

Laina at the Movies  
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Trumbo

It is amazing that a bio-pic about a screen writer persecuted by the communist witch-hunting UnAmerican Activities Committee in the 1940s to 1950s could be both informative and entertaining. This film was both, and funny in a wry way to boot.

Dalton Trumbo, played wonderfully by Bryan Cranston, was one of the best of Hollywood's screenwriters was blacklisted along with ten others in 1947 when they refused to name names before the theatrical hearings of the Un-American Activities Committee and later, Senator Joseph McCarthy (whose present day reincarnation is Senator Ted Cruz).

Our country, just recovering from winning World War II, was in a panic when we discovered that another war was unfolding: the Cold War with the USSR. America had experienced an earlier anti-Communist witch-hunt in the 1920s, after the Communists replaced the Russian Empire. The Cold War was a scary time, a time that could have turned into a very hot nuclear war.

Complicating this dangerous time was that the Soviets had a distinct advantage in the propaganda wars: selling their values as progressive, idealistic, and humane, none of which was true. However, during the Depression years before World War II, many naive idealists bought the nonsense and joined Communist Parties in the US and Western Europe. They were largely harmless and many dropped their associations. However, the House Committee was selling the idea that America was in danger from clandestine enemies recruited by the USSR. Hearings were held and people were intimidated into naming friends, family, and associates. The brave among them recognized this process as illegal and refused to cooperate. They went to jail, and when released, found their careers gone.

Trumbo was a very decent (and talented) man, and when released from prison, he cobbled together a plan to write screenplays and convinced a producer to use them, attributing them to another (cooperating) writer. Trumbo enlarged his scam to include all the other blacklisted writers, enabling them all to survive their disaster.

Several of Trumbo's screenplays won Oscars, which at the time he could not receive.

This very entertaining film had quite a cast, including John Goodman as a cooperating producer of schlock films and Helen Mirren as the vicious Hedda Hopper.

An alert for you: the persecution of former naive Communists turned up no real spies, no real agents for the Soviet Union. It was just nasty. One of the worst Communist recruits of the time was in England, a Cambridge aristocrat who betrayed England and the US for years. No House Committee unmasked him!

Some of today's naive "Progressives" will equate this witch-hunt to today's concern about Muslim terrorists and their complicit communities. There is no anti-Muslim witch-hunt today, nor will there be. The lone-wolf self-radicalizers will proceed unmolested because their families refuse to out them. Donald Trump may fulminate, but will not succeed in tarring all Muslims. It is illegal.

Brooklyn

This is a sweet little movie about a time that a "second Irish immigration" took place in the US, the 1950s. The first Irish migration was horrific, with thousands of people starving to death in Ireland because of the potato blight and British policy, letting them starve or emigrate.

In the 1950s, educated and largely Middle Class Irish young men and women left Ireland for New York, mostly settling in Brooklyn, because there seemed to be no economic opportunity in Ireland at that time.

This film is about one young woman, Eilis Lacey (played by Saoise Ronan) who is encouraged by her elder sister, Rose, to go to the US to find a better future. Her

sea voyage is rough, her homesickness keen, but in a short time, she finds the right place to live (a genteel boardinghouse), night school for an accounting class, and she even finds a very nice boyfriend, an Italian-American who likes the Irish girls enough to go to Irish church dances.

When her sister unexpectedly dies, she returns home for a visit and finds, to her surprise, that conditions have changed enough in Ireland that she could actually thrive there. The movie is about the push and pull of original home and new home.

This is a very watchable and charming film. I do not find it deserving of Time Magazine's putting it on the list of the best movies of the year. It is just nice.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens

It might just be an age thing, but I have never thought that the Star Wars series was the best thing since whipped cream. I do remember the very first one, in which there was a hilarious scene in a Galactic tavern: a saloon reminiscent of the Old West, except that it was peopled by every sort of creature living in that strange universe. That one really made me laugh.

The Force Awakens is the 7th of this popular series. I am sure that the fans will love it, but I thought it was something of a ripoff, just lots of zooming aircraft, battles, and mayhem. Not my thing since I was fifteen. I prefer Star Trek with Captain Picard.

But for those of you who are dazzled by this series, this is the official plot description:

Thirty years after the defeat of the Galactic Empire, the galaxy faces a new threat from the evil Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) and the First Order. When a defector named Finn crash-lands on a desert planet, he meets Rey (Daisy Ridley), a tough scavenger whose droid contains a top-secret map. Together, the young duo joins forces with Han Solo (Harrison Ford) to make sure the Resistance receives the intelligence concerning the whereabouts of Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), the last of the Jedi Knights.

For those who enjoy this stuff, please do. For me, I will watch reruns of Foyle's War.

The Big Short

This was my Christmas afternoon movie, the once a year that I can lure my husband to a movie. I particularly wanted to have him see this because he is as good with numbers as I am with languages. My eyes often glaze over when I have to balance my checking account. His do not.

This film is the true story about four outsiders in the high-finance world who saw that the credit and housing bubble collapse of the mid-2008 was coming. After getting laughed at by the big Wall Street banks when they warned them, they did something that was certainly legal, but in my estimation, terribly unethical. They exposed the banks for their greed and willful exploitation of the monetary system. They went to the big banks with a deal: a bet that if the mortgages that were being grabbed up in the overheated housing market would go bust, they would get a huge reward. The bankers took on what was essentially betting on people's money!

The film is stylish, lively, and foul mouthed, the preferred style of today's young and chic. The approaching disaster was exciting to watch, and of course, it came. We are all still paying for this today. And yes, almost none of the criminal bankers have gone to jail.

My husband's trouble with this film is what they left out: that the US Government itself played more than one role in this near catastrophe (yes, it would have been worse had not the new Obama administration saved the system). The government had long believed that every American should be able to own a home. This is a nice idea, a proper one for a largely middle class population.

However, two other issues intervened: Congress, in a fit of deregulation, permitted banks to engage in the housing industry with no oversight. The second thing was that in the government's zeal for everyone to own a home, there was no oversight of whether buyers were qualified for home loans. In a rising and overheated market,

nobody considered the consequences.

What goes up comes down. The movie was very self-righteous and cynical, something that annoyed me. The bank malfeasance has not yet been corrected. Let us not be fooled again. We, the citizens, were taken for a ride and are still paying for it.