## Cinematic Contextual History of *High Noon* (1952, dire Fred Zinnemann) J. M. CAPARROS-LERA SERGIO ALEGRE

Cinema must be seen as one of the ways of ideologies of our Century because it shows very well the mentality of men and women who make films. As well as painting, literature and arts, it helps us to understand our time. (Martin A. JACKSON)

0. T.: *High Noon*. Production: Stanley Kramer Productions, Inc./United Artists (USA,1952). Producers: Stanley Kramer & Carl Foreman. Director: Fred Zinnemann. Screenplay: Carl Foreman, from the story *The Tin Star*, by John W. Cunningham. Photography: Floyd Crosby. Music: Dimitri Tiomkin. Song: *Do Not Forsake Me Oh* My *Darlin'*, by Dimitri Tiomkin and Ned Washington; singer: Tex Ritter. Art Director: Rudolph Sternad. Editor: Elmo Williams. Cast: Gary Cooper: (Will Kane), Thomas Mitchell (Jonas Henderson), Lloyd Bridges (Harvey Pell), Katy Jurado (Helen Ramirez), Grace Kelly (Amy Kane), Otto Kruge: (Percy Metrick), Lon Chaney, Jr. (Martin Howe), Henry Morgan (Sam Fuller), Ian MacDonald (Frank Miller), Eve McVeagh (Milfred Fuller) Harry Shannon (Cooper), Lee Van Cleef (Jack Colby), Bob Wilke (James Pierce), Sheb Wooley (Ben Miller), Tom London (Sam), Larry Blake (Gillis), Jeanne Blackford (Mrs: Henderson), Guy Beach (Fred), Virginia Christine (Mrs. Simpson), Jack Elam (Charlie), Virginia Farmer (Mrs. Fletcher), Morgan Farley (Priest), Paul Dubov (Scott), Harry Harvey (Coy), Tin Graham (Sawyer), Nolan Leary (Lewis), Tom Greenway (Ezra), Dick Elliot (Kibbee), John Doucete (Trumbull). B/W -85 min. Video distributor: Universal.

The post-war American atmosphere and the never well-seen social problem cinema -especially thriller film *noir*- are the major reasons to understand why during the Forties Hollywood was purged by the self- called the most liberal and democratic government of the world.\*

Truman's executive order was published in May 12, 1947. It was a declaration of total war against communism. Nine days later, the president created The Loyalty Programme for federal employees. Automatically one million and a half public workers became suspect because it was considered disloy to be member or a supporter of any organization, association, group, movement or union of people considered totalitarian by the Attorney General.<sup>1</sup>Obssesion with loyalty and Americanism was so strong that even the president was accused by the Attorney General of disloyalty because of Harry Dexter White affair. It was a real paranoia: «Who is investigating the man is investigating you?», asked a pamphlet. But President Harry Truman denied to declare.<sup>2</sup>

So, senator Joseph McCarthy started to investigate communist influence in the intellectual community. So did the House on Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), with J. Parnell Thomas as chair (later he was accused of misappropiating funds). Thomas, would meet a few men he had investigated in prison when he was sent there, was a congressman of New Jersey and an opposal of the New Deal. The rest of members were John McDowell (Pennsylvania), Richard D. Vail (Illinois),Karl E. Mundt (Dakota), John S. Wood (Georgia), who was the president of HUAC in 1951, and Richard Nixon (California).<sup>3</sup>

The HUAC grew out of the Dies Comittee, which in the thirties had accused forty artists of disloyalty. They contacted Joseph B. Mathews -a journalist of Randolph *Citizen Kane* Hearts-, a violent anticommunist and the real «teacher» of McCarthy in order to investigate Hollywood. In September 25, 1947, the HUAC was a front page in all newspapers when ten Hollywood people refused to declare. Known as the *Hollywood Ten*, the group was formed by Edward Dmytryk, Herbert J. Biberman, directors; Alvah Bessie<sup>5</sup>, Lester Cole, Ring Larner Jr., John Howard Lawso<sup>6</sup>, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ormitz, Dalton Trumbo<sup>7</sup>, screenwriters; and Adrian Scott, producer. Only a few of them were members of the Communist Party. But in 1949 a few of them were condemned to spend one year in jail and pay \$1,000 fine.<sup>8</sup>

After that, a terror atmosphere grew-up -at the same time the Korean War and *Red Terror* of Cold War were going on-and it was shown in films: a few suspect of communist propaganda, as well as *Crossfire* (1947, dir. Dmytryk), *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1947, dir. Elia Kazan), *All the King's Men* (1947, dir. Robert Rossen), *No Way Out* (1950, dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz), and *The Well* (1951, co-dir. Rouse and Popkin); others as indirect attacks against the moral crisis: *Key Largo* (1948,dir. John Huston), *Criss Cross* (1949,dir .Robert Siodmak), *Panic in the Streets* (1950,dir. Kazan), *Detective Story* (William Wyler,1951), *The Big Heat* (1952, dir. Fritz Lang), *High Noon* (1952, dir. Fred Zinnemann), *Johnny Guitar* (1953, dir. Nicholas Ray), *Pick-up on South Street* (Sam Fuller, 1953) and *Salt of the Earth* (1953, dir. Herbert J. Biberman).

It was a real *Witch Hunt*<sup>10</sup> in order to push a big group of artists with a critical point of view, completely different from the normal one in Hollywood,<sup>11</sup> Because of McCarthyist persecution-although this Senator from Wisconsin did not play a role in the trials<sup>12</sup>- a few directors denounced their own fellows and accused them of disloyalty (two of them were Ed ward Dmytryk and Elia Kazan , who tried to justify himself in *Viva Zapata!* [1952] and *On the Waterfront* [1954] ). Others decided to live the country; a few saw how their careers were frustrated (Jules Dassin o Abraham Lincoln Polonsky)<sup>13</sup>; others were sent to exile: John Barry and Joseph Losey, who emigrated to Italy and later to England where he could develop, first with pseudonym, a work that would have been cut off by McCarthyism.<sup>14</sup>

Altogether at least 320 people were blacklisted and one, John Garfield, died. At the same time, friendly witness as Adolphe Menjou, Robert Taylor, Walt Disney, Robert Montgomery or Gary Cooper (who declared: «...what I have heard of it (communism) I don't like because it's indecent...»)<sup>15</sup> were cooperate with the HUAC. Finally, although House on Un-American Activities Committee was disolved when McCarthy died, blacklists were used for a long time. So, between 1947 and 1956 the famous HUAC called 380 people, 60 were friendly witness, 8 answered negative, 146 did not answered and 159 did not go at all.<sup>16</sup>



Even at the begining of the Fifties, when persecution was less strong, Oscar winning films had nothing in common with real America life. Hollywood, obssesed with the anticommunism <sup>17</sup>, decided to give the Academy Awards to escapist films, entertainment movies or just movies related to Hollywood: *All About Eve* (1950, dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz), *An American in Paris* (1951, dir. Vincente Minnelli), *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952, dir. Cecil B. De Mille). This film was the winner against *High Noon*, perhaps the moral winner.

*High Noon* was produced by Stanley Kramer<sup>18</sup> and directed by Fred Zinnemann. Carl Foreman, who had had problems with McCarthyism, was the co-producer and screenwriter<sup>19</sup>, but for a lot of critics he was the real author of the film, because he controlled it directly and hid the real meaning from Zinnemann and Gary Cooper<sup>20</sup>. That's why critics think *High Noon* lost its f chances for Oscar and not for artistic reasons<sup>21</sup>

Ever since Zinnemann's film has been interesting to historians and critics, many different political explanations have been written about it:

(a) It has been seen as a Pro-McCarthyism film because the evil forces (in this case the bandits, seen as a communist threat) are destroyed by a single hero, who symbolizes the virtues of America middle class.<sup>22</sup>

(b) Critics has seen the argument as a symbolic allegory of U.S. foreign politic during the Korean War: although he had cleaned up the city five years ago (World War II), Sheriff Kane, who wants peace, must fight again (Korea War). His quaker wife represents pacifist and isolationist America although she feels that it is important to defend her husband's ideas. In this way *High Noon* defends the idea that war is, under special circumstances, moral and inevitable.<sup>23</sup>

(c) Historians Georges A. Astre and Albert P. Hoarau say: *«High Noon* shows the slow fall of the social structure. How a real situation can destroy a community's moral code. So, when Sheriff Kane overcomes fear, he can see that it is just the expression of the community fear, worried and nervous about the unknown, ready to take any dirty and unfair action if it is necessary»,<sup>24</sup> This interpretation is very close to Carl Foreman's ideas: *«High Noon* is more a study of community fear than a study of personal fear»<sup>25</sup>, and *«*if you think of America political atmosphera of this time, and you know if tended me quite of lot, I was very interested in this film».<sup>26</sup>

(d) A group of film critics believe Fred Zinnemann and Carl Foreman took revenge on the repression they suffered -all country suffered because trials did not stop till 1956<sup>27</sup>- using methaphors to represent the fear produced by McCarthy period. For example, the name Sam Fuller -famous filmmaker because of his anticommunist ideas<sup>28</sup>- was given to the most afraid man in the film. Futhermore each protagonist's behavior and the anguish of Sheriff Will Kane (the name of one of HUAC members), torn between his obligation and his self-preservation instinct, are methaphor of the attitude of the vast majority of American people during that time. Fear despite a defect few how took, alone, their own moral responsibilities.<sup>29</sup>

(e) Finally, *High Noon* has been recently analyzed from a point of view fairer than the political one. *High Noon* seen as a model of Kant's moral philosophy<sup>30</sup>, with four basic ideas of the film. These are: Time, Autonomy / Heterodonomy, Duty or the Categorical Imperative, and Visible and Invisible Church. «Through each runs the issue of appearance and reality».<sup>31</sup>

Did Zinnemann think of any of these ideas when he made this film? Which of them is nearer to this original intention? Did he just think to make a psycological western with no relation at all to America political situation during the Fifties? Have critics and scholars gone too far?<sup>32</sup>. In order to clear up these questions, the authors directly questioned to Fred Zinnemann.<sup>33</sup> Here we re-produced his first answer by letter (Cfr. original in page 42).

Now let's see what historians Marc Ferro and Pierre Sorlin can tell us referring to this:

«In any case, every film has value as a document, whatever its apparent nature. This is true even if it has been made in the studio, even if it is neither narrative nor representational. Through the way in which it acts on the realm of imagination, through its transporsition of the imaginary , every film lays down the relationship which bind together its author, its matter and the spectator. Besides, the unspokens, the imaginary are as much history as is History , but cinema, specially the cinema of fiction, opens a royal road towards psyco-socio-historical regions never reached by the analysis of 'documents' ».<sup>34</sup>

«Any film is completly impregnated by the worries, moviments and wills of it time (...): so if ideology is the base of an era, where problems came from, the ways you can show and develop them, each film is a part of this ideology, it is one of the ideological expressions of it time.»<sup>35</sup>

Ideas very similar to Martin A. Jackson point of view<sup>36</sup> quoted at the beginning.

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2 September 1988

## Dear Professor Caparros-Lera,

Thank you for your very kind letter of August 5th which I read with much interest. It gives me great pleasure to answer your questions about "HIGH NOON":

1. This is the first time I have heard of the theory that the film was intended to be an **d**llusion to the Korean war. I can assure you that this is pure speculation.

2. The second theory originated with Carl Foreman, who saw the film as an allegory on his own experience of political persecution during the McCarthy period. Of course I respected his opinion but I did not share it. To me the story is about the character and commitment to duty of a man who is under pressure and who triumphs over his own strongest fears - which is true courage. I believe it was the first time that the hero of a Western did not symbolize the myth of a superman, forever victorious, who doesn't know the meaning of fear. Also, I thought that it was a commentary on the human condition: people who can find all kinus of excuses to avoid becoming personally involved in a dangerous crisis. As you can see, the theme I was interested in had a broader meaning than a purely political angle would have had.

I hope you will find the above comments useful and I remain, with my best regards,

Sincerely yours,

Limemen

FRED ZINNEMANN

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES:

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Afterwards, Sergio Alegre completed this article with two interviews: the American historian Robert A. Rosenstone, Profesor of the California Institute of Technology (Pasadena), and the filmmaker Fred Zinnemann in London, on April of 1995. The authors are grateful to Prof. Rosenstone and Mr. Zinnemann's contributions.

See also our original videotape *Fred Zinnemann's High Noon (1952): An Anti or Pro- McCarthyism Film (FILM-HISTORIA, 1989. Co-dir. J. M. Caparrós-Lera and Sergio Alegre. Filmmaker: Xavier Roca), 20 min. B/W & Color. Copy VHS -Pal System, Department of Film, MOMA New York).* 

(1) The film written by a blacklist -Walter Bernstein- has shown that reality: *The House of Carrol Street* (1988, dir. Peter Yates). Vid. the article by TRAINOR, R. «Blacklist», *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 57, No.3 (1988): 198-199. See also another recent film: *Guilty by Suspicion* (1990, dir. Irwin Winkler).

(2) Cfr. GUBERN, R. *McCarthy contra Hollywood: la caza de brujas*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1974, p. 17 (3<sup>a</sup> ed. en 1987: *La Caza de Brujas en Hollywood*). See also DONOVAN, J. *Conflict and Crisis: the Presidency of Harry Truman, 1945-1948*. New York: Norton, 1977); and FREELAND, R. *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism*. New York: A. Knapf, 1971.

(3) An interesting survey in Spanish is the article by RIAMBAU, E.; TORREIRO, M. «La caza de brujas. Una pesadilla en la fábrica de sueños», *Dirigido por...*, No.70 (1980): 8- 31. Vid. the books by LATHAM, E. *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy*. Cambridge, 1966; and GOODMAN, W. *The Committee: the Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities*. New York: Farrar, strauss and Giroux, 1968.

(4) Cfr. O'REALL Y, K. Hoover and the Un-Americans: the FBI, HUAC, and the Red Menace. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983; and CEPLAIR, L.; ENGLUND, S. The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960. New York: Anchor Press-Doubleday, 1980.

(5) Bessie, who was a member of the Lincoln Brigade at the Spanish Civil War, was pay homage in the Spanish film *Spain Again* (1968, dir. Jaime Camino). He wrote a testimonial book: *Inquisition in Eden*. New York: Macmillan, 1965.

(6) Lawson wrote another testimonial work: *Film in the Battle of Ideas*. New York: Masses and Mainsream, 1953.

(7) Trumbo, who did not sign any script until the Sixties *-Spartacus* (1960, dir. Stanley Kubrick) and *Exodus* (1960, dir. Otto Preminger)-, realized his first film when he was 65 years old: *Johnny Got His Gun* (1972), based on his novel written in 1937, with the Luis Buñuel's contribution. Cfr .Dalton TRUMBO's testimony: *Addictional Dialogue*. New York: M. Evans and Co., 1970. Vid. COOK, B. *Dalton Trumbo*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977.

(8) Cfr .DIRK, B. F. *Radical Innocence: A Critical Study of the Hollywood Ten.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989; and KAHN, G. *Hollywood on Trial: the Story of the Ten Were Indicted.* New York: Arno Press, 1972. See also these three important documentaries: *The Hollywood Ten* (1951, dir. John Barry), *Hollywood on Trial* (1976, dir. David Helpern Jr.) and *Legacy of Hollywood Blacklist* (1987, dir. J. Choikin).

(9) Vid. ADLER, L. «The Politics of Culture: Hollywood and the Cold War», GRIFFITHS, R.; THEOHARIS, A. (eds.) *The Specter: Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism*, New York: New Viewpoints, 1974; and POLAN, D. *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative and the American Cinema, 1940-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

(10) Cfr. ROFFMAN, P.; PURDY, J. *The Hollywood Social Problem Film. Madness, Despair and Politics From Depression to the Fifties.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

(11) At the time the neo-realism had born in Italy and Europe would take new ways with the «new waves». Vid. DOWDY, A. *The Films of the Fifties*. New York: Morrow Paperback, 1973.

(12) Joseph McCarthy did not go neither to any judgement nor to Hollywood till 1950. Cfr. ALSINA THEVENET, H. *Listas negras en el cine*. Buenos Aires: Fraterna, 1987. Edward Dmytryk agreed with

this idea in Barcelona in July 1988 during the Film Festival. Cfr. «The Blacklisted in Barcelona: 40 Years Later», *Acció!*, No.3 (1988): 42-44. See also KEMPTON, M. *Part of Our Time*. New York: Dell Publushing Co., 1967, pp. 208 et sq.

(13) This director who realized in 1948 one of the best film *noir* of post-war-*Force of Evil*- did not make any film until 20 years later: *Tell Them Willie Boy is Here* (1968). See his testimony in «How Blacklist worked in Hollywood», *Film Culture*, No.50-52 (1970): 41-48.

(14) Cfr. LEAHY, J. *The Cinema of Joseph Losey*. New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1967; and MILNE, T. *Losey on Losey*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1967. See also CIMENT, M. *Kazan on Kazan*. London: Viking Press, 1973; and NAVASKY, V. S. *Naming Names*. New York: Viking Press, 1980.

(15) A very famous star who said that he could not set an example of a communist script because he read them by night and if he did not liked he did not finish them. Cfr .KHAN, G. *Op. cit.*, p. 56. The author of this book was one of the unfriendly witness (The first edition was in 1948 and it is a very important testimony). See also MUSCIO, G. *Lista nera a Hollywood: la caccia alle Streghe nelle anni quaranta.* Milano: Feltrinelli, 1979; and BRION, P. «La liste noire», *Dossiers du Cinéma: Films III.* Brussels: Casterman, 1975.

(16) DONNER, F. *The Un-Americans*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1961. Vid. BENTLEY, E. *Thirty* Years of Treason: Excerpts From Hearing Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968. New York: Viking Press, 1972. See also, about this era, HOFSTADTER, R. *The Paranoid* Style in America Politics and Other Essays. New York, 1965, Chapters 2 and 3; ROGIN, M. *The* Intellectuals and McCarthy. Cambridge, 1967; and on McCarthy vid. too ROVERE, R. Senator Joe McCarthy. New York, 1959; and REEVES, Th. *The Life and Times of Joseph McCarthy*. New York: Stein, 1982.

(17) Cfr. GOW, G. *Hollywood in the Fifties*. New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1971. See also POLAN, D. et al. *Op. cit*.

(18) He was a liberal and independent producer who wanted to use cinema to communicate a mesage to people. Cfr .SADOUL, G. *Dictionnaire des Cineastes*. Paris: Seuil, 1965, p. 133. Kramer worked during the Forties in Columbia Pictures and was supported by United Artists which distributed the film around the world.

(19) He went to England and was accused to «buy» the Tribunal (this idea was never proved. Cfr. CEPLAIR, L.; ENGLUND, S. *Op. cit.*, p. 397). Carl Foreman did not write until 1960. In 1962 he won, with Michael Wilson, the Best Screenplay Academy Award with *The Bridge On the River Kwai* (1957, dir. David Lean), but who took the Oscar was the author of the novel, Pierre Boulle, as a reprisal against the old blacklisted.

(20) A few critics think that Carl Foreman «tried that people saw Gary Cooper as a isolated hero». Cfr .CASAS, Q. «Hace 40 años Hollywood vivió un delirio anticomunista», *Imágenes de actualidad*, No. 62 (1988): 111. Se also *Acció!*, No.3 (1988): 20-47. Even soon Foreman bought all the rights of a similar story, John W. Cunningham's *The Tin Star*, in order to avoid any problem. His original script has four editions.

(21) Cfr. SANCHEZ, A. Iniciación al cine moderno, II. Madrid: Magisterio Español, 1972.

(22) Cfr. ASTRE, G. A.; HOARAU, A. P. Univers du western. Paris: Seghers, 1973, p. 297.

(23) This theory was originated in the Swedish critic. Cfr. GUARNER, J. L. «Solo ante el peligro», *100 películas míticas*. Barcelona: Biblioteca de La Vanguardia, 1986, p.178.

(24) ASTRE, G. A.; HOARAU, A. P. Op. cit., pp. 297-299.

(25) Ibidem, p. 296.

(26) HOUSTON, P. «Interview with Carl Foreman», Sight and Sound (Summer 1958), quoted by ASTRE, G. A.; HOARAU, A. P. Op. cit., p. 296.

(27) Cfr .VAUGHN, R. *Only Victims. A Study of Show Business Blacklisting.* New York: C. P. Putman's Sons, 1972. See also KANFER, S. *A Journal of Plague Years.* New York: Atheneum, 1973. But in 1960 when *Exodus* -screenwritten by Dalton Trumbo- was showed, «there were a few squads of American Legion members but the public did not care at all. The film was a success. The Cold War was over» .Cfr. ALCOVER, N. et al. *El cine y la gente. Aspectos sociales del cine.* Madrid: UNED, 1976, p.m. But the political failure of McCarthy started in 1954 when revealed the Communist infiltration in the Army. The end of the Korean War and the change of Russian politic stopped the HUAC. In 1964 HUAC became the Committee on Internal Security (CIS) and investigated activities against Vietnam War.

(28) Cfr .SANCHEZ, A. Op. cit., p. 234. See also CAPRARA, V. Samuel Fuller. Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1984.

(29) COCLEY, J. *Report on Blacklisting, I: the Movies*. New York: Arno Press, 1972. Vid. DAVIES, Ph.; NEVE, B. (eds.) *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981; and the testimony by HELLMAN, L. *Scoundrel Time*. Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1976.

(30) Cfr. KRYCHE, G. F. *«High Noon* -A Paradigm of Kant's Moral Philosophy», *Teaching Philosophy*, Vol.II, No.3 (1988): 217-228.

(31) *Idem*, p. 224.

(32) NACHBAR, J. G. *Focus on the Western.* Englenwood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974.; and MAYNARD, R. A. *The American West on Film: Myth and Reality.* Rochele Park, N.J.: Hayden, 1974. See also Clint Eastwood speech, LENIHAN, J. H. *Showdown.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980, p.172, who «believed that (his own *High Plains Drifter*) resembled *High Noon* as a commentary on contemporary society's fear of getting involved».

(33) We asked him a letter dated August 5, 1988 (we did not ask about the philosophical theory because it was published in September 1988). Now we contact again with Fred Zinnemann through his secretary Linda; she has facilited the interview. A recent study on the Zinnemann's films is in *Film Criticism*, Vol. XVIII, No.3 (Spring 1994), and Vol. XIX, No. 1 (Fall 1994), special double issue on Fred Zinnemann. Vid. also GOLDAU, A.; PRINZLER, H. H.; SINYARD, N. *Zinnemann*, Berlin: Filme, 1986; and, specially, his *Fred Zinnemann*. *An Autobiography*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1992.

(34) Cfr. FERRO, M. «The fiction films and historical analysis», SMITH, P. (ed.) *The Historian and Film*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 81. See also FERRO, M. *Analyse de film*. *Analyse de sociétés*. *Un source nouvelle pour l'histoire*. Paris: Hachette, 1975, pp.12-13; and his book *Cinema and History*. Translated by Naomi Greene. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988.

(35) Cfr .SORLIN, P. Sociologie du cinéma. Ouverture pour l'histoire de demain. Paris: Auberg-Montaigne, 1977, p. 42.

(36) See *Cultures*, Vol.II, No. 1 (1974), quoted by ROMAGUERA,J.; RIAMBAU,E. (eds.) *La Historia y el Cine*. Barcelona: Fontamara, 1986. Cfr. JACKSON, M. A. «El historiador y el cine»,p.14.

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