalize thought -- but that right does not exist and the day it does, God help us all." As regards the shot, the director undertakes the mission of using a medium close-up shot which aims at showing Trumbo's defiance and determination as he refuses to answer the committee's questions about his political beliefs and affiliations.



Interestingly, part of the scene is displayed through a White and Black screen which permits to convey a sense of timelessness and nostalgia through evoking a former era, in

addition to this, the technique adds a great sense of realism and a great understanding of the actual happenings with Dalton Trumbo. On the other hand, by allowing for greater emphasis on contrast, shadow, light and texture this absence of colour establishes a dramatic and moody atmosphere, which can reflect the hardships underwent by Trumbo, as well as the dark gloomy atmosphere of the Red Scare.



The sense of survival is also present in the character of Edward G. Robinson. Played by Michael Stuhlbag, the film exhibits Robinson's character as a composite of several real-life people who testified before the HUAAC and named names of supposed Communist sympathizers in the Hollywood industry. Unlike Dalton Trumbo, the ability to express unpopular opinions without fear of persecution



was not that easy for “Eddy”, for as formerly mentioned in the first chapter, actors did not have access to the Front system. In the scene displaying him naming names (00:46:00), the camera zooms on the facial features of Robinson in order to put emphasis on the character's

emotional state. The technique aims at capturing Robinson's conflicted emotions, showing the audience how torn he is between his loyalty to his



friends and his fear of losing his career. At the same time, the filmmaker uses a cross-cutting; so as Trumbo in prison, his family at home, closely listening to the radio conveying Robinson's



testimony. This can shed light on the universality of their struggles.

As can be observed, *Trumbo* serves as a powerful portrayal of the dark Red Scare period in American history when the government sought to silence dissent and punish those

who held unpopular and conflictual political views; in our case the Hollywood Ten. Therefore, it can be observed that different forms of survival are extended throughout the entire narrative.

### 5.3 Loss of Self

Throughout the film, Trumbo suffers various losses, including the loss of his career, his reputation, and his freedom. This being so, *Trumbo* depicts the struggle for identity and self-worth against society and political pressure. As the main protagonist is revealed to be a man who is devoted to both his political views and his profession as a writer, he ends up consumed by his journey of survival and loses himself. Unable to work in Hollywood and obliged to take on writing jobs under pseudonyms for a much lower pay, Trumbo becomes increasingly isolated. Through a voice-over, the director immerses the audience to Dalton Trumbo's mind (00:58:33). The statement "Every work week is seven days, every day is fourteen hours, every minute I'm further behind" accentuates the overwhelming amount of work he has to cope with, causing him the inability to find equilibrium between job and personal life, as he seeks to readapt himself to leading a decent life despite the blacklist.

In order to let the spectators, grasp the intensity of pressure Trumbo was going through, the film at (01:03:00) exposes the audience to a close-up in which is framed a bottle of Benzendrine, the first brand of amphetamine commercialized in the United States during the 1930's. The drug originally acts to raise dopamine and norepinephrine levels in the brain, stimulating focus, attention, and energy; which are exactly what Trumbo needs. However, on the other hand, stepping back in time, during the WWII the Allied forces administered amphetamines to their troops.



Hence, this can be understood as a reminder of Dalton Trumbo's personal involvement in WWII.

The sentence "and I'm becoming a stranger in my own house" (00:58:29) implies that Trumbo's demanding work schedule is taking a toll on his family. As long as Trumbo's family is concerned, the film sheds light on the gradual degradation of family ties throughout the narrative. In fact, the pressures of the blacklist and the fear over HUAC and its sympathizers cause strain on the family's relationships. In the scene showcasing Trumbo's wife, Cleo, confronting him, angrily stating "Us, you're losing us. Since prison, you don't talk or ask, just snap and bark -- I keep waiting for you to start pounding the dinner table with a gavel", "This isn't just happening to you. We all hurt!", "This isn't a discussion, it's a fight." (01:26:11). These statements clearly imply that the injustices Trumbo endures because of his political leanings wound both him and his loved ones, so that it overpasses this personal step to go beyond the individual sufferings. From a different angle, the same sentence "and I'm becoming a stranger in my own home" (00:58:29) can allude to Trumbo's sense of alienation from both his own homeland and the cinema business he was formerly engaged in. It emphasizes the serious impact that political persecution may have on people's sense of self and belonging.

## **6. Poster Analysis**

The poster of the film *Trumbo* reveals a striking image of Bryan Cranston as the titular character, Dalton Trumbo. As can be observed, the image of Cranston is put at the centre, with the actor looking directly to the viewer in a determined and earnest expression. This is compatible with the character's mindset of defiance in the face of governmental oppression. As regards the chosen colours, the poster's dominant colour palette of red, symbolizing Communism, and black symbolizing the dark era of McCarthyism, the whole giving an impression of threat and urgency, which eventually sets the film's subject matter and tone. As

regards the title of the film, the latter appears in bold, upper-case letters that aim at reflecting the character's strength and resilience. At the top of the poster, the audience is introduced to a tagline that reads "Are you now or have you ever been..." referring to the infamous question asked during the hearings held by the HUAC in the late 40's. The line assists in defining the historical and political context of the movie. Besides, it serves as a provocative reminder of the hysteria of the time and the baseless charges made against those who were deemed to be harbouring Communist sympathies. Moreover, as can be observed the background is full of pieces of text written in red that provide context and additional information about the protagonist.

Another appealing element that appears in the poster is the typewriter. As might be expected, the typewriter serves as a visual representation of Trumbo's profession. Besides, being a vintage model from the 1940's, the typewriter helps to identify the time period in which Trumbo lived. Nonetheless, this can also be presented as a subtle reminder of the intricacies experienced by many writers during the McCarthy era.

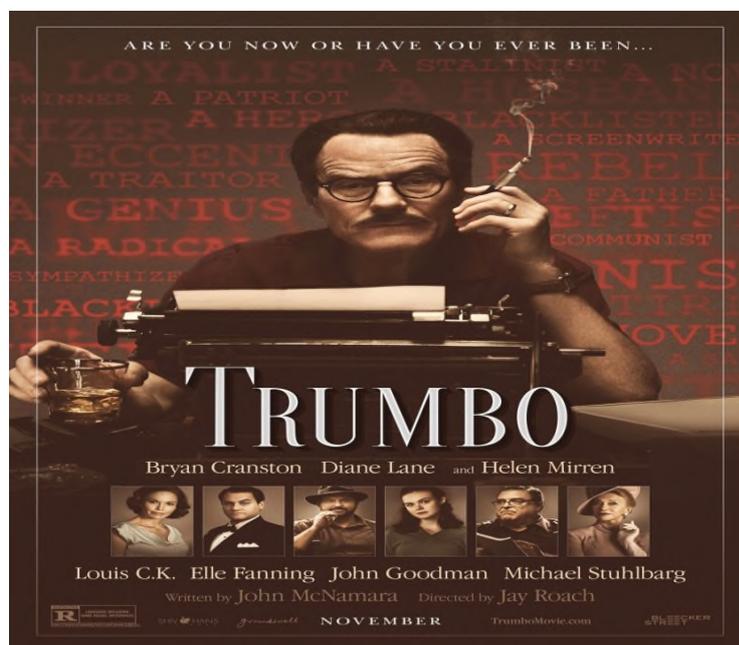


Fig. 1. "Trumbo" Movie Poster.

The poster features the character holding a cigarette in one hand, with smoke curling around, and a glass of wine in the other. The poster's symbols of wine and cigarette are used for the sake of evoking a sense of sophistication and defiance. Since wine tends to be associated with sophistication and refinement, Trumbo is pictured as a cultured, intellectual person who rejects being intimidated or silenced by those who claim his censorship. On the other hand, the cigarettes may be interpreted as a sign of the 1940s–1950s, when the movie is set, as well as the Hollywood culture and lifestyle of the era. In fact, smoking is shown as an almost ubiquitous part of the Hollywood lifestyle, so that many characters of the movie are seen as chain-smokers.

From a different angle, the cigarettes can be representative of Trumbo's emotional and psychological distress as he attempts to cope with the traumatic episodes he'd been subjected to, and the burdensomeness he had to carry for years in the middle of a highly agitated political and social period of the United States.

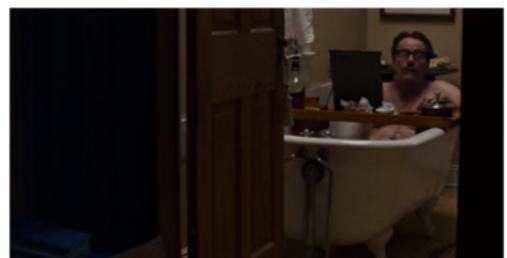
It is noteworthy that several posters of the film have been released; however, we have decided to discuss this one as it is the richest in terms of conveyed information.

## 7. Narrative Structure Analysis

The narrative adheres to the conventional Three-Act Structure: Act One: Setup, Act Two: Confrontation and Act Three: Resolution. *Trumbo* opens with a long shot that showcases a big house in



1947 surrounded by a range of mountains in North Los Angeles. Diegetic sounds of birds chirping, letting thus the audience immerse into the serenity of the atmosphere (00:01:34). The appeasing atmosphere is extended shortly after as Dalton Trumbo is displayed smoking a cigarette and working on a script



while lounging in a bathtub. (00:01:40). Interestingly, this sequence can be read as an illustration of Trumbo's uncommon, relaxed, and creative nature since he appears at ease working in such an unusual setting. The next scene reveals Trumbo fastly attacking the keys of his typewriter, and at the same time, a nondiegetic sound is employed. The soundtrack is vivid and rhythmic, so as parallelly, the sound of the keys tapping as Trumbo is using his typewriter is audible throughout the scene, blending thus with the sound, and further enhancing the sense of immersion. Interestingly, this may eventually reflect Trumbo's devotion and active participation in regards of his rhythmic professional career.

Stick to the opening, the latter features a series of dissolves at (00:02:08). The dissolves are used to transit between different images, creating a smooth flow of information and a sense of historical continuity. That first, a frame of Trumbo in uniform appears, so that it grabs the audience's attention as one can link it to the main protagonist's involvement in war. Besides, this can let the viewer question the political commitment of Trumbo. Right after, the image fades out and is replaced by another fading in, which exposes a certificate of nomination for award. The process is repeated and exhibits Trumbo's book *Johnny Got His Gun*, the poster of the film *A Guy Named*, along with others. In fact, these dissolves present archival footage and photographs that eventually establish the historical context for the story, and convey additional information about the main character.

The scene that takes place at a party when Trumbo is surrounded by renowned individuals from Hollywood establishes Trumbo's standing as a successful screenwriter in the film industry and his connections to other characters like Edward G. Robinson, a well-known actor. The quarrel with Director Sam Woods occurring at (00:04:28), where they argue about Communist strikes, further enhances our understanding concerning Trumbo's political inclinations.

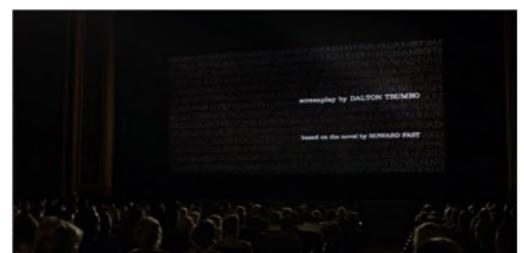
As can be noted, the opening scenes of *Trumbo* effectively expose Dalton Trumbo's personality traits, his position in the film business, his political leanings, and the conflict that will be the story's main focus. They further define the film's mood as being a drama with social and political concerns.

Around (00:15:00), a scene of family and friends reunion is displayed; and this is believed to be the one that marks the end of Act one. In fact, the filmmaker undertakes the mission of employing a Cross-cutting so that simultaneously, the scene of the family gathering and a scene of a car seemingly approaching intersect. The cinematic technique lets the audience establish linkages between the two



scenes, so that it stirs their apprehension and anticipates a dramatic incident. This being said, the movie's second stage is the confrontation which begins at precisely (00:16:02) with the arrival of the aforementioned car to the family. Dalton Trumbo receives a subpoena and is compelled to give testimony about his political beliefs and associations. The events then escalate through Trumbo's decision to resist the HUAC's demands which ultimately leads to his blacklisting from the film industry and a period of personal and professional hardship. The upcoming events also reveal the battle undertaken by Trumbo to maintain his screenwriting career under degraded circumstances, which eventually constituted of him writing under pseudonyms, ultimately winning two Academy Awards.

The events making up the confrontation ultimately led to the protagonist's triumphant return to Hollywood. The very exact scene that marks the start of it is considered to be at (01:51:35), as Trumbo attends the premiere of *Spartacus*,



as the opening credits are up on the screen, the name Dalton Trumbo appears under the words “screenplay by”, and through a parallel editing, Trumbo’s own name is reversely reflected in his glasses. This scene is displayed through a close-up, as one can see Trumbo’s watery eyes. Besides, believed to be the most powerful tool a filmmaker disposes of, the close-up comes to instil a sense of intimacy and immerses the audience into this heart-touching and long-awaited moment in the life of Trumbo.



On the other hand, speaking of the reflection of Trumbo’s name in his glasses, this can be taken as a subtle yet powerful means of underscoring the personal significance of his work on *Spartacus*. Moreover, the sequence also serves as a tribute to Trumbo's tenacity and perseverance in the face of adversity, so that in spite of the difficulties, he persisted in creating and working, and his efforts assisted in ending the blacklisting. Furthermore, when it comes to the reversed letters in the reflection, one may question the meaning of it. In fact, the filmmaker may suggest that the reversal of letters coincides with the reversal of Trumbo’s career, as the blacklist came to alter the general run of things, and switched Trumbo’s life from all sides.

The resolution continues as Dalton Trumbo delivers his Oscar acceptance speech on March 13, 1970. The speech is considered an appropriately fitting conclusion to the movie's assessment of the outcomes of political persecution. This being considered, the resolution is thus synonymous with a happy ending, which makes the film's storyline conventional.

### **8. *Mise-en scène* Analysis**

Mise-en-scène is the French for “putting on stage”. In her *Film Studies: The Basics*, Amy Vellarejo remarks that *mise-en-scène* is “all that is encompassed by the frame” (28).

This being so, the term encapsulates elements such as setting, lighting, costume design , props as well as the acting choice.

When it comes to our film under study, an in-depth *mise-en-scène* analysis of it is needed to be established. In fact, the setting of *Trumbo* is a vital component of the plot because it faithfully captures the political and social upheavals that existed in Hollywood in the 1940s and 1950s. Primarily set in Hollywood, it portrays the glamorous nature of the then motion picture industry. The extravagant parties,



fine restaurants, and luxurious houses that actors and actresses move through are all intended to evoke the excess and opulence of Hollywood. However, it is of great significance to note that, with the happenings of the blacklist, the setting reveals the switch corresponding to Trumbo’s life so as Trumbo is shown residing in a humble house, working in a small basement office surrounded by papers and books.



Stick to the setting, the film additionally highlights more locations across the United States, including Washington D.C., where Trumbo and other Hollywood figures testify before the HUAC. In addition to this, the film conveys actual footage of historical people just like Senator Joseph McCarthy (00:49:00) and the Rosenbergs (00:48:46), which eventually adds a great



sense of realism to the film and reflects the political tensions of the era, and help picture the fear and paranoia surrounding Communism and its perceived jeopardy to American democracy.



In terms of lighting, the latter constitutes an essential element of the film and is employed to establish mood, atmosphere, and meaning. The film contains variations in lighting so that, when Trumbo is displayed having quality time with his family just like in (00:15:00), or enjoying a moment of creative inspiration, just like when he is in his bathtub the lighting is brighter and warmer; or in the language of cinema, it is a high-key lighting.



In spite of this, if we came to generalize, the scenes of the film are majorly displayed in a low-key lighting, which eventually creates a sense of drama and tension, fitting the film's subject matter, so that it comes to describe the critical and oppressive political context of the period. For instance, during the final sad moments of Trumbo's goodbye before going to prison (00:37:30), the emphasis is put on the shadows. The use of deep shadows and high contrast mirrors the emotional aspect of the characters grieving Trumbo's departure, and generates a morose atmosphere. Moreover, the low-key lighting effect can also be read as the reflection of the government's oppressive scrutiny, intimidation and inquisition tactics over suspected Communist sympathizers, as well as the fear that Hollywood figures faced during that part of the American history.



Another key *mise-en-scène* element is the costumes. These play a highly significant role in cinema as they represent an effective visual understanding of the character, their social

status, as well as the time period in which the film is set. Being a story that takes place in the 1940's and 50's, men are pictured wearing business suits. When it comes to the social status, for example, considering Edward.G.Robinson's status as successful and wealthy actor, he is displayed with sophisticated and classy suits, always with a breast pocket handkerchief. On the other hand, Arlen Hird is exhibited through a relatively plain and understated fashion including simple shirts and trousers, with braces that convey a sense of practicality and simplicity.



As long as women are concerned, these too are well-depicted in terms of costume design in *Trumbo*. The costumes of the Hollywood figures in the film reflect the glamour and luxury of the film industry during the 1940s and 1950s, and the most relevant figure that comes to evidence this hypothesis is Hedda Hopper. The latter is often seen wearing fine clothes and very extravagant hats. And this opulence is a mere picture of her potent and striking position in Hollywood as a columnist on one hand, and as a great defender of her country on the other. In point of fact, the real life Hedda Hopper cultivated strong sentiments towards hats, and was eventually known for that. Hence, the filmmaker enabled to convey a very faithful and realistic image of the real-life columnist through this subtle yet vital reference to hats.



In contrast, Cleo; Trumbo's wife costumes are less excessive clothes. Not taking part of the Hollywood elite, her style is very simple, and utilitarian. She is often seen wearing simple dresses and practical shoes, which may reflect her role as a supportive and practical partner to her husband.



The fourth concept that will be depicted is Props. Props are the objects that the actors manipulate or are part of the set. Their use is highly significant in the film as they constitute an integral part of the film's visual language and contribute to the film's overall impact and effectiveness. One of the major objects that are recurrent in the film is the typewriter. It is used as a symbol of the main character's writing profession, and shows his dedication to his craft. Besides, the typewriter also derives the plot forward so as it symbolizes Trumbo's commitment and resilience against blacklisting, for despite the complexities and hardships he faced, he continues to abundantly write and use his machine. The typewriter is Trumbo's weapon.

Another appealing and prominent Prop in the film is the cigarettes. Used to enhance the film's period, cigarettes demonstrate the widespread use of tobacco during the 40's and 50's. Most of the characters are shown smoking cigarettes throughout the film, and the one mostly associated with it is Trumbo. In fact, his persistent smoking habits may reflect the ease and relaxation it generates for him, and can also reveal his easygoingness. As the film moves forward, this educated guess may alter, since taking into account the intensification of the events and the critical shift in Trumbo's life, his smoking can be seen as he is own shelter for his sorrows and grief.

Another Prop that will be analysed is the paintings on Edward.G.Robinson's walls. To further extend Robinson's Hollywoodian lifestyle, the paintings illustrate his important career as a successful actor, and show how well-educated and appreciative of art he is. Selling a Van Gogh's to help the Hollywood Ten in their trial; Robinson shows the commitment and appreciation he holds towards them.

As regards the cast of *Trumbo*, the latter constitutes an essential asset and great strength of the movie. Skilled performers deliver powerful and memorable performances that bring the characters to life and contribute to the movie's potential to be a compelling and

thought-provoking journey through one of the darkest eras in Hollywood history. Bryan Cranston, who plays Dalton Trumbo, offers a performance that is alternately humorous, tragic, and motivating. Cranston gives Trumbo's character depth and complexity, reflecting his strengths and weaknesses as well as his wit, intellect, and passion. As regards Helen Mirren, she looks particularly admirable in her representation of Hedda Hopper, giving the character a steely drive and venomous wit. The remainder of the cast, which also includes Michael Stuhlbarg, Elle Fanning, and Diane Lane, deliver very beautiful and solid performances that add depth to their respective roles, asserting thus their positions as talented actors and actresses.

A number of reviews come to reinforce the above-mentioned impressions. *The Guardian* writes that Bryan Cranston was “terrific in the role, perfectly embodying the irascible genius of a writer”. It gives credit to Diane Lane stating that “Diane Lane is excellent as Trumbo’s loving but long-suffering spouse, Cleo, defending her children against their father’s drug- and alcohol-fuelled irritability”. *The Sydney Morning Herald* depicts the impersonification of Helen Mirren to Hedda Hopper by stating “Gossip queen Hopper wasn't exactly the Witchfinder General we see here, but once you cast Helen Mirren, the size of the role increases to match her stardom, growing like Hedda's hats.”

All things considered, *mise-en-scène* plays a crucial role in the art of filmmaking as its importance lies in its ability to communicate meaning and create an emotional and visual language that engages with and impacts the audience.

## **Conclusion**

The provided thorough analysis of *Trumbo* comes to prove that the film is a well-made and faithful representation of one of the most destructive periods in Hollywood history. By centring on individuality, it takes an incisive look into the lives of people who were impacted by the Hollywood blacklist and well conveys the political and social environment that

prevailed during the Red Scare period. The film foregrounds Dalton Trumbo's struggles along with his comrades to restore their liberties and rights, and fight against the oppressive system. The extracted themes of the movie coincide with the general idea of it. As regards, the poster, it promises an entry to the themes and messages of the film, and serves as a potent visual representation of its overall meaning. Concerning the cinematic techniques employed, these come to bolster the intended meaning of the film. The combination of varieties of shots and angles, archive footage, lighting, and soundtrack, all intersect to generate a rich and engaging cinematic experience.

## General Conclusion

The present research has provided an overall cinematic depiction of *Trumbo* through implicitly referring to the correlation between film and history; to what extent film can tell about history. It has provided a general, yet plausible idea of Robert Rosenstone's position towards the integration of film in telling historical concerns. It is noteworthy to mention that the screenwriter of the film, John McNamara personally approached the daughters of Dalton Trumbo, in order to stick close to the truth as much as possible.

Our research has implicitly pointed out to the significant role of film as a medium of transporting history. As long as Robert Rosenstone is concerned, the latter admits that the image of the past can in all way never be recreated to its fullest, yet film remains a way of telling history that marks our modern times, which should be welcomed and acknowledged among historians. This being considered, our study attempted to measure the accuracy of *Trumbo* in retelling history; which is achieved through a cinematic analysis. In fact, considering Robert Rosenstone's sayings, so that not being the past itself, *Trumbo* is believed to be a faithful representation of the time period in which it took place. The theme of "Americanism" coincides with US position and involvement in the eve of a Cold War in order to safeguard the nation and preserve its ideals from any Communist infiltration, more specifically the HUAC which helped the government to expose those who were suspected of having far-left leanings. On the other hand, the themes of "loss of self" and "political survival" stand for the persecuted Other, in this case communists, and the animosity they were subjected to. The poster of *Trumbo* serves as a visual representation of the time period, so that the provided analysis effectively underlined the symbolic references to former real-life events. As regards the contextual analysis, the latter tried to establish linkage between the film under study and its director's career, as well as its production company. Speaking of the plot structure analysis, this provided a logical and clear progression to the movie, which comes to

bolster the linearity of the unfolding events of the time period as well as in Dalton Trumbo's life course. In addition to this, it aims at creating a sense of anticipation and keeps the audience engaged throughout the film. The *mise-en-scène* part highly managed to re-create both the glamour and the oppressive mood of post-World War II America. The combination of the *mise-en-scène* elements helps to create historical context as well as an immersive and convincing portrayal of the period in which the film is set.

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## Résumé

Le présent projet de recherche vise à fournir une analyse filmique du film *Trumbo* réalisé par Jay Roach en 2015, et de sa représentation de l'ère de la liste noire à Hollywood ; en se concentrant principalement sur les entraves personnelles et professionnelles rencontrées par Dalton Trumbo, un scénariste de premier plan durant la Peur Rouge. Suivant les événements de la guerre froide et l'ascension du Sénateur Joseph McCarthy, suivi de son Maccarthisme, une attitude anti-communiste a aussitôt régné sur la population américaine, laissant ainsi place à une intense hystérie. Ceci étant dit, en analysant le film dans son contexte historique, cette recherche a mis en lumière la signification de la période et son impact sur l'industrie cinématographique et la société américaine, de sorte que le contexte historique du film a été établi et son authenticité mesurée. L'étude a entrepris une analyse approfondie du film, incorporant une analyse contextuelle, thématique, structure narrative, affiche ainsi que mise-en-scène. En conséquent, l'étude, en s'appuyant et s'alignant sur certaines idées sélectionnées de l'historien Robert Rosentone, qui prône l'utilisation et l'intégration des films pour dire l'Histoire, en vient à déterminer la fidélité et l'authenticité du film, ce qui en fait ainsi une source historique fiable.