

THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
ABDERRAHMANE MIRA UNIVERSITY OF BEJAIA
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



**Dunkirk as a Western Romantic Narrative
in Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk*
(1982) and Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*
(2017)**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfilment of
the Requirement for a Master Degree in English Literature and Civilization

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Academic Year: 2022 / 2023

Abstract

This research paper examines the portrayal of Dunkirk as a romantic Western narrative in Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk* (1982), and Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk* (2017). By analyzing these primary sources in light of Hayden White's ideas on historical narrative, the concept of British Exceptionalism, Francis Fukuyama's book on the end of history, and the contemporary Cold War, the study aims to explore the intricate relationship between history, geopolitics, culture, and cinema in shaping the Dunkirk narrative. Through an exploration of the plot structure, narrative construction, and contextual influences, the research emphasizes the subjective nature of historical accounts and their lasting impact on our understanding of history.

Key Words: Dunkirk, British Exceptionalism, romantic narrative, contemporary cold war, *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, *Dunkirk*.

Dedication

Our families and close friends have been a constant source of belief, guidance, and support throughout our journey, and it is to them that we dedicate this humble work.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere appreciation and respect to our supervisor, Dr. Nouara Touche-Kharouni, for her invaluable assistance and unwavering patience.

We extend our gratitude to the board of examiners for dedicating their time and effort to read and assess this humble paper.

We would like to express our gratitude to all the teachers in the department who have played a valuable role in our education.

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General Introduction

Our understanding of history comes from first-hand accounts, literature, and cinema. Historians, writers, and film directors bring past realities to us in the form of a story, which provides a genuine understanding of the given event and its implications instead of simply bearing knowledge. Therefore, a historical event is brought to us as a set of facts shaped into a story instead of a simple exposition of historical facts. The technique may be understood as dramatization or plot construction, this forms the basis for the story of history, as exposed by American historian and literary critic Hayden White (*The Historical Text as Literary Artifact*).

World War II is an event that marked the world on an exceptional scale, being the largest conflict in history. This event has been studied, documented, and recounted in various shapes and forms. The conflict opposed Nazi Germany and its Axis allies against the Soviet Union and the West, resulting in Germany's defeat. World War II endorses a titanic context, as it is characterized by the scale of the armies engaged, and the intensity of the battles fought. Subsequently, the conflict remains a subject of debate, and its battles and figures are still expounded upon in historical books, films, and novels. These accounts of World War II shape our understanding of the conflict.

For example, Christopher Nolan's 2017 blockbuster *Dunkirk* features the story of the Dunkirk evacuation, an event mythologized throughout time, in films, books, and novels, as Dunkirk holds a significant stature in British history. The film recounts the story of Dunkirk as a strive for survival in the face of death, conveying the significance of the event in the broader context of World War II. Dunkirk is also documented in several historical accounts, notably, Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, featuring a detailed account of the Dunkirk evacuation, where 300.000 British and allied soldiers were evacuated from the Dunkirk beach in northern France in 1940, after being encircled by the German army, during the battle of France. Dunkirk is thus celebrated in Western accounts of World War II, as the event is popularly coined "Miracle", and is demonstrated as such in various representations, the latest

being Nolan's *Dunkirk* and Joe Wright's 2017 *Darkest Hour*. These two films are the latest of a long series of cinematic and historical accounts tackling the event. This is to say that Dunkirk is indeed celebrated, and widely represented.

Yet, given the many battles and decisive events of the Second World War, we are, arguably, left to wonder how an evacuation stands out in the titanic context of the war. This research paper explores the complexities of the Dunkirk narrative, investigating the interplay between history, geopolitics, culture, and cinema, through an examination of the event's historical and cinematic representations in Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*. This is with the aim of exploring how Dunkirk as a historical event transcends mere historical facts and is transformed into a lasting captive narrative. Additionally, considering that, the various accounts of Dunkirk shape public perception of the event, then it is plausible to assume that our understanding of historical events, particularly Dunkirk in this case, is shaped by how these accounts demonstrate the event, even if this demonstration exceeds historical accuracy.

In his article "A Great Escape? Dunkirk was a Humiliation for British Forces", British journalist Adrian Hamilton, whose father was a Dunkirk veteran, argues that the Dunkirk evacuation was a strategic and military failure, asserting that it was the cheering that followed the evacuation and not the battle for which Dunkirk is remembered (Hamilton). Hamilton's argument is shared by other journalists and historians, which will be reviewed later in this introduction, but the idea is that, in strict military, strategic, and historical terms, Dunkirk was a defeat. Yet, the latter conclusion will not seem plausible for any individual who views Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk* or reads Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk* or simply comes across the term Miracle of Dunkirk, but he will rather deduce that Dunkirk was a victory against all odds.

Therefore, it is in the belief of this research that representations of Dunkirk are a reinforcement of a narrative, a narrative conveying notions of heroism, exceptionalism, resilience, and victory, or in short a romantic narrative meant to portray the Dunkirk evacuation as a major victory for the west in general and the British in particular. This research seeks to break down the Dunkirk narrative through the examination of its manifestations and dimensions, drawing on Hayden White's ideas on historical narrative, the concept of British exceptionalism, Francis Fukuyama's thesis on the end of history, and the contemporary geopolitical climate. This work is based on the argument that Dunkirk was a defeat and is only portrayed as a victory, which suggests notions of rewriting history and conveying propaganda. These assertions are contingent on various works contemplating the twist of Dunkirk's reality from defeat to victory, hence, supporting the argument on which this paper rests.

In conjunction with *Dunkirk's* release in 2017, Steven Byas published "Dunkirk Miracle or Blunder", in which he exposes historical facts related to the Dunkirk evacuation and its surrounding context, with the aim of demonstrating the blunder behind the miracle. Byas asserts that Nolan's film is a masterpiece, but fails to cover all aspects of the evacuation, as the film features a story of miraculous survival (33). Byas goes on to expose the disaster behind the evacuation, providing a context for the alleged miracle. In addition, he reports that the evacuation did not disturb Hitler, as he was careless about the escape of British soldiers, and even regarded the evacuation not as a setback but as an event that did not harm the advance of the German military in France (Byas 37). Overall, the article dives into the significance of Dunkirk as a historical event and questions the rhetoric of miracle through an exposition of historical evidence that suggest that the Germans did not regard Dunkirk as a setback. Therefore, the article provides evidence that Dunkirk can be regarded as a blunder as much as a miracle, further reinforcing this research's argument.

Another article that shares the argument of Steven Byas is Alice Palmer's "Dunkirk: the Defeat that Inspired a Nation". Palmer explores the construction of the Dunkirk myth (the miracle of Dunkirk), and traces it back to the aftermath of the evacuation during World War II, after an overview of Dunkirk's surrounding context. Palmer notes that: "The myth of Dunkirk as it exists now was created largely during World War II. While the British government was influential in shaping the myth, the state did not strictly control public discourse, as authoritarian regimes did" (3). Additionally, she relates the Dunkirk myth to Churchill, arguing that he was the main trigger behind the portrayal of Dunkirk as a victory, asserting that Churchill ensured the event would be remembered as a victory (4). Besides, Palmer suggests that "Anniversary commemorations reinforce the narrative of Dunkirk as a primarily maritime and populist event" (20). further supporting the argument that Dunkirk is a narrative, and exceeds historical representation, and therefore this article provides valuable insight into the construction of the Dunkirk myth.

Moreover, Penny Summerfield's "Dunkirk and the Popular Memory of Britain at War, 1940-58", offers a compelling insight into Dunkirk's public perception during and after World War II. Summerfield points out that historical representation shapes public perception of the event, as government discourse seeks to center events and eclipse others (790). The latter implies that this perception forms the memory the public develops on the given event, as is the case for Dunkirk. Government propaganda, newsreels, and subsequent cultural representations all take part in constructing the memory of an event. Similarly to Alice Palmer's claims, Summerfield also suggests that Churchill was the main promoter of the Dunkirk myth, as he celebrated Dunkirk as a victory and reinforced it with his speech despite cautioning against early celebrations (791). She then goes on to review the published works on Dunkirk such as Elleston Trevor's *The Big Pick Up* published in 1955, and discusses how these works partook in shaping Dunkirk's memory as a victory. Lastly, Summerfield's work

enhances the arguments of this paper and provides a backdrop for the upcoming analysis of the Dunkirk narrative.

Another significant work is Marco Malvestio's article entitled: "If Necessary for Years, If Necessary Alone": History, Memory, and Fiction in Contemporary Representations of Dunkirk", The author analyzed three films on Dunkirk, Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*, Joe Wright's *Darkest Hour* and *Atonement*, in the aim of exposing the continued persistence of Dunkirk's cultural memory on post-war generations. He argues that the films, despite their strive for accuracy, are patriotic and jingoistic (190). Then he advances a hypothesis that suggests that the continued persistence of the Dunkirk myth is due to nostalgia, which is the notion that during Dunkirk British identity was clear and boosted national pride. The latter argument is proven through his analysis of the films, as they fail to provide an accurate portrayal of the event or its participants. This is exemplified, according to Malvestio, in the absence of non-British soldiers in the films, while in reality there were other ethnicities in the allied army (199). Malvestio also argues that portraying Dunkirk as a victory boosts national pride and popular memory, and therefore represses the fact that the British Empire had collapsed because of World War II (200).

Finally, another source material that is valuable for this paper is Thomas Howard's "Eyewitness Views of Dunkirk; The Miracle of Dunkirk, by Walter Lord", as this article provides needed information on one of the primary sources of this study and its author. Howard briefly reviews *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and provides insight into Walter Lord's style and methods, hence providing data for a deeper understanding of Lord's book.

Overall, the above review of literature provides a backdrop for this study's arguments and enhances understanding of Dunkirk as a historical event and as a memory in culture, literature, cinema, and historical accounts. Thus, it provides a foundation for the analysis of

the primary sources and Dunkirk as a Western romantic narrative, which is conducted in three chapters.

The first chapter entitled “From the Frontlines to the Cold War; Setting the Stage for Dunkirk” provides a historical background for the study. It includes an overview of the events of World War II, Dunkirk (Operation Dynamo), and the Cold War, intending to provide a historical context, a better understanding of Dunkirk in the titanic context of World War II, and an insight into the Cold War as it is an important element in the subsequent analysis of the primary sources.

The second chapter entitled “Walter Lord’s *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and Christopher Nolan’s “Dunkirk” A Historical Account and Cinematic Representation of Dunkirk” reviews, analyzes, and contextualizes the primary sources of this study; it is divided into three sections. The first section features a biography of the author, a review and analysis of the book, and a background for the book’s creation. The second section adopts a similar approach to the film, as it offers an in-depth understanding of Nolan’s *Dunkirk*. The third section aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the primary sources by comparing them and exposing the reasons behind their selection. Overall, the second chapter delves into *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and *Dunkirk* and provides an in-depth understanding of the primary sources while setting the stage for the analysis of Dunkirk as a Western romantic narrative.

The analysis of the primary sources is tackled in the last chapter through a theoretical framework that conceptualizes Hayden White’s ideas on historical narrative, Francis Fukuyama’s thesis on the end of history, the concept of British exceptionalism, and echoes of the Cold War (contemporary geopolitical climate).

Through the examination of Dunkirk as a Western romantic narrative in Walter Lord’s *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and Christopher Nolan’s *Dunkirk*, this study offers insight into the

correlation between narrative and history and seeks to shed light on the influence of ideological struggles, storytelling techniques, and cultural narrative on representations of history. Furthermore, by seeking an answer to the questions of how Dunkirk is romanticized and why is it romanticized, this research attempts to contribute to the field of World War II studies, and the Dunkirk studies, as it exposes the influence of narrative on historical representation. Additionally, by uncovering the complexities of Dunkirk as a Western romantic narrative, this research paper seeks to unravel the role of subjective interpretations, cultural influence, and geopolitical contexts in transforming historical events into narratives.

Chapter One

From the Frontlines to the Cold War:

Setting the Stage for Dunkirk

Introduction

This thesis examines the historical event of Dunkirk as a Western romantic narrative, the construction of the latter, and the factors surrounding its creation and its ongoing reinforcement in literature and film. The first chapter of this paper seeks to explore the historical context of Dunkirk, providing a historical background for the events leading up to Dunkirk in World War II, the event itself in Operation Dynamo, and the Cold War which, in the belief of this research, had a major role in shaping the event into a romantic narrative. For before diving into the analysis of the portrayal of the contextualization of this paper's main sources, a brief and concise historical background for the event is in order. This chapter, however, will not dwell on or provide unnecessary details about the events mentioned above for clarity purposes, providing only the necessary and needed information required for a further understanding of Dunkirk's surrounding context. Setting a historical framework, while serving as a prelude for upcoming chapters in the hopes of a complementary chronology of chapters and an in-depth understanding.

1. A Brief Overview of World War II: The Context of Dunkirk

World War II was the deadliest conflict in history; it reshaped Europe and the world and set the conditions for a bipolar world. The many events and battles that characterize this war will be broadly addressed below, setting a framework for the war in which the Dunkirk evacuation took place.

Walter Lord highlights in his book *The Miracle of Dunkirk* the rise of Germany as a new military power and a serious threat to Europe:

Since 1918 the French Army had been generally regarded as the finest in the world. With the rearmament of Germany under Adolf Hitler, there was a new military power in Europe, but still, her leaders were untested and her weapons

smacked of gimmickry. When the Third Reich swallowed one Central European country after another, this was attributed to bluff and bluster (Lord 02).

Twenty years after the horrors of the First World War, another war would erupt. The Second World War is the most important event in the twentieth century. This war started, mainly, as a result of the harsh treaties imposed on Germany at the end of World War I such as The Treaty of Versailles signed on 28th of June 1919 which led to the destruction of the German economy, the German nation, and the loss of territory. In addition, the Germans had to drastically lower their military personnel and hardware and had to pay the Allies a huge amount of money as a refund for the losses it caused.

By 1938, Nazi Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, and after a rapid militarization, was claiming territory in Czechoslovakia. This act was met by a proposed agreement from the British PM Neville Chamberlin to avoid further escalation, Hitler corresponded and signed the Munich agreement. While the latter recognized German sovereignty over the territories it wanted to annex (Sudetenland), the Nazi leader, however, would go on to invade the whole of Czechoslovakia in 1939. Later that year on the 1st of September, Germany invaded Poland while the Soviets invaded from the east. France and Britain would officially declare war on Nazi Germany only two days after the invasion. However, that did not stop the inevitable, for under the crushing weight of two superpowers, Warsaw fell on September 27th, 1939. It is worth mentioning that The West was both surprised and alarmed by the alliance between Stalin and Hitler, under the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact signed between the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and Nazi leader Adolf Hitler on August 23rd, 1939. The Nazi-Soviet pact allowed Hitler to focus on his other objectives without fear of a Soviet attack from the east, while the Tripartite Pact signed in September 1940 provided solid strategic cooperation and mutual support between Germany, Japan, and Italy, forming the Axis.

Italy, under a fascist regime, began its territorial invasions in 1935 with the annexation of Ethiopia, followed by Albania in 1939. Similarly, Japan, an isolationist imperial state under a staunch military regime, expanded into Southeast Asia and China. The Japanese Imperial Army was known for its brutal tactics, exemplified by the Nanjing Massacre (1937) in China, considered one of the worst atrocities in human history, with an estimated death toll as high as 300,000 Chinese civilians. This approach was recurrent throughout the Japanese conquest of the Pacific Theatre.

It is important to elucidate the underlying motives that drove the expansionist tendencies of the Axis powers before delving into the European and Pacific theatres of WWII. Germany, under the Nazi ideology of Adolf Hitler, held a fervent belief in the superiority of the German Aryan race, his obsession with this belief drove his expansionist tendencies as he sought to gain the necessary “Lebensraum” or living space for the German race (*History.com*). This ideology drove Germany’s conquest of Europe, as it sought to establish Aryan Hegemony. Italy was ideologically aligned with Nazi Germany and shared similar expansionist ambitions under its Fascist regime. In the Pacific, Japan, under the militaristic leadership of Emperor Hirohito, viewed itself as the Asian superpower, guided by a belief in the divinity of the emperor and pursuit of expansionist goals. Thus, the Axis Powers shared a common belief in their superiority and a perceived right to expand their territories.

In the lead-up to the eruption of the European theatre, Germany invaded Norway and Denmark in 1940, while the Soviet Union invaded Finland. This period, dubbed “the phony war”, was characterized by a lack of military action on the Western Front, resulting in the news media leading talks of a “phony war” (*History.com*). Despite the apparent calm, the Allies were not paying close attention to the situation. France, for instance, which had been a winner in World War I, underestimated the German threat and relied heavily on the Maginot

Line; a series of barriers and trench fortifications along the German border. However, the line was not extended to the English Channel, and to the south, there was a belief that the Ardennes would act as a natural barrier. Moreover, the French military was not modernized or alert enough, and most critically, they neglected the unfortified positions in the Ardennes forest; a neglect which would prove to be a historical strategic blunder.

In a “Blitzkrieg” or lightning war, the stage was set for the European theatre as Germany moved westwards. Walter Lord writes in *The Miracle of Dunkirk*: “Then after eight months of quiet—“the phony war”—on the 10th of May, Hitler suddenly struck at Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg” (Lord 02). The suddenness of the attack proved effective as the Wehrmacht (German army) swept through Holland and Belgium, bypassing the Maginot Line through the Ardennes- the only part of the border, which was unmanned by the French, a strategic error as mentioned above- and encircling the Allied army. The German incursion encircled the British expeditionary force on the northern coast of France, in “Dunkirk”. Thousands of British troops were trapped between the Wehrmacht and the English Channel in late May and early June of 1940. The British navy was unable to intervene but “The Miracle” was that the Allies managed to make a desperate last-minute escape with British civilian ships to bring their young men home, saving them from complete annihilation, and preserving the British Army, though it meant abandoning France and facing defeat. It is important to note that this event is given smaller attention in this part in comparison to other events, for purposes of brevity and in the belief of this thesis, that the event is minor in the theatre of the Second World War. Yet, for the aim of providing needed context, the circumstances and details of the Dunkirk evacuation will be addressed separately in the upcoming section. Approximately one month after the evacuation, the Battle of France ended in a French surrender on June 22nd, 1940, marking the fall of France.

Hitler's plan was similar to that of the German plan in World War I; taking over the Soviet Union after invading France and defeating the UK in the process. The latter, however, was galvanized by Winston Churchill's refusal of compromise, and solid attitude, "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" had strengthened British resolve, and turned, arguably, the defeat at Dunkirk into hope. The United Kingdom did not crumble in its "Darkest Hour" as the Fuehrer had anticipated. Thus began The Battle of Britain; German planes relentlessly raided British ports, coastal facilities, and RAF bases, crippling the Royal Air Force. In addition, while Hitler's invasion seemed ever closer. Churchill ordered an insignificant bombing over Berlin, but it did not do any damage, Hitler was infuriated and ordered the Luftwaffe (German Air Force), to target civilians. The RAF's stubborn resolve against the Luftwaffe successfully defeated the Luftwaffe and with it Hitler's initial plan to invade the UK, focusing instead on the North African Campaign in 1941, and renowned German General Erwin Rommel's conquest of Egypt after the Italian failure. The Balkans was also a theatre of war, as the Axis powers sought to secure their southern flank, thus invading Yugoslavia and Greece. The Germans were also focused on their naval strength as their "U-Boats" (submarines), were an unmatched force on the high seas, until the British Cryptanalyst Alan Turing broke the German Enigma code, crippling German radio communication, and countering the "U-Boat" threat. While these details are not elaborated upon in this context, it is important to note that they serve as a prelude to another front that was about to erupt on an unprecedented scale; the eastern front was on the verge of witnessing the largest ground invasion in history-"Operation Barbarossa".

On the 22nd of June 1941, The Luftwaffe carried out a massive bombing campaign across the Soviet Union, paving the way for 3 million soldiers to attack the Axis. The element of surprise served the Wehrmacht well, as they reached the outskirts of Moscow by December 1941. Despite being unprepared, the Soviets used winter to their advantage and

halted the German advance near Moscow, marking the first setback of the Wehrmacht in the War. The eastern front was characterized by sheer brutality, as the Germans committed atrocities across Poland, Ukraine, and Russia, building up concentration camps and adopting a genocidal approach towards minorities, notably the Jews. Furthermore, the soviet red army's reliance on manpower and the initial size of the German invading force meant that the casualty rate was going to be very high. In addition, the Germans implemented a policy of "Total War", meant to destroy the Soviet Union and its people, since they were deemed inferior. Thus, the scale and intensity of warfare, massacres, partisan warfare, and reprisals were unprecedented. (*Britanica.com*)

In the Pacific, Imperial Japan pursued its expansionist agenda by invading territories, and attacking southern colonies of the UK and USA in southern Asia. However, a pivotal event was the Japanese air force attack on the American Naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7th. 1941, marking the entry of the United States of America into World War II. Just as Winston Churchill had predicted in his famous speech "We Shall Fight on the Beaches": "Until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the Old." (Churchill). Subsequently, the Japanese rapidly carried out a series of military operations including the invasions of Guam, the Gilbert Islands, Wake Island, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, as well as coercion of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, North Borneo, the East Indies, New Guinea, and others. Japan was highly motivated and convinced of their inevitable triumph, which drove their aggressive actions in the Pacific theatre. Since the Japanese were raised on the Bushido law; which is built on an intricate system of values in Japan places significant emphasis on honor and loyalty to both the country and family, above all other considerations. Thus, There was no possibility that they were going take any lenient stance to confront the other nations (*Pbs.org*).

Back on the Eastern Front, the Russians had moved their factories behind the Urals in the east producing mass military hardware; tanks, aircraft, Rocket Launchers, and rebuilding the Red Army. In the spring, Hitler shifted his ambition to the oil reserves of the Caucasus, targeting the city of Stalingrad, because of its strategic and significant location, and its symbolic importance. Hence, on the 23rd of August 1942, the Luftwaffe bombed Stalingrad to rubble, while the German army stormed the city. The battle for Stalingrad would go on for the next 6 months, during which the scale of combat and destruction was unprecedented, resulting in an estimated 2 million casualties, making the battle of Stalingrad the bloodiest battle in history. It would, however, end in the first major German defeat, as the Soviets encircled the city and liberated it by the 2nd of February 1943. The Battle would mark the beginning of a Soviet offensive westward.

Germany was not the only Axis power facing defeats, as Japan was halted and saw the tide shift, as the Allies had a series of successes from August 1942 to February 1943 (*History.com*). Italy was also defeated in North Africa by the British and was gradually pushed back to the mainland, by 1943, as an overthrow of the fascist government was forced, following the successful invasion by the Americans and the British (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Consequently, a gradual defeat of the Axis powers was shaping up. In addition to the Soviet offensive in the east and the Allied invasion of Italy, the western front was about to witness a pivotal moment of the war and Germany's ultimate defeat.

The western front erupted with a large-scale allied invasion, on the Northern coast of France, debarking 156,000 British, Canadian, and American troops on the beaches of Normandy on June 6th, the operation would be known as D-Day (*History.com*). The successful breach at Normandy would serve as a beachhead for the liberation of Paris by August 25th, 1944, and a steady advance toward the German mainland. The Germans were unable to counter the Allied advance, and the Battle of the Bulge was a failed attempt to halt

their progress. Pressured by the relentless advance of the Red Army from the east, and the Americans from the west, the Wehrmacht was overextended and depleted. Furthermore, an Allied intensive bombing reduced Germany to rubble, while the Soviets reached Berlin by April 1945, and nearly a month later, the Soviet Flag was raised atop the Reichstag building (the German Parliament building) symbolizing the end of the Battle of Berlin. Nazi Germany did not outlive its leader, as Adolf Hitler committed suicide in his bunker on April 30th, and Germany officially surrendered on May 8th, 1945.

With Germany's defeat, the focus shifted towards the Pacific theatre, where the Japanese imperial army fought for every island, grinding down the Allied advance and inflicting heavy casualties. The Japanese Bushido doctrine motivated and influenced Japanese soldiers to prioritize self-sacrifice over surrender. Battles such as "Iwo Jima" and "Okinawa" stand as an example of the extent of this doctrine's influence. In other words, the Japanese defended every inch of territory to the death. Consequently, the Japanese army's warfare style sparked hesitation among Western leaders in regard to the continuation of the campaign; President Truman's authorization of a new and destructive weapon was prompted by the heavy loss of life during the Iwo Jima campaign in February 1945 and the Okinawa campaign from April to June of the same year. These experiences, along with concerns about the potential human cost of a land invasion of Japan, influenced Truman's decision to approve the use of this weapon. (*History.com*). Thus, on August 6th, 1945, an Atomic Bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, and two days later another atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. These bombings ultimately led to Japan's formal surrender on September 2nd, 1945, marking the end of World War II.

To conclude, World War II was a global conflict that opposed the Allies and the Axis powers, a conflict motivated by expansionist tendencies, ideological extremism, and

militarism. The six-year-long conflict ended in an Allied victory and reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the world. In the context of this research, World War II is the historical backdrop of the Dunkirk evacuation. Thus, having now provided a framework, we will delve into the Dunkirk evacuation.

2. A Narrow Escape: Operation Dynamo

The Dunkirk evacuation, commonly referred to as “Dunkirk”, is a historical event that unfolded during World War II. By establishing a historical framework for the event, this section seeks to shed light on the key details of Operation Dynamo.

The miracle of Dunkirk, codenamed operation dynamo was a large-scale military evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), from the port city of Dunkirk in northern France, after being encircled by the German Army during the Battle of France. Following the successful German invasion of France through the infamous “Blitzkrieg” in May 1940, The BEF fell back to the northern coast of France and was constantly pushed by the advancing Wehrmacht. This resulted in the BEF being trapped in Dunkirk; more than 300.000 British troops were facing the English Channel with the Wehrmacht at their backs, and the Luftwaffe above. The British attempted to evacuate their forces, but the German army impeded the landing of British ships on the beaches of Dunkirk, this caused a shortage of rescue ships for the large number of troops in need. Despite the lack of urgency from Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the Admiralty recognized the dire situation and launched Operation Dynamo, which involved the mobilization of civilian boats and cruise ships from Britain to aid in the evacuation.

Vice Admiral Bertram Ramsey, a distinguished British Royal Navy officer and the head of the Dynamo room played a pivotal role in leading this operation along with other notable figures such as Viscount Gört, the commander of the BEF, and Admiral Frederick

Wake-Walker. However, the Germans posed significant obstacles, as they sought to seize the opportunity to destroy the British army, given that the BEF represented nearly the bulk of British ground forces. Consequently, the Germans deployed sea mines in the English Channel, S-Boats launched torpedoes at British ships, and the Luftwaffe raided the beaches.

The German Army's attempts at cutting off and fully encircling the BEF were relentless, however, the foggy weather halted the Luftwaffe; the German rapid advance overextended their supply lines, and the German command was more focused on capturing French key cities. Furthermore, the British defense and evacuation tactics were well coordinated.

Hence, despite the challenges, the evacuation would take place from May 26th to June 4th, 1940, successfully rescuing 338.000 allied troops, and transporting them across the English Channel to Britain in a narrow escape. The evacuation would be followed by the fall of France on June 22nd, and Winston Churchill's famous speech "We Shall Fight on the Beaches", which would announce that Britain will not compromise, marking the beginning of the battle of Britain.

To conclude, the miracle of Dunkirk allowed the BEF to regroup and fight another day, it is regarded as a significant event in World War II. It contributed to the eventual Allied victory, even if it meant that the BEF was strategically and tactically defeated in the battle of France, leading them to abandon France. This historical event, however, would shape up into a romantic narrative through the years, notably during the Cold War. The latter will be overviewed in the section below.

3. Understanding the Cold War: A Historical Context and Overview

The Cold War is an asset of paramount importance in this thesis, which assumes, that the Cold War is a trigger behind the romantic narrative of Dunkirk. While this notion will be expanded upon in the upcoming chapter, this part seeks to provide an overview of the Cold War.

History's largest military conflict ended in an Allied victory by 1945; Nazi Germany and its Axis allies had been defeated, and Europe was left in a post-apocalyptic atmosphere, implying utter devastation and decimation that would not heal in the short term. In other words, the old world order had died when WWII ended, paving the way for a new world, a bipolar world that opposed two main protagonists. After their victory in Europe, the United States of America emerged with new policies contrary to the former isolationist notions dominating American politics, and the Soviet Union which now controls all of Eastern Europe and sits at the steps of Western Europe and the Western world. An "iron curtain" had descended upon Europe as Winston Churchill declared, and a new form of war was in the making, in the shadows and ruins of WWII, a hybrid war, a Cold war.

Post-war bipolarity meant that the world was split into two blocs, divided, and in a state of conflict in the form of a cold war. Although nowadays we attach the given term to the conflict between the US and USSR, the origin of the term is still in conflicting debate, but the most credible of origins would be, for the sake of literary relevance in this research, that used by George Orwell for the first time in his essay "You and the Atom Bomb" published on October 19th, 1945 in the British magazine Tribune, as he aligned the term with the status quo of the time being a world living in threat of nuclear war, and constant conflict, short of confrontation.

Historically speaking, the cold war is the ideological conflict between the capitalist west led by the US, and the communist east led by the USSR, which span from 1945 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This part reviews the history of the conflict chronologically, which allows us to provide a general background of the Cold War. It is important to emphasize that the difference between the Western and Eastern blocs are, in the belief of this research, the main trigger behind historic and cinematic representations. This means that the representation of WWII is riddled with subjective views which originate in the Cold War, as is the case we are making in our thesis concerning Dunkirk. However, before diving into this, it is important to provide a factual definition and a summary of the cold war as a 20th-century conflict.

By the end of World War II, the Soviets had control over the totality of Eastern Europe, in the process of their offensive towards Berlin during the war, while the Western powers, the French, the British, and the Americans, had occupied the western part of Germany. Consequently, the former allies were staring at each other in a stalemate, no enemy was left to unite them, and tensions would only grow. Arguably, the tension had existed even before the end of the war, as the Americans had been wary of Soviet communism, and Russian leader Joseph Stalin, whilst the so the soviets resented America's refusal to recognize the USSR as a legitimate part of the international community (*History.com*) In other words, the enemy unifying the two blocs was defeated, thus tensions would only spiral and often out of control; escalation from both sides would leave the world on the brink of a nuclear holocaust. Interventions, regime change policies, and coups in various countries around the world caused tremendous suffering. The theatre of the cold war was the entire world, but the confrontation would never spiral into confrontations.

The Western world was a democratic capitalist world with a free market and democratic governments, while the Eastern world was a communist socialist world with Marxist values. The US feared a spread of communism which would threaten its free market and its sphere of influence. Therefore the Americans adopted a policy of containment; to counter and contain the spread of Russian communism or as they coined it, "Soviet expansionism". George Kennan first brought this policy to the US Congress in 1947, as the belief was that there could be no *modus Vivendi* or agreement between parties that disagree (*History.com*). Hence, the US would base its struggle against the Soviets on this belief, leading to military interventions.

The first instance of an intervention was in Korea in 1950, when a pro-communist regime in the north tried to invade the pro-western regime in south Korea, resulting in an American or a Western intervention in a war, to stop the spread of communism, which would end in a stalemate. Another notable example would be that of the Vietnam War, otherwise known as the Second Indochina war, during which the US military was defeated after a 9-year-long brutal war against a pro-communist government in North Vietnam. The latter war was highly significant because it showed the world the extent to which the Americans would go to "contain" Communism. Therefore, for the better period of the cold war, various countries in the world would be a theatre of a struggle between communist tendencies and democratic notions. Africa, South East Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America would all see a conflict directly related to the cold war, leading to the third world, in its post-colonial struggles, mostly aligning with the Soviets, given that the communist revolutionary utopia was the foundation of the Soviet Union.

In addition, Communist states and Soviet Republics, such as Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic states, Romania, and others, were engaged in this struggle in the form of arms race, as the Soviets developed their first atomic bomb in 1949. This led to a clear realization by the Americans that they would need a limitless amount of deterrents to counter Soviet militarization and the Soviets followed suit. As the Soviets developed their atomic bomb by 1949, which led the United States to build a hydrogen bomb, and the Soviets followed suit (*History.com*). Competition was rife in all domains between the two superpowers; after all, the cold war is a conflict in every sense of the word except direct military confrontations.

Another field that marked the Cold War was the space race, the soviets sent a man into space (Yuri Gagarin on April 12th, 1961) and 8 years later the Americans would send a man to the moon (Neil Armstrong on July 20th, 1969). Critically speaking the cold war was a process of action-reaction during a competition, race, or struggle. The broader concept of the cold war can be summarized as a process of unfriendly competition, which elicits a response or a reaction from one superpower when its rival acts.

Furthermore, the fronts of this war were also at home, as both the Soviet and American governments were wary of the other's ideology infiltrating the homeland. Throughout the duration of the conflict, the Soviets took extreme measures to repress any liberal or Western tendencies in the USSR and the communist states. On the other hand, the Americans would put their democratic values aside when it comes to fighting socialism and communism at home. Consequently, a form of phobia and extreme caution towards left-wing tendencies spread in America, generating radical policies adopted to counter the spread of socialist ideology. What was known as "The Red Scare" would be incarnated in the

“Un-American activities committee” (HUAC), which took a role in tracking down left-wing activists. As a result, both sides fought a war on all fronts without confrontation.

It is worth mentioning that cinema and literature were a front in the conflict, as both sides sought to spread their propaganda and discredit the other. This notion which, in the belief of this research, outlived the end of the cold war still influences literature and cinema nowadays.

The Cold War would heat up, and then cool down, depending on the level of escalation. However, by the 80s, the tide started to favor the Western bloc. As the arms race continued, soviet coffers started to dry and its leadership was weakening with each general secretary they buried. This would result in a series of crises and failures, such as the Chornobyl nuclear disaster on April 26th, 1986, the withdrawal from the Afghan operation (soviet invasion of Afghanistan 1979-1989), and the culmination of revolts and revolutions in communist republics such as Poland, critically diminishing Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. This eventually leads to the breakup and collapse of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, as by 1989 every communist state replaced its government with a noncommunist one, and the most visible symbol of the Cold War –the Berlin Wall- fell (*History.com*).

Finally, the bipolar world came to an end, as general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev announced the dissolution of the Soviet Union, along with his resignation on December 25th, 1991, marking the end of the cold war and bipolar world, and the beginning of the American hegemony and the new world order. Yet, the central premise of this work is that the Cold War is not over and that its echoes

still influence culture, literature, Cinema, and historical discourse. These ideas will be discussed, as asserted previously, in upcoming chapters.

Conclusion

World War II was a monumental event that concluded in the defeat of Nazi Germany, and the Axis powers at the hands of the Allies. It is also the war in which the Dunkirk evacuation unfolded, a daring rescue mission that saved the British Expeditionary Force from the advancing German army during the Battle of France. Overall, World War II reshaped the world and ushered in the Cold War, an ideological conflict between the Western bloc led by the USA, and the Eastern bloc led by the USSR, which eventually ended in 1991 with the dissolution of the USSR. This chapter provides a historical background for Dunkirk as a historical event, set against the backdrop of World War II, and sets the stage for understanding Dunkirk's romantic narrative, within the context of the Cold War. Considering the historical context provided by this chapter, the next chapter will discuss the main sources for this study, namely, Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*.

Chapter Two

Walter Lord's The Miracle of Dunkirk and Christopher Nolan's Dunkirk: A Historical Account and Cinematic Representation of Dunkirk

Introduction

The Dunkirk evacuation has been the subject of great cultural interest, with numerous films, novels, and historical books shedding light on the event. More specifically, Walter Lord's historical book *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, and Christopher Nolan's film *Dunkirk* have had a major impact in shaping this event into a romantic narrative. These works will be overviewed and contextualized, in addition, a background for the author and director will be provided. The first section of this chapter will delve into *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, providing a biography of Walter Lord, an overview and discussion of the book's major themes, and reviewing the context of the book's release. Then, the focus will be placed on reviewing the film and presenting the film's director. Finally, the last section will discuss the criteria behind the selection of these sources, highlighting the reasons for choosing a historical account and a cinematic representation as the main sources for this study, and the similarities and contrasts between the two sources.

1. Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk*: A Historical Account of Dunkirk

Originally published in 1982, Walter Lord's seminal work on the Dunkirk evacuation is regarded as one of the most reliable and gripping accounts. In this section, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of this historical account and set the stage for discussing its partaking in shaping Dunkirk as a Western romantic narrative in the third chapter.

1.1 From Copywriter to Esteemed Historian: Walter Lord's Biography

The author of the 1982 bestseller *The Miracle of Dunkirk* was born on October 8, 1917, in Baltimore, Maryland. Walter Lord was the only son of the esteemed Henrietta Hoffman, and lawyer John Walterhouse Lord. In his early life, he attended private schools in Baltimore, and then he graduated from Princeton University in 1939, where he majored in

history. During World War II, he joined The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which is an American Intelligence Agency, before obtaining his Law degree at Yale after the war.

Richard Pyle states in a newspaper article entitled “Walter Lord Best-Selling Author Who Chronicled Titanic’s Demise”: “While working as an advertising copywriter and collaborating with tax expert J.K. Lasser on writing tax manuals, Mr. Lord broadened his literary horizon in 1954 with "The Fremantle Diary," about a British military officer observing the American Civil War” (02). This marked his first success and an early transition to writing history. However, Walter’s career would have witnessed a major shift as he went from copywriting to literary fame (01). following his 1955 best seller: *A night to Remember*, which was a gripping account of the sinking of the Titanic. Subsequently, he published several books, notably *Day of Infamy* published in 1957, *The Good Years* published in 1960, *A Time to Stand* in 1961, and *The Miracle of Dunkirk* in 1982, along with others in the following years. His works are characterized by a unified technique, which he coined “Living History”. The latter translates to the combination of historical research and journalistic methods, as stated by Richard Pyle: “‘He was a pioneer in bringing the journalistic narrative to history,’ said Evan Thomas, a Newsweek editor, and close friend. ‘It’s a common technique now, but it was anything but commonplace in the 1950s’” (01). Through this technique, he demonstrates every story at a time, similar to pointillism.

For his dedication to American History, Walter Lord was awarded the Francis Parkman Prize for Special Achievement by the Society of American Historians in 1994. He was also a member of many civic enterprises in New York such as the Union Settlement, the New York Society Library, the Authors Guild, and the New York Historical Society. The esteemed historian Walter Lord died at his Manhattan apartment at the age of 84 after a long struggle with Parkinson’s disease.

1.2. *The Miracle of Dunkirk*: Overview and Discussion

The Miracle of Dunkirk provides a detailed, systematic, historical account of the Dunkirk evacuation; it is deemed the true story of Operation Dynamo. Written by esteemed American Historian Walter Lord in 1982, the book was a best seller. The book details the Dunkirk evacuation in fifteen chapters, from the end of the “phony war”, through the battle of France, to Dunkirk. Each chapter provides detailed accounts and ideas about the events that happened before, during, and after the evacuation, in a gradual narrative.

The first chapter of the book provides a historical context for the events preceding Dunkirk, covering the period of ‘the phony war’, and giving insight into the state of Western Europe, and the eventual invasion of France. The latter is highlighted in the second chapter, covering the rapid advance of the German forces and the British Expeditionary Force’s retreat to Dunkirk, following the German Blitzkrieg. Thus, the first two chapters set the stage for upcoming events and provided a historical context for readers unfamiliar with the political and military situation in Europe in the spring of 1940. In addition, the discourse remains very detailed, as Lord introduces some key figures of the story, such as General Viscount Gort, the commander of the BEF, seeking to humanize the story and render it relatable to the reader. Furthermore, the dominant mood of uncertainty, chaos, and fear, along with the personal narrative, throughout most of the book, engages the reader and renders the story accessible.

The German advance had been stunningly quick, creating a sense of urgency in the British command, the BEF, and the French Army Corp. This ambiance is very explicit in the first two chapters, frequently through personal narratives. This discourse of the book aimed to convey a message, which adds to the existing confusion, an example of that would be the Chiefs of Staff meeting; “Admiral Pound was presiding, and he was discussing the limited number of destroyers that could be used at Dunkirk—the very point that had so upset Gort”

(Lord.38). This highlights the themes of uncertainty and confusion while setting the stage for “Operation Dynamo”, which Lord tackled in the third chapter.

The third chapter constructs a narrative of the evacuation, not in its mythologized desperate, urgent, and miraculous form, but rather as a well-planned operation, as the British Command did not see the urgency in the matter. An air of confidence and composure replaces the previous uncertainty; the British Command was planning on evacuating the bulk of its forces, including the Calais and Boulogne groups along with the Dunkirk group, devising plans for a daily evacuation. Yet, the composure would not last, and urgency would settle again, as German divisions headed to the coast. According to Lord, Viscount Gört deemed that the evacuation ceased being a matter of secondary significance and became a priority (41). As a result of the unanticipated German advance, the plans would change accordingly, as a plan was devised on the 20th of May, 1940, another was devised on the 21st, and again on the 22nd. The latter, however, was a shift according to Walter Lord: “By the following day, the 22nd, everything had changed again. Now the panzers were attacking Boulogne and Calais; only Dunkirk was left. There would be no more of these meticulous plans; no more general meetings of all concerned” (42). Therefore, we may deduce that the flawed plans, the unexpected German advances, and logistical issues that coupled with the intended operation, contribute to the conveyed discourse of continued crises and constant urgency. Thomas Howard argues in his article “Eyewitness views of Dunkirk; The Miracle of Dunkirk”, by Walter Lord; “Mr. Lord correctly portrays Dunkirk not as a ‘miracle,’ nor as a succession of critical days, but as a series of major crises, one following closely upon another, which were met with varying degrees of success by those responsible for withdrawing the BEF” (Howard 01). On a side note, Howard’s assessment may appear, at its core, to contradict the argument of this thesis, which considers Dunkirk a romantic narrative, however, the idea he exposes is

critical to this overview, as it confirms the recurrence of urgency, crises, and uncertainty throughout the upcoming book chapters.

The retreat to Dunkirk is covered in a grim, hopeless ambiance, and to provide a more vivid description, the personal narrative goes on, as the book follows soldiers from the BEF through their retreat to Dunkirk, “Private W. S. Walker of the 5th Medium Regiment, Royal Artillery, could have better used an English-French dictionary. Coming to a signpost that pointed to “Dunkerque,” he wondered whether that was the same place as Dunkirk” (Lord 50), highlighting the confusion before arriving into Dunkirk. Lord describes Dunkirk as “shambles”, as the loss of discipline, the destruction of the port, and the constant air raids from the Luftwaffe (55). This plunged the scene into a state of constant danger, desperation, and chaos. The BEF was trapped in Dunkirk, in danger of a full encirclement; the troops looked ahead and saw the English Channel, looked above and saw German warplanes, looked behind, and feared the German arrival.

The circumstances drastically evolved in the German favor, so much so that the British were at an ultimatum; hence, in the words of Walter Lord; “The time had come to act. At 6:57 p.m. this Sunday, May 26, the Admiralty signaled Dover: “Operation Dynamo is to commence” (58). The announcement was followed by a dilemma; providing time for enough troops to reach Dunkirk. This is discussed in the chapter entitled “Buying Time”, as the theme of sacrifice is introduced, through Churchill’s decision to sacrifice the Calais group, and more retreating allied soldiers headed for Dunkirk in a state described by Walter Lord as follows: “They swarmed into Dunkirk and onto the beaches—lost, confused, and all too often leaderless. In many of the service and rear area units the officers had simply vanished, leaving the men to shift for themselves” (80). Another issue arises, in the chapter entitled “Plenty Troops, Few Boats”. The chapter’s title reflects the crises, and here the book jumps from the “Dynamo Room”; the HQ of the Dunkirk evacuation planning, to the beaches of Dunkirk,

while reminding us of the imminent German threat. In this respect, Lord gives the impression of a race against the clock. The book then projects a gallery of photos, and press articles from the period, to further engage the reader with the story.

Notions of hope and themes of deliverance are inducted to *The Miracle of Dunkirk* when the chapter entitled “The Little Ships” is introduced in the following words: “Lieutenant Ian Cox, First Lieutenant of the Destroyer *Malcolm*, could hardly believe his eyes. There, coming over the horizon towards him, was a mass of dots that filled the sea. *Malcolm* was bringing her third load of troops back to Dover. The dots were all heading the other way — towards Dunkirk. It was Thursday, the 30th of May” (Lord 155). “The Dots” Lord is referring to, stand for the British civilian ships participating in the evacuation. Having now arrived at Dunkirk, the rising tension, which is dominant throughout the book, is replaced by appeasement, and hope. This is best represented in an excerpt, where Lord establishes a more resolute, and hopeful ambiance: “Cox felt a sudden surge of pride. Being here was no longer just a duty; it was an honor and a privilege” (Lord 155).

Although “crisis” breaks the hopeful discourse of the book frequently, fear, uncertainty, and desperation, would not dominate the discourse anew, but rather set the stage for “The Miracle”. Lord goes on to evoke the French, in a dedicated chapter; detailing the attempts at their evacuation from Dunkirk. However, the reality was different as Viscount Gort stated that every evacuated French soldier replaces an English soldier (Lord.175). The dilemma reached the British PM who reassured that the evacuation should be shared, but the French should use their boats. Furthermore, Lord argues that if the evacuation was truly a joint operation, then the orders would have been clearer (178). According to Walter Lord; “the total number rescued during the day: British 45,207; French 8,616” (178). This disparity would jeopardize the alliance between the British and the French, to the extent that Churchill had to fly to Paris, to disperse rumors. Eventually, the French would be evacuated, as stated

by Lord: “The surge of little ships across the Channel helped too. By now there were enough boats for everyone—both French and British.” (197).

Nevertheless, the evacuation was far from over, as the bad weather that had kept the Luftwaffe in check for the past days, suddenly cleared on June 1st. To put things in perspective, Lord introduces this new crisis in this way, as follows: “As the growl of approaching planes grew louder, veteran Seaman Bill Barris carefully removed his false teeth and put them in his handkerchief pocket—always a sure sign to the men on the destroyer *Windsor* that hard fighting lay ahead.”(Lord 212). This type of detailed personal narrative is recurrent throughout the book and serves to engage the reader in the story and relate it to him as much as “Bill Barris”. The ensuing bombing and raids, wreaked havoc, and caused large panic on the beach, and the surrounding ships. The horror could be summarized in the following occurrence; “But the damage was done—three more hits. *Skipjack* lurched heavily to port, and the order came to abandon ship. It was none too soon. In two more minutes, *Skipjack* turned turtle, trapping most of the 250 to 300 troops aboard” (Lord.217). German planes relentlessly targeted British ships such as the *Skipjack* and sank them. In addition, the title of this chapter “I Have Never prayed so Hard Before” reflects the content and conveyance; moments of desperation near deliverance, and notions of despair are reintroduced. As a result of German air dominance, the evacuations were set through the night, avoiding daylight; nevertheless, as Lord concludes this chapter, the operation also rested on whether the forces holding the Dunkirk perimeter, would not seed the line (230).

Throughout the retreat to Dunkirk and the evacuation process, the flanks of the retreating army were defended, in a lightly fortified perimeter, thus allowing soldiers to retreat to Dunkirk and evacuate. In other words, if the flanks were breached, Operation Dynamo would be terminated. The parallel importance of the perimeter can be highlighted in the drastic measures adopted to ensure the line holds; the troops holding the perimeter were in

danger of being gunned down in case of retreat, as in the following incident detailed by Walter Lord: “McCorquodale picked up a rifle himself, and the two Cold streamers sat waiting, guns trained on the tree” (Lord 232). For further context, McCorquodale was a BEF major, who had been stationed in a firing position in case the troops holding the flanks withdrew. Lord fits these notions of resolve, determination, as well as desperation, through occurrences such as the previously quoted. Additionally, Lord covers the theme of sacrifice, in conjunction with The French replacing the British divisions at the flanks, to allow the remainder of the BEF to evacuate (Lord 234). Furthermore, the book goes on to detail the retreat to the beach, through personal narrative, all the way to what seemed like the success of the evacuation, yet, as established above, another crisis would emerge.

The perimeter around Dunkirk was held, manned by the remainders of the French army, and the bulk of the BEF was evacuated. And soon, the necessity of evacuating the French resurfaced, distorting the appeasement that was settling after the evacuation, and raising urgency. In a rollercoaster of events, the French would be evacuated but many were left behind.

The Final chapter opens up with the aftermath of the fall of Dunkirk, detailing occurrences in conjunction with the German arrival, and the capture of the remaining forces. Walter Lord then shifts focus back to England to summarize the conclusion of Operation Dynamo: “Paris gave its formal approval at 11:00, and at 2:23 p.m. the British Admiralty officially announced the end of Operation Dynamo. Released at last from the strain and tension, Ramsay drove up to Sandwich and celebrated with a round of golf” (Lord 269). The tension finally came to a close, replaced by appeasement, as incarnated in Admiral Ramsey’s subsequent reaction. Furthermore, Lord informs us that an “astonishingly” large number of French troops were evacuated and that the last ship leaving Dunkirk carried up to 26.000 French soldiers (Lord 268). Despite the grim ambiance surrounding the opening, with the

arrival of the Germans, the narrative gradually adopts an air of “deliverance” similar to the chapter’s title, describing the mood in England, which was the total opposite of the mood that dominated the entire narrative, from Dunkirk to the House of Commons to The Dynamo Room, the mood in England can be summarized in the following quote: “It was a nation already overflowing with gratitude and relief when Winston Churchill went to the House of Commons on the evening of June 4 to report on the evacuation” (Lord 270). Operation Dynamo was a success, and with that any uncertainty, fear, chaos, or confusion was at a close, subsequently, even the troops who arrived feeling disgraced in defeat, were welcomed, as Lord notes; “conquering heroes”, cheered and greeted (Lord 271).

Lord then moves on to discuss the term “miracle”, and expose its origins in its association with the Dunkirk evacuation, and the factors contributing to its success, ultimately supporting the use of the term “Miracle”. Lord evokes the weather conditions which halted the Luftwaffe, and kept calm the sea: “and during the nine days of Dunkirk the Channel was a millpond. Old-timers still say they have never seen it so smooth” (Lord 272). This insinuates a divine help behind the success. Furthermore, the book dives into the significance of Dunkirk and explains how it was twisted from defeat to victory by the people rather than Government propaganda, arguing that it was a major setback for Hitler and that Dunkirk would be regarded as “the turning point of the whole war” (Lord 275). Additionally, Lord argues that if it had not been for Dunkirk, Russia would have been defeated, and there would’ve been no Stalingrad. This argument will be further discussed in the last chapter.

Overall, Walter Lord’s *The Miracle of Dunkirk* provides a vivid and gripping account of Operation Dynamo and the events surrounding it. Through a combination of personal accounts, historical analysis, and official account, the book conveys the scale and complexity of the Dunkirk evacuation, and offers an almost minute-by-minute account, plunging the reader into the event itself. Hence, *The Miracle of Dunkirk* offers a compelling narrative of

Dunkirk. To further understand this book, it is necessary to dive into the context surrounding its creation and the elements that shaped it. Therefore the section below will provide a background for *The Miracle of Dunkirk*.

1.3 Context and Background of *The Miracle of Dunkirk*

The Miracle of Dunkirk was published 40 years after the events of Dunkirk unfolded, in an era characterized by a renewed interest in World War II, as the Cold War shaped the geopolitical and cultural landscape. In this climate, Walter Lord sought to write a compelling narrative on the Dunkirk evacuation. It is worth noting that Lord had previously recounted other World War II events, such as “Pearl Harbor” and the “Battle of Midway” (Pyle 01). Furthermore, Walter Lord’s career-changing best seller; *A Night to Remember* published in 1955, was made possible by Walter Lord’s innovative techniques, as explained in Richard Pyle’s article; “Using techniques learned in researching tax issues, he tracked down some 60 survivors of the 1912 maritime disaster and turned their stories into a dramatic, minute-by-minute account of how the “unsinkable” British liner sank on its maiden voyage after colliding with an iceberg in the North Atlantic” (Pyle 01). This is to say that Lord uses methods he applied in his former career to collect data for his books. Additionally, in his article; “About Books and Authors”, the critic Mitgang Herbert informs us that Walter Lord had interviewed hundreds of Dunkirk veterans, some in England, and some in his apartment (Mitgang 02) which explains the heavy use of personal narrative in the book, and the introduction of personal stories to shape the major story of Dunkirk. Thus, similarly to his 1955 bestseller, *The Miracle of Dunkirk* owes its detailed account to the interviews conducted by Walter Lord with survivors from Dunkirk.

In the aim of covering the complexities of Dunkirk, Lord combines testimonies from veterans with official reports, personal diaries, and newsreel footage, and blends these materials into a gripping account. This is to say that *The Miracle of Dunkirk* draws a main

source of eyewitness accounts, but is not fully reliant on them, choosing instead to combine, as explained in the article “Eyewitness views of Dunkirk: “The Miracle of Dunkirk, by Walter Lord” Written by Thomas Howard: “Despite the author's reliance on interviews with those who were at Dunkirk, he is such an experienced craftsman that the historical background is handled with skill. Sufficient details are included to provide an understanding of how the evacuation was decided upon, the events which led up to it, how it was carried out, and its importance at the time”. (Howard 01).

In addition, a factor that might justify the combination of historical analysis with storytelling is Walter Lord's participation in WWII; as he joined the American Office of Intelligence Services during the war. Lord's role in the OSS was the tactical analysis of information, which rhymes well with his detailed accounts of Operation Dynamo's intricate events. Thus, we can conclude that *The Miracle of Dunkirk* was shaped by Lord's past experiences. Indeed, the author invested all his knowledge, experience, and effort in the making of this account, an interesting passage from Herbert Mitgang's “About Books and Authors” confirms this argument; “While he was researching "The Miracle of Dunkirk," Walter Lord's apartment on New York's East Side resembled a war room before an invasion or, in this case, an evacuation” (Mitgang 02). Additionally, in the same article, Mitgang reports that Walter Lord claimed that Dunkirk would leave a lasting impression on him (Mitgang 02), this conveys that the author was dedicated to the making of *The Miracle of Dunkirk*.

Another point worth expanding upon is Lord's participation in WWII. He worked for three years in London for the OSS and he contributed to the war effort through his work on propaganda and psychological warfare efforts as an intelligence officer. This background explains the meticulousness of the military and operational-related details in the book, as well as the analysis of the ensuing propaganda in the final chapters. Moreover, Lord's sense of

patriotism, incarnated in his dedication to American history (see in the biography), his passion for World War II history, and his keen critical and experienced acquisitions have all partaken in the creation of *The Miracle of Dunkirk*. Finally, we must consider the era in which the book was published. The Cold War era shaped the cultural and political climate of the United States of America. Although this is a notion to be discussed in the chapter, it is important to note that a dedicated American historian published *The Miracle of Dunkirk* during this time. The book argues in its final chapters that Dunkirk is perhaps the turning point of WWII in general (Lord 275). Thus, one can conclude that the surrounding socio-historical context influenced the making of the book as much as the Lord's methods and experiences.

Overall, *The Miracle of Dunkirk* was published during the cold war, influenced by Walter Lord's experiences; notably his participation in WWII, and shaped by Lord's methods and techniques. A combination of eyewitness accounts, official reports, and historical facts fashioned a gripping and vivid narrative of Dunkirk. In addition, the author's intense research and work invested in the creation of the book resulted in a minute-by-minute account of Dunkirk. By contextualizing the book we hope to gain a deeper understanding and set the stage for the analysis of perception. The second part of this chapter will adopt a similar approach to our second main source; Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*.

2. Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*

Three decades after the release of *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, "Warner Bros Pictures" released *Dunkirk*, a war film featuring the Dunkirk evacuation, directed by esteemed and critically acclaimed Filmmaker Christopher Nolan. As this chapter has already covered a historical account of Dunkirk, the focus now turns to examining a cinematic representation of the event. The following section will provide the director's biography, a review of the film,

and a discussion of its themes and techniques, before delving into the context of the Film's production.

2.1. Christopher Nolan's Biography

Christopher Edward Nolan was born in 1970 in London to a British father and an American mother. During his early years, Nolan was raised both in Chicago and London and developed a passion for filmmaking. At the age of seven, he began shooting short clips with his father's Super-8 camera. Nolan went on to study English literature at the University College of London, while also filming 16 mm films at the UCL Film & TV Society, a prominent film production company in London. It was during this time that he showed his skills in guerrilla film techniques, which would later become a hallmark of his films. In 1998, Nolan released his first film *Following* which generated enough profits to launch his career in Hollywood.

Many of Nolan's subsequent films were collaborations with his brother Jonathan, including *Memento*, which was released in 2000. This film generated critical acclaim and earned Nolan numerous academic prizes, including Academy Award and Golden Globe Award nominations for Best Original Screenplay. Another pivotal moment in Nolan's career is when he was allowed to reboot the Batman franchise; *Batman Begins* released in 2005 was widely praised and established Nolan as an iconic filmmaker. Before continuing the Batman franchise, Nolan produced *The Prestige* in 2006. The success of these films set the stage for his next project in the Batman franchise, *The Dark Knight* released in 2008. This film was a critical and commercial triumph, in large part due to the outstanding performance of the late actor Heath Ledger. Nolan's direction received nominations for a Directors Guild of America (D.G.A.) Award, Writers Guild of America (W.G.A.) Award and Producers Guild of America (P.G.A.) Award and the film received eight Academy Award nominations.

Nolan's 2010 release, *Inception*, was a defining moment in his career and represented a significant contribution to the art of filmmaking; the film earned nearly a billion dollars worldwide and generated an extensive critical discussion. It received four Academy Awards and eight nominations, such as Best Picture and Best Screenplay. Nolan's peers recognized his work with nominations for the Director Guild of America and Producers Guild of America Awards, as well as the Writers Guild of America Awards. Nolan concluded his trilogy with *The Dark Knight Rises*, a highly exclusive film that further solidified his reputation as a distinguished filmmaker. Some of the prominent he has cast in his films include Christian Bale, Cillian Murphy, Michael Caine, Tom Hardy, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Gary Oldman. Nolan's net worth is estimated to be approximately 250 million dollars.

Despite his high-profile career, Nolan maintains a reputation for guarding his privacy. He married his college friend, Emma Thomas, in 1997 and the couple currently resides in Los Angeles, California with his four children. Nolan is known for his reluctance to share details of his personal life with the media.

2.2. *Dunkirk*: Overview and Discussion

Christopher Nolan and Emma Thomas, his wife, and producing partner, directed and produced the critically acclaimed war film *Dunkirk*. The movie has been lauded for its postmodernist style and portrayal of the events surrounding the Dunkirk evacuation during World War II. Notably, the film features an all-British cast, casting renowned actors such as Tom Hardy, Cillian Murphy, and Kenneth Branagh. Additionally, the inclusion of popular musician Harry Styles in the cast helped generate buzz and further cement the movie's commercial success, which earned gross revenue of over \$527 million. *Dunkirk* has received numerous academic awards, including Best Sound Mixing, Best Film Editing, and Best Director, among others.

Dunkirk features the story of Operation Dynamo from the perspective of the BEF soldiers trapped in Dunkirk, as the film opens up with Tommy, a young British soldier retreating to the Dunkirk beach under enemy fire. The first few instances of the film are conveyed in a grey frame, suspenseful soundtrack, courtesy of Hans Zimmer, and a grim uncertain ambiance, as Tommy reaches the beach and gazes at the thousands of soldiers waiting for evacuation. The Dunkirk beach could be conceptualized as the embodiment of despair, this theme marks the bulk of the film with the arrival of the small boats, as the beach is shattered by previous Luftwaffe raids, smoke rising, and thousands of soldiers with an unknown fate staring at the English Channel. Tommy then encounters Gibson, who is burying a dead body, after a German dive-bombing attack, Tommy and Gibson rushed to a hospital ship in the hopes of boarding and escaping. However, the ship sinks, and Tommy rescues Alex, another British soldier. The three of them leave on board a destroyer at night, but it is also sunk by a torpedo, and they miraculously survive.

These occurrences heighten the degree of suspense and uncertainty, as the ambiance appears to grow darker and grimmer with each narrow escape of our main characters. In her article “Ambitious and Harrowing, Christopher Nolan’s *Dunkirk* is a Masterpiece”, Film critic Stephanie Zacharek writes; “Nolan sustains *Dunkirk*’s dramatic tension from start to finish. This is a supreme achievement made from small strokes, a kind of Seurat painting constructed with dark, glittering bits of history”. (Zacharek). This conveys that the overall discourse of the film is uncertainty and confusion as the tension keeps growing. Back on Dunkirk Beach, the threat from the air is constant, as German warplanes constantly harass the soldiers at the beach and the ships at the channel. The only hope, it seems, for the soldiers on the ground, is the RAF pilot Farrier patrolling the skies, as the British warplane struggles to cover both land and sea from the Luftwaffe. The film offers features insightful aerial footage of the beach from the

perspective of Farrier, in this light, Nolan immerses the viewer into the Dunkirk beach with the soldiers, as the story is rendered vivid and appealing through these shots. As noted by Stephanie Zacharek; “ But if the soldiers’ story, at this point, represents what’s happening on land, other stories are unfolding in the air and on the water, and Nolan connects them all with nearly invisible stitches”. (Zacharek). This is to say that the film covers all fronts of the event, as we are immersed on the beach with Tommy and in the waters of the English Channel with Tommy and his comrades, and in the air with Farrier. Additionally, by depicting the war from multiple angles, the film emphasized the chaos and confusion of the situation. In his article “*Dunkirk* is a Tour de France War Movie, Both Sweeping, and Intimate”, Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* writes;” Overhead shots of soldiers scattered across a beach convey an unnerving isolation — as if these were the last souls on earth, terminally alone, deserted”. (Dargis). The message conveyed here is the desperate situation of the BEF. The latter is further emphasized when Tommy, Gibson, Alex, and a group of Scottish soldiers find an abandoned fishing boat and try to traverse the sea with it. Nevertheless, German bullets pierce through it. As the boat sinks, Alex suggests lightening the boat’s weight by getting rid of one of the passengers, the ensuing confusion results in Alex accusing Gibson of being a spy, but he eventually reveals that he is French, having assumed the identity of a British soldier, in hopes of escaping to England.

Alex, hoping to lighten the boat's load, accuses Gibson of being a German spy, but eventually reveals that Gibson is French and had assumed the identity of the soldier he buried earlier in the film in the hope of being evacuated with the British. As the boat begins to sink, they are rescued by Dawson's boat, which maneuvers to pick up the troops, including Tommy and Alex. Stephanie Zacharek writes in this regard; “Faces carry history. They’re genetic maps, but they’re vessels of spiritual memory too. *Dunkirk*, set against events that

happened more than 75 years ago, is like a message from a lost world. If the setting feels unfamiliar to you, don't worry, trust the faces". (Zacharek). This conveys that Nolan recounts the story of Dunkirk through the soldiers; the theme of confusion is conveyed through occurrences such as these. Mr. Dawson with his son Peter, and their young neighbor George pilot a boat to Dunkirk in participation with Operation Dynamo (the evacuation), they had previously saved a stranded BEF soldier on their way to Dunkirk before saving Alex and Tommy. Mr. Dawson represents the ordinary British civilian, partaking in the evacuation; this is to say that the Dunkirk spirit is incarnated in Mr. Dawson's character played by Mark Rylance. Themes of courage and resilience are present in this character, as he took to the sea with his boat the moment civilian boats were called upon.

Peter, the shell-shocked BEF soldier rescued by Mr. Dawson, caused a commotion when finding out that they were heading to Dunkirk, resulting in George being injured and eventually dying. Peter's shivering and frightful attitude can be seen as an incarnation of the theme of fear, which is also central in the film. This theme is the main drive behind survival, as the story of Dunkirk in the film is about survival against all odds. Therefore, fear is a natural component of the plot as it elicits survival, the constant threat from the air, coupled with the desperate attempts at evacuation blocked by German U-Boats and aviation further induces this notion. Furthermore, the overall ambiance of the film gives the impression of a race against the clock. Christopher Nolan's tendency of centering his films on the notion of time is put to work in *Dunkirk*, as the film feels like a waiting game, time is fragmented, and the uncertainty, confusion, and fear are all framed by time. Additionally, time is the deciding element in the film, as the survival of the BEF depends on the velocity of the evacuation. In this regard, Monohla Dargis of *The New York Times* notes; "as Mr.

Nolan cuts from daytime scenes on the ground to those in the sea and the air, a slight merging of space and especially of time that underlines the enormity of a fight seemingly without end". (Dargis).

Back on the Dunkirk beach, looking through his binoculars, Commander Bolton sees the arrival of several civilian ships and exclaims that he sees "Home" (01:13:36). This scene, however, does not mark an end to the rising tension, but it does give way for hope and deliverance. The previously dominant grim and desperate ambiance turns into cheer and hopes with the arrival of the boats, hence the evacuation is underway, and boats cross the English Channel. However, uncertainty returns as the soldiers are not expecting a warm welcome back home. This is illustrated through the facial expressions of the BEF soldiers disembarking in England, they have survived, but they do not seem too thrilled about it (01:32:41). The return of tension and suspense is notable, as the soldiers advance, head down, in lines of defeated men, framed by a suspenseful soundtrack. Their faces give the impression of defeat, shame, and dishonor, as they embark on a train.

On the Mole located on the Dunkirk beach, Commander Bolton oversees the last phase of the evacuation, but he chooses to stay for the French (01:34:10). This scene conveys themes of courage, sacrifice, and solidarity, these are recurrent throughout the film but Bolton's decision to stay emphasizes the notion of solidarity explicitly. Back in England, Tommy and Alex wake up to a new day inside the train, sunrays are creaking through the window, and children playing near the railway. The change in the frame is notable, as the climate and surrounding ambiance were completely different in Dunkirk, as it was grim, grey, and almost dark. Alex finds Churchill's speech on the evacuation in a newspaper, and while gazing it exclaims, "I can't bear it" (01:35:31). The latter scene demonstrates the defeated mindset of the BEF soldiers, although they were saved and Dunkirk was now behind, the men felt shame. This would change however when Tommy reads the speech.

The ending of the film features Farrier landing his Spitfire (British fighter aircraft) on the beach after he ran out of fuel, Tommy reading Churchill's "We Shall Fight on the Beaches", under the glamour and cheer of British civilians at the windows of the train, and Mr. Dawson seeing Peter's portrait in a newspaper, framed by a hopeful soundtrack. The suspense had worn out, as the final scene conveys deliverance. However, we are reminded that Dunkirk is not the end of the war (World War II), as Farrier burns his aircraft before being captured by German soldiers. In "Dunkirk' Is a Tour de Force War Movie, Both Sweeping, and Intimate", Manohla Dargis writes; "By the time that plane is burning — and a young man is looking searchingly into the future — you are reminded that the fight against fascism continues". (Dargis).

Overall, *Dunkirk* tells the story of Operation Dynamo in three narratives; the land, the sea, and the air. In "Dunkirk Miracle or Blunder", Steven Byas argues that a film cannot cover all aspects of the evacuation no matter how well done the film may be, and as a result, the context of the evacuation remains unknown to the audience, as they are left to wonder how the BEF ended up in that situation (33). While the argument applies to *Dunkirk*, Nolan fills the gap through the immersion of the audience into the event; the three narratives provide a wide understanding and intimate connection to the event, as we are immersed into the sea with Mr. Dawson, into the air with Farrier, and the beach with Tommy. Additionally, Nolan emphasizes personal experience rather than broader strategy, as Manohla Dargis notes "Mr. Nolan's unyielding emphasis on the soldiers — and war as it is experienced rather than on how it is strategized — blurs history even as it brings the present and its wars startlingly into view". (Dargis). Furthermore, the film stays true to the component of the miracle of Dunkirk, notably in the ending scene, where we hear Churchill's speech, Dargis notes in this regard that Churchill is only heard from and not seen because Nolan narrows Dunkirk down to a handful of men scrambling their way into history in Land Sea and air (Dargis).

2.3 Context and Background: *Dunkirk*

Nolan's *Dunkirk* passed through many stages of difficulty, yet it came with its most ideal result. Nolan was not a fan of Computer Generated Imagery, but it was only used to remove the modern building in the city of Dunkirk. Nolan limited its use in the most possible way to create an authentic and immersive experience for the audience. Nolan himself mentioned in one of Popcorn with Peter Travers' interviews that the film was shot during the 76th Anniversary of the evacuations where small ships came from England to recreate the journey (00:10:29).

Nolan also sought out young, relatively unknown talent, such as Fionn Whitehead, to accurately portray the youthfulness of the soldiers involved in the evacuation. This decision created new opportunities for emerging actors and helped to cultivate a new generation of talent in the film industry. (IMDB)

Furthermore, Robert Koehler states in his film review of *Dunkirk*: "In an interview, Nolan told me that he provided his composer, Hans Zimmer, with his stopwatch to record the ticking sound that he thought should support the movie's soundtrack" (03). Nolan's films frequently explore the concept of time, appearing in the soundtrack, theme, story, and plot. He and Zimmer are said to have reached the heights of cinematic suspense rising methods, in which Alfred Hitchcock is the supreme master (Koehler 03).

Subsequently, after the movie was released, *Dunkirk* became a popular tourist destination for people from all over the world who wanted to see the location of this historic event and the settings of the film. This increased tourism has had a positive impact on the local economy and helped to bring attention to the importance of the events that took place in *Dunkirk* during World War II.

The circumstances in which the movie was released are numerous. One of the popular occurrences is the famous Brexit, the British separation from the European Union in 2016, which was a shock to the whole world. The movie production was on the same track as Brexit; the movie was still in production while Brexit was about to happen. In addition, Christopher Nolan declared that he got the idea in 1992 but he did not do it because of his lack of experience, this period was very sensitive because it was close to the end of the cold war.

3. Comparing and Contrasting Accounts of Dunkirk in *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and *Dunkirk*

This section explores the reasons behind the selection of a historical text and a cinematic production. Additionally, this research work provides insight into the historical book and the film.

3.1 Criteria of Primary Text Selection

With the strategy of exploring the representation of Dunkirk in history and cinema, it is in the belief of this research, that a more contemporary film and a more recent work of history would be more adequate. In this case, we chose Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk* and Walter Lord's *Miracle of Dunkirk*.

Nolan is widely regarded as a highly accomplished film director, known for his skillful cinematography and meticulous attention to detail in both visual and narrative elements. His film about Dunkirk is notable for its historical accuracy and effective storytelling, which presents the event from three different perspectives and creates a sense of intense suspense that ultimately gives way to relief and hope. The film was selected as a primary source for this research due to its cultural and historical significance, and the analysis of the film is presented

objectively while recognizing the importance of considering factors that may have influenced the particular representation presented in the film.

Walter Lord's book, *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, provides a detailed account of the Dunkirk evacuation; which is the focus of our research. We have chosen to examine this book because it portrays Dunkirk as a heroic event, as the title suggested, "The Miracle". This portrayal, which has been romanticized and celebrated in Western culture, is significant in the context of our study. Additionally, the book was published during the Cold War, which further underscores its cultural and historical importance.

Like Nolan's film, *The Miracle of Dunkirk* offers valuable insights into the subjective perspectives that have shaped the Western narrative of the event. We aim to present an objective analysis of the book while acknowledging and examining the factors that may have influenced the specific representation of Dunkirk in this work. Overall, the selection of our primary sources is done according to the adequacy of our assets; the accuracy of the historical material, and the subjectivity of the author and the producer.

3.2 Comparison and Contrast

Separated by a span of 30 years, *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and *Dunkirk* share many similarities and differences. Though a historical book is wider in content, analysis, and perception, the film still carries on a similar narrative. This part will explore the points of parallelism, and contrast between the book and film, in hopes of gaining more critical insight into *The Miracle of Dunkirk* in comparison with Nolan's *Dunkirk*.

Time is a major theme that stands out as a central comparison. *Dunkirk*'s emphasis on the notion of time has been recurrent throughout the film; sequences are riddled with the idea of a race against the clock, and the discourse of the film is shaped by time. Similarly, *The Miracle of Dunkirk* conveys a parallel notion, through Walter Lord's detailed work, and

minute-by-minute account, exemplified in his recurrent use of timing, thus marking a similarity.

Furthermore, we can draw a parallel between the book's imagery and the Film's cinematography. Seen as a valuable asset, *The Miracle of Dunkirk* features vivid imagery, riddled with detailed descriptions. When reading certain passages, it stimulates an imaginative reaction to the content and reflects on similar scenes in the film. The film is seen through cinematography, where the producer depicted some of the major occurrences of the Dunkirk evacuation. This imagery serves the inclusion of various themes including danger. The latter is present in both the film and the book. For the film, the danger is permanently present throughout the plot, depicts through the intense atmosphere of the film. Likewise, the book's representation of danger is developed through the narrative of the book, describing the atmosphere in which the evacuation unfolded, and asserting the notion of constant danger (see in the book review).

Additionally, an explicit comparison might be the story structure, both works convey the same event. One might consider it would be normal that they have an identical storyline. However, given that the book is broader in context and analysis, it is remarkable that one can draw similarities between the film and the book in this respect.

Besides the discussed similarities, contrasts are apparent between the film and the historical book. The scope, most notably, is vastly wider in the book, and naturally so; given that a film could never cover what a historical work covers content-wise. Subsequently, as the film covers the events unfolding from the retreat until Churchill's address on June 4th, the book covers a wider scope, going from the phony war to Churchill's address and beyond. Furthermore, the wideness of the scope allows for larger, and multiple settings. While the film focuses on Dunkirk Beach, the book transitions through different settings; the Dynamo Room,

The House of Commons, and France. Thus, it conveys a larger context, exemplified in the thorough WWII background provided by Walter Lord, and the details in earlier chapters, whilst the film focuses on the evacuation itself.

Finally, Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk* are reflective despite the large time disparity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the second chapter of this paper explored our two primary sources on Dunkirk, Walter Lord's historical book, *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, and Christopher Nolan's cinematic representation, *Dunkirk*. Through an overview and analysis of the book's major argument, a biography of the author, and a review of the book's context, the chapter provided a deeper insight into *The Miracle of Dunkirk*. Similarly, by examining Nolan's *Dunkirk* in a parallel approach, this chapter provided needed insight into our second main source. Additionally, our main sources are further explored in their contrasts and similarities, while highlighting the motives behind their selection. Hence, the insight provided by this chapter sets the stage for the analysis of Dunkirk as a Western romantic narrative in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Dunkirk as a Western Romantic

Narrative

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the representation of Dunkirk in Walter Lord's book *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and Christopher Nolan's film *Dunkirk*, using Hayden White's ideas on historical representation, Fukuyama's thesis on the end of history, the concept of British exceptionalism, and echoes of the Cold War. This paper argues that the romanticization of Dunkirk in Western narratives is driven by an ideological agenda to maintain the perception of Western victory in World War II, which we believe indicates the persistence of the Cold War-era mindset. Additionally, a connection will be drawn between Dunkirk and Brexit to demonstrate the continuation of The British exceptionalism mentality.

1. Theoretical Framework

This section explores four main elements; Hayden White's ideas, echoes of the Cold War, the concept of British exceptionalism, and Francis Fukuyama's thesis on the end of history. Therefore, a conceptualization and an introduction for these concepts are in order; as the elements will be broken down before being used in the analysis.

Dunkirk is history, it is factually a past event that has been retold and represented in different forms and accounts. This argument implies that Dunkirk is a story, and in the frame of this research; a story shaped into a romantic narrative through time, which conveys that Dunkirk is not only shaped by the actual events themselves but also by its narration and interpretation by Historians and filmmakers. In this sense, Hayden White's ideas on the literary nature of history, and historical narrative are relevant to the understanding of Dunkirk's narrative. It is important to note that this paper is not a new-historicist study, as we do not intend to frame our research in a literary theory, but rather use Hayden White's ideas to support the argument that Dunkirk is context-based rather than fact-based.

Hayden White is an American Historian and literary critic who challenged the standard approach to historical writing, arguing against the belief that historiography is scientific and objective, but rather it is a literary form shaped by context and ideology. White's ideas have had a great impact on cultural studies, literary criticism, and history. It is worth noting that it would be vague and irrelevant to adopt a general approach toward White's ideas. This paper instead focuses on two main notions; the narrative of history, and the subjectivity of history.

Before expanding upon White's theory, it is important to establish a fundamental notion, which translates to the consideration that history is a set of facts, including stable dates and events reflecting a past reality. In this respect, a historian's job is to deliver this past reality. However, instead of providing a set of facts, which allows us to simply bear knowledge, a narrative is more suited for us to have a genuine understanding of that past reality. Therefore, history needs to be told in the form of a story; in other words, the story of history. Hence, we as readers and spectators receive a representation of past reality in the form of a story. In his article "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact", Hayden White stresses this notion in his argument: "The late R. G. Collingwood insisted that the historian was above all a storyteller and suggested that historical sensibility was manifested in the capacity to make a plausible story out of a congeries of "facts" which, in their unprocessed form, made no sense at all" (83). Thus, one can deduce that all past realities are brought to us in the form of a story.

Additionally, if we consider the idea of a "Story" to be a text with literary attributes and the fact that a story does not shape itself but rather is shaped by its author, then the latter quote does not state that a historian creates a story. Instead, Hayden White argues that what Collingwood's argument fails to see is that several historical facts do not constitute a story, but rather "story elements" (84). The events, he adds, constitute a story only when a historian

suppresses or subordinates some events, and highlights others, through variation of tone, descriptive strategy, and point of view (84). To summarize the mentioned above Hayden White's words: "In short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play" (84). White's main argument is that to convey a past event, a historian shapes the stable elements (facts) into a story, and this story has, surprisingly, the attributes of a literary work. On a side note, the validity and relevance of White's arguments, about this thesis, will be explored and analyzed in the upcoming section of this chapter, as our main sources are a historical book and a historical film.

Furthermore, the argument put forth by Hayden White implies that History is not as accurate as promoted by Historians themselves. White expands this idea in an article entitled "Historiography and Historiophoty": "Every written history is a product of processes of condensation, displacement, symbolization, and qualification exactly like those used in the production of a filmed representation. It is only the medium that differs, not how messages are produced" (1194). White here implies that the representation of history goes through a similar process and that it is only the means that differ and not the manner, this idea is relevant for our study as it involves a historical book, and a historical film tackling the same event.

In addition, in an article entitled "The Burden of History", White argues against the claim that a historian occupies a middle ground between art and science, asserting instead the fact that a historian cannot be scientific or objective, as historians must select events and interpret to shape a coherent narrative. This implies the subjectivity related to the cultural, political, and ideological attributes of the historian. The ideas discussed so far all lead to the conclusion that history is a narrative, the notion seems vague, but Hayden White Identifies four types of narrative which he coins "plots".

Before exposing White's types of narrative, an example to set the stage is in order. The assassination of Julius Caesar was a major event in ancient Rome, in which staunch Republican senators assassinated whom they perceived as tyrant (Julius Caesar). This event has stable facts: date, place, assassins, and victim, and everyone agrees on the chronology of the event, but the interpretation varies. The historical account of Julius Caesar's assassination could be a romance, in which good (senators) triumph over evil (the tyrannical Julius Caesar); a tragedy; in which Julius Caesar, the idealist is assassinated by power-seeking senators; or a satire, in which the senators are portrayed as incompetent fools, and Caesar as an egocentric dictator. Hence, the argument is that past reality is stable, but its interpretation and exposition are not. Thus, a historian may reflect a past reality through different narratives, which White categorizes into Romance, Tragedy, and Satire, the illustrations of these narratives are provided in the "Julius Caesar" example above.

Therefore, the plots are the narratives through which we learn history, and they are shaped by the choices of the historian, as Hayden White states in "The Historical Text as Literary Artifacts":

How a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation. And to call it that in no way detracts from the status of historical narratives as providing a kind of knowledge (White 85).

This is to say, the plot structure of a historical account renders the account close to a literary artifact. Yet that does not mean that we cannot learn about the past reality from the account.

Overall, White theorizes that a historian adopts a strong reliance on narrative for meaning, and this narrative can be categorized into plots. The latter method goes against the notion that historians are scientific or objective, as they perceive the past realities according to many variants, and one of those variants is the political, social, and cultural context to which the historian lives or is attributed. In this light, an important cultural element, which had a role in shaping Dunkirk's romantic narrative, is the notion of British exceptionalism.

British exceptionalism is a primal component in British mentality; it can be rooted at the beginning of the British Empire. The ideologies used in colonizing other countries such as the "White Man's Burden", focused on the belief that the others needed to be civilized by the white man. This mentality remained firmly established in the British mindset. After WWII, Britain came to be hungrier for leadership, as several British PMs, notably Margaret Thatcher, recurrently asserted the necessity of "sovereignty" and "independence", which was in the light of Britain's adhesion to the European Union (EU), as British exceptionalism played a role in influencing their relationship with other European nations.

Additionally, Britain's negative, or skeptical view of Europe, was incarnated in what is known as "Euroscepticism"; a position involving criticism, or opposition towards European policies. The skepticism is a result of British Exceptionalism. This is highlighted by Taylor Ros in an article entitled "Brexit and British Exceptionalism: The Impossible Challenge for Remainers". In which he explores the historical roots of British exceptionalism and how it was used in political discourse over time. Ros notes that: "The most complete iteration of British exceptionalism was articulated after the second world war by Winston Churchill" (Ros). Additionally, Ros draws the development of British exceptionalism, since Margaret Thatcher, to David Cameron's referendum of 2016.

Furthermore, Christopher Cooker, in an article entitled “Dunkirk and Other British Myths», defines British exceptionalism as a British Myth. Cooker states: “The myth of exceptionalism never less, survived the nineteenth century and looks set to survive into the twenty-first. England may no longer be the leading economic power of Europe but it is still deemed to be more ‘free’” (77). This serves as conclusive evidence that this ideology was not just popular, but rather originates in the upper class.

Cooker examines the creation of the Dunkirk myth, and its boosting of British exceptionalism, arguing that: “In any case, Britain chose to align itself with neither "Europe," choosing instead to remain aloof. The Dunkirk mentality was expressed fittingly by George VI in a letter to his mother, immediately after Britain's continental disengagement in 1940: ‘I feel happier now we have no allies to be polite to and to pamper’”(76). This gives evidence that indeed, mindset-set of English people is in part a result of Dunkirk, in which the British believe that they had achieved self-preservation. This also shows how this ideology became much stronger especially after the defeat of Nazi Germany.

Therefore, British exceptionalism is an asset of major importance, as it influences cultural reception and representation, in addition to policies, and in the case of the present work, historical discourse. Another element, which aligns itself with the ideology of British Exceptionalism, as it exposes the superiority of Western values, is Francis Fukuyama’s idea about the end of history.

Francis Fukuyama is an American political scientist and one of the contemporary debates on the recent state of the world. His book, *The End of History and the Last Man* published in 1992, became a center of attention these last decades.

Fukuyama’s work on the end of history argues that with the end of the Cold War, History with a capital “H” has come to its end (Fritzsche 817), not in the literal meaning, but

the advancement of history has stopped. In the beginning of his book, He focuses on ideologies of the modern world and introduces the concept of the end of history. He also argues that liberal democracy has become the ruling form of government, as he argues: “What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (04).

The second part of Fukuyama’s work digs deeper saying that the human being is seeking recognition from others, and that liberal democracy is the way to satisfy this need. Furthermore, he believes that liberal democracy will keep developing according to technological evolution. Fukuyama argues that religion has played a role in creating ideological government throughout history and that with the fall of religion, rational governments are going to exist more, linking the subjectivity of religion to the influence, it produced on history.

Moreover, Fukuyama introduces the term “the Last Man”, referring figuratively to the victory of capitalist economics and liberal democracy. Implicitly, he investigates the usefulness of historians after the death of history because for him the meaning of historical accounts depends on good reasons, the validity of meta-narratives, and biased intentions. According to him, without these components, history will become useless, thus the end of history means the end of a genre (Fritzsche 817).

Fukuyama demonstrates that the triumph of liberal democracy may have occurred in the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union with the collapse of communism in 1989. This draws the final argument of this thesis saying that liberal democracy existed before and it will keep existing in the future as the final form of the world’s political and economic culture. Giving more from this thesis, Fukuyama gives the

example of China; he acknowledges it as a rising superpower in nowadays' world, which would pose a challenge to the global dominance of the USA and the Western liberal order. Furthermore, he believes that Chinese policy is characterized by authoritarianism and lack of political freedom and that later on it will have to democratize or face dire consequences.

Fukuyama's essay has been both praised and criticized. Some argued that his prediction of the end of history has been proven incorrect by many events such as the rise of tyrannical regimes in various parts of the world and the invasion of Russia into Ukraine. However, his arguments continue to evoke debates about historical progress and the prospects of human society. He says: "In watching the events in the past decade or so, it is hard to avoid the feeling that something very fundamental has happened in world history. The past year has seen a flood of articles commemorating the Cold War, and the fact that "peace" seems to be breaking out in many regions of the world" (03).

By applying the ideas of Francis Fukuyama in the book *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and the movie *Dunkirk*, the romanticism of Dunkirk can be viewed as a way of holding a nostalgic idea of the West's achievements and glory, and of repeating the idea of the West as a dominant global power. By continually retelling the story of Dunkirk and other moments of Western triumph, the West can keep a sense of superiority and dominance and can avoid grappling with the complexities and challenges of the present moment.

Fukuyama suggests that the end of the Cold War marks the ultimate triumph of liberal democracies and the West over any other form of political system. In this respect, *Dunkirk* as a story of heroism sacrifice, and resilience reflects the perceived superiority of the West and pushes a romantic narrative. By examining the myth of Dunkirk in the context of Fukuyama's thesis on the "end of history," it can be possible to explore how the romanticization of the evacuation of Dunkirk can reflect Western political and ideological trends.

The context of our primary sources, though three decades apart, is arguably similar. Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk* was published in 1982, during the Cold War (see the first chapter), and Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk* was released in 2017, a period of a new Cold War. It is in the belief of this paper, that just as the Cold War had a role in influencing Dunkirk's narrative in *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, the contemporary Cold War has a similar role in Christopher Nolan's 2017 film.

In March 2014, Russia annexed Crimea (a Ukrainian peninsula on the Black Sea), sparking a conflict in eastern Ukraine, where separatists backed by Russia declared independence and clashed with the Ukrainian military. This event sparked what many newspaper headlines called, "a new Cold War", and tensions would only grow, in a similar fashion to the original Cold War; the West is at a cold war with Russia. This is to say that the Film *Dunkirk* was released in such a geopolitical climate that influences historical writing and production. In this light, the contemporary Cold War serves as another element with which to analyze Dunkirk's narrative.

Having established a historical background for Dunkirk, contextualization of the primary sources, and a conceptualization of the main elements justifying Dunkirk's narrative, we have thus set the stage for the analysis of *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and the movie *Dunkirk*.

2. Dunkirk as a Western Romantic Narrative

This section will analyze Dunkirk's narrative in Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, and Christopher Nolan's film *Dunkirk*, through four elements: Hayden White's ideas on historical writing, the notion of British Exceptionalism, Echoes of a Cold War, and Francis Fukuyama's book on the end of history. Through this exploration, we seek to expose the miracle of Dunkirk as a constructed narrative.

2.1. Dunkirk as a Romantic Plot

Hayden White argues that historians shape their narrative according to preconceived plot structures, and the Dunkirk evacuation is a clear example of a Romantic plot in all historical accounts of Dunkirk. Most historical accounts and films on the event seem to agree on a similar structure for the Dunkirk “story”, as is the case in the main sources examined in this research.

The evacuation of Allied troops from Dunkirk in World War II is an occurrence that stood the test of time and was constructed into a “major” event throughout history, as this past reality was gradually shaped into a story of resilience, sacrifice, heroism, and above all triumph. It would be plausible to discuss the validity of such a narrative; after all, Britain retained its Army due to the evacuation, the British people demonstrated solidarity and resilience, and the loss of the BEF would have had dire consequences, and perhaps even lead to Britain’s downfall. Consequently, a Romantic plot is only adequate for such an event; Dunkirk is in no way a tragedy or a satire in Western narrative.

Nevertheless, it is equally important to consider the fact that the BEF was defeated, and that defeat resulted in the fall of France. Strategically speaking the BEF campaign was a failure, and the evacuation was factually a retreat of a defeated army. This argument put forth in this research paper is nothing new. In an article entitled “Dunkirk Miracle or Blunder”, American historian Steven Byas challenges the romantic narrative of Dunkirk, arguing that the “miracle” was a strategic failure. He supports the argument with Adolf Hitler’s take on the evacuation: “Toland writes of Hitler’s reaction when he learned that the bulk of the BEF was going to escape from his grasp. Oddly, the continuing evacuation did not seem to perturb Hitler. It was almost as though it was no concern of his” (Byas 37). This is to say that while the British saw a triumph in the evacuation, the Germans merely viewed it as a minor setback

or even as a triumph for them. Byas goes on to assert that Hitler never intended to invade Britain, nor did he consider it a major enemy, but rather sought to neutralize it (Byas37).

In another study entitled “Dunkirk; The Defeat That Inspired a Nation”, Alice Palmer argues that the Dunkirk evacuation was the final event in a series of culminating defeats; thus it could be interpreted as a disaster (Palmer 2). According to Palmer, the Germans viewed Dunkirk as the culmination of their victory in France (2). She asserts that Dunkirk was largely mythologized during World War II and she emphasizes that “Winston Churchill’s speech about the evacuation, and subsequent coverage in newspapers and newsreels, were the earliest sources of the myth of Dunkirk. Later, Literature, film, and firsthand accounts would further shape the public narrative” (Palmer 03). Therefore, the notion that the story of Dunkirk can only be a romantic plot is put into question.

But how Dunkirk is a romantic plot in Walter Lord’s *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, and Christopher Nolan’s *Dunkirk*, and why is it so? Hayden White’s theories on the historical narrative and the bias of historians constitute, in the belief of this research paper, an answer to these questions.

The Miracle of Dunkirk offers a detailed account of the evacuation. Walter Lord provides a background for the evacuation before delving into it, as the story is told in detail, reinforced by a humanization, and vivid description. The book constructs its narrative through the recurrence of themes such as fear, chaos, and confusion, which are gradually replaced by hope, resilience, and deliverance. While it cannot be said that Lord adopted a romantic tone in his discourse, as the facts presented are clear and detailed, the overall discourse of the book does convey a romantic tone. The latter is apparent in the overall structure of the account. Lord constructed Dunkirk into a series of crises and obstacles; each chapter introduces crises and solves them, only to see another crises resurface at its end. These obstacles are overcome

by the cunningness and efficiency of the British command, as Walter Lord portrays it. This is to say that the BEF's path to deliverance was full of obstacles, and it was a hopeless situation. Hence, what Lord is trying to convey here is "a victory against all odds". In this respect, *The Miracle of Dunkirk's* plot could only be regarded as a romantic plot, as it conveys a triumph, good overcoming evil.

Furthermore, the discourse, initially dominated by a grim ambiance, gradually adopts an air of triumph and deliverance, as the author shifts focus back to England in the final chapter; Walter Lord writes; "It was a nation already overflowing with gratitude and relief when Winston Churchill went to the House of Commons on the evening of June 4 to report on the evacuation." (Lord.270). Understandably, the author was only reporting on the mood in England at the time, nevertheless, he goes on to support the idea of a miracle and considers the major significance of Dunkirk as the "turning point of the whole war"(Lord.275). Without Dunkirk, he adds, Germany would have defeated Russia, implying that Germany could have focused all of its efforts on the eastern front and won. Lord's arguments could hardly be viewed as objective or scientific. As we have explained above, Germany never intended to invade Britain, let alone focus its efforts on it. In addition, Germany's efforts on the eastern front were nothing short of the largest ground invasion in history, and a doctrine of "Total War" (see in the first chapter).

It is important to note that we do not seek to discredit the work of an esteemed historian, as Lord's statements could be regarded as assumptions. However, considering the extent of Lord's assumptions, the examination of the least historical facts is necessary. Additionally, if we take into consideration Hayden White's assertion that: "a story is only constituted when a historian suppresses or subordinates some events, and highlights others, through variation of tone, descriptive strategy, and point of view" (84), we can safely assume

that the *Miracle of Dunkirk* went through the process of plot construction, based on the overall discourse conveyance, and Lord's view on the significance of the event.

In this light, another relevant idea stated by Hayden White is that: "How a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind"(84). White argues that a set of historical events is structured in a specific plot to convey meaning. Hence, Walter Lord structured Dunkirk into a romantic plot, intending to convey the significance of the event in the broader context of World War II.

Similarly, the 2017 blockbuster film *Dunkirk* conveys a similar significance to Dunkirk. Christopher Nolan's film features the Dunkirk evacuation from the initial retreat until the return to England. Unlike *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, the film focuses on the soldiers, and the set is mainly the Dunkirk beach. By adopting a recurrent personal narrative, the director relates the viewer to the story and attempts to personalize it to an extent. Although the events are accurately portrayed, just as in *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, the film constructs a romantic plot out of the Dunkirk events. Arguably, it would be plausible to say that the film has a more significant role in shaping Dunkirk's narrative, for the simple fact that films have larger audiences, as a visual representation of Dunkirk is more likely to influence public perception than a historical account. Additionally, the film's recentness implies an inspiration drawn from previously published historical accounts of Dunkirk. Nevertheless, despite the time gap, and the varying medium, the Dunkirk narrative has only been reinforced as a romantic story featuring the triumph of good over evil. In this regard, Hayden White notes in "Historiography and Historiophoty" that how the message is produced remains the same, despite the variation of mediums (1194). This implies, in the context of this analysis, that *Dunkirk* went through the same plot construction operation as *The Miracle of Dunkirk*.

Consequently, to shape a story or a plot in the frame of a film, Nolan had to structure a set of events into a specific narrative.

The film opens up with retreating BEF soldiers under fire, in the frame of a deep grey lightning and a suspenseful soundtrack. This ambiance would dominate the bulk of the film's duration. Similarly to Walter Lord's book, the themes of fear, chaos, and desperation constitute the dominant narrative of the film, until it is interrupted by the arrival of the little ships, marking deliverance. The structure of the film's plot conveys a victory against all odds, as the Dunkirk beach was constantly threatened. It would be valid to assume that for audiences unfamiliar with Dunkirk, the film would not initially seem like a romantic story, as Nolan features a grim, tragic-like ambiance, induced by composer Hans Zimmer's suspenseful soundtracks, the notion of constant danger, and impending threat. However, close to *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, the arrival of the civilian boats appeases the grim ambiance and gives way to hope and deliverance. Hence, the romantic plot structure is the same as in the book. In his article "Debacle at Dunkirk – Hollywood can't whitewash the shame", defense analyst Rakesh Krishnan Simha asserts that "The Battle of Dunkirk in 1940 was a massive and humiliating defeat suffered by the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) of 400,000 troops against Adolf Hitler's powerful German Army, but in the Hollywood movie *Dunkirk*, director Christopher Nolan has packaged the evacuation as a story of heroism" (Simha). What the analyst implies here is that Nolan recounted an event, which was factually a defeat, as a story of heroism.

Understandably, Christopher Nolan is not a historian and a filmmaker has to dramatize events to make a film. Yet, considering that *Dunkirk* is a historical film, and often praised for its accurate portrayal of events, then it would be valid to assert that it represents a past reality as much as *The Miracle of Dunkirk* does. The representation of this event requires a plot structure, and Nolan structured it in a Romantic plot; portraying the triumph of good over

faceless evil, hence, portraying the Dunkirk evacuation as a victory for Britain and the British people. However, as British journalist and writer Adrian Hamilton write in his “A great escape? Dunkirk was a humiliation for British forces”; It was the cheering, not the battle, for which Dunkirk was remembered” (Hamilton).

We can conclude from the analysis above that, the story of Dunkirk is a romantic plot, not for the lack of evidence suggesting otherwise, but it seems that only a romantic plot could reinforce a romantic narrative. Both Walter Lord and Christopher Nolan portrayed Dunkirk as a romantic story of triumph. It would be plausible to say that the romantic plot construction hinges on the creation of history rather than reflecting it, as the factual defeat at Dunkirk is twisted into a significant victory. Nevertheless, the Western romantic narrative of Dunkirk is not constructed only through a historical narrative, as other factors are in play, and among those is the ideology of British Exceptionalism.

2.2 An Exceptional Feat: Dunkirk and British Exceptionalism

After WWII, the British Empire declined, and Great Britain became a soft power compared to the USA and USSR. Britain made many attempts to integrate the European Union. Nevertheless, following several referendums to exit the EU, a decisive referendum was held in 2016 within the term of David Cameron, in which the majority voted for leaving the EU (Brexit). All of this shows that British exceptionalism is an ideology appropriate to British people.

The main period in which British exceptionalism came to be the main boost of the British people was WWII. The role of this period is reflected in Britain’s struggle against the Axis, then after the surrender of France, which was considered as a betrayal, Operation Dynamo was held by the British command. The evacuation of Dunkirk is believed to be one of the major events which influenced heavily the British people because it was considered a

miracle in which British civilians rescued their soldiers as portrayed by Alter Lord in *The Miracle of Dunkirk*. In this regard, Britain believes that it reached self-rescue without any intervention from any other nation. This is an idea highlighted by Alice Palmer as she notes: “Dunkirk is connected to the myth of the “People’s War” through the narrative of the 38 little ships. J.B. Priestley, in implying that the civilian boats had played a crucial role in the evacuation, tied ordinary Britons to the war itself”(12).

Churchill himself directly tackled the incident, praising it in his speech, “We Shall Fight on the Beaches”. Penny Summerfield, who examined the representation of Dunkirk from 1940 to 1958, argues that the memory of Dunkirk was used in shaping Britain’s memory of WWII, reinforcing its romantic image after the war. He holds that:

The contest hinged on whether Dunkirk was to be remembered as an expression of the 'people's war'. It began, however, not in 1958 but in 1940. During the Second World War, there was a divide between Churchillian accounts of Dunkirk that portrayed the evacuation as a triumph above all for the Royal Navy and those that followed the broadcaster J.B. Priestley by giving pride of place to the civilian contribution. Dunkirk was the subject of the first of Churchill's iconic wartime speeches, delivered on 4 June 1940. Churchill used the speech to secure his position, to assert that the retreat was not the first step to capitulation, to promote national and imperial unity, and to court America as an ally (Summerfield 790-791)

Furthermore, Alice Palmer argues that the myth of Dunkirk is related to the myth of “Britain Alone” since it shows the times in which Britain was neglected by its allies (11). It is clear that the evacuation of Dunkirk has been the main reason for calling for the ideology of British exceptionalism.

In the case of Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*, we can see that these two sources made a romantic story out of the Dunkirk evacuation, in which British Exceptionalism is strongly present. Walter Lord demonstrates his interpretation of this ideology in the last chapters; he also discusses the bravery and courage of the BEF. In some passages, he mentions the post-Dunkirk period in which the defeat was turned into a victory, as he notes:

For the moment, his warnings did little good. The returning troops were greeted—often to their amazement—like conquering heroes. Captain John Dodd of the 58th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, had expected sullen and angry faces, possibly hostile crowds, and a stigma that would stick for all time. Instead, he found nothing but joy and thankfulness, as if the BEF had been the victors, not the vanquished (271).

This passage gives an implicit interpretation of how the aftermath of Dunkirk was given a certain amount of praise due to British exceptionalism.

Additionally, Lord mentions the role of Winston Churchill in preaching for the Dunkirk Evacuation saying:

It was a nation already overflowing with gratitude and relief when Winston Churchill went to the House of Commons on the evening of June 4 to report on the evacuation. The benches were filled; the Public Gallery, the Peers Gallery, and the Distinguished Strangers Gallery were all packed. The crowd welcomed him with a rousing cheer, then sat enthralled by that rarity— a speech devoted mainly to bad news but which, nevertheless, inspires men with hope and courage (271).

This quote explicitly shows how the population adopted this ideology in the aftermath of the evacuation, and displays the courage of the British population hearing the bad news but with inspiration.

In addition to this, Lord displays the scenarios that the Germans could or would have done to block the evacuation, conveying the idea that the evacuation was conducted against all odds, and hinting at the belief that the Dunkirk evacuation was a setback for the German army. Lord asserts these notions for the sake of reinforcing the Dunkirk myth

Christopher Nolan's film *Dunkirk* uses a similar methodology in integrating the ideology of British Exceptionalism throughout the movie. One of the reasons for believing so is that Nolan hired only British actors, not only known ones but also unknown ones. We notice that he uses one French character only during the whole movie and he focuses only on British stories. We also notice the blurring of faces of the German army at the end of the film, when the pilot Ferrier got arrested, conveying that the enemy is faceless, thus reinforcing the notion of heroism. Additionally, the film conveys the latter theme through a focus on the British soldiers, while portraying the enemy as faceless. The focus of the film on the British soldiers trapped by the German forces could also be seen as a sign of their exceptionalism.

Another important detail is the emphasis placed on the theme of survival, as British soldiers strived in determination and courage on the beaches of Dunkirk, further conveying notions such as heroism and determination. In addition, the call for civilian vessels was drawn; showing them all getting started to go on a journey to bring back their children from war. As an example, we see Mr. Dawson responding to the call with his son Peter, and their friend George Mills insists on accompanying them; this is a strong representation of what the Dunkirk spirit is. Even though George seems to be at a young age, he insists on going with them, and he dies as a war hero. The ideology of British exceptionalism is strongly emphasized in these scenes.

The vessels in the film also provide an accurate image of Britain's self-preservation, as these vessels significantly contribute to portraying Britain's commitment to self-preservation. Thus, their assembly in response to the BEF's distress call on the shores of Dunkirk is particularly noteworthy. In a poignant scene from the film, the Commander observes the flotilla and expresses a profound sentiment, exclaiming, "Home." This moment exemplifies the emotional connection and sense of belonging associated with the sight of the vessels.

. It is worth noting the parallel between the latter scenes and the following quote in *The Miracle of Dunkirk*: "Cox felt a sudden surge of pride. Being here was no longer just a duty; it was an honor and a privilege." (Lord.155). both the film scenes and the quote imply a scene of pride, heroism, and hope.

Overall, Dunkirk is seen as a symbol of British exceptionalism. Both Walter Lord and Christopher Nolan boost the miracle in their works as a result of their bias toward Britain. Dunkirk is portrayed as an important part of national identity and history, interpreting the evacuations as an important moment that displays the unique qualities and the unity of the British people. Accordingly, we can say that Dunkirk boosted British exceptionalism and this latter reinforced the Dunkirk myth. On a broader scale, the Dunkirk narrative is also reinforced through Fukuyama's thesis on the end of history.

2.3 The Triumph of Western Values: Dunkirk and Francis Fukuyama's Thesis on the End of History

As already mentioned in this chapter Francis Fukuyama introduced the books *The End of History and The Last Man*, the argument that liberal democracy represents the final form of human government, marking the deadline of the ideological evolution of Western values.

His main argument on the death of history does not mean the death of history in the literal meaning and nothing significant would not happen in the future, but rather the pose that

the Westerns went into, in which there would not be any force to challenge liberal democracy.

Fukuyama holds that:

The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period, there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed. Such nostalgia will continue to fuel competition and conflict even in the post-historical world for some time to come (18).

This directly leads to believe that the end of history would cause a lot of trouble in the world including the risk of the disappearance of arts and philosophy because there would be nothing more to be perceived. Subsequently, the idea of nostalgia conveys a reliance on a continuous retelling of history, since history is “dead”, which is this paper’s argument for the continued romanticization of Dunkirk. Furthermore, Fukuyama used Hegel’s expression of the end of history which he shaped as the triumph of liberal democracy and the achievement of human beings of self-perfection in all domains. Fukuyama believes that this ideology came with the end of the Cold War. Öner Selcen reports that, in an interview, Fukuyama explains that the core idea of his thesis is the question of whether such a thing called history exists (Öner 98). Fukuyama was said to be right in his argumentation about the end of history and liberal democracy being the last man to stand amongst all ideologies and governments. In this vein, Aris Roussinos asserts that:

Yet nearly thirty years later, reading what Fukuyama wrote as opposed to the dismissive précis of his ideas, we see that he was right all along. Where Huntington and Kaplan predicted the threat to the Western liberal order coming from outside its cultural borders, Fukuyama discerned the weak points from within, predicting, with startling accuracy, our current moment (Roussinos).

We believe that the continued recounting of the Dunkirk myth in literature, films, and politics is aligned with Fukuyama's idea on the death of history. It is commemorated, for the sake of recalling Britain's victory over Nazi Germany. It is also worth mentioning that this historical and cinematic adaptation was present in boosting the Dunkirk spirit throughout a long period. After all, this romanticization is considered as a nostalgic ideology to believe that Dunkirk is a Myth in which the BEF was saved with a divine miracle. From Fukuyama's perspective, one could argue that the continuation of recalling this myth is part of the cultural and political project of celebrating the values and achievements of the West and promoting Western triumph.

Our previous examination of the *Miracle of Dunkirk* by Walter Lord and the film *Dunkirk* by Christopher Nolan reveals that these two accounts give great details about Operation Dynamo. Yet, both have managed to celebrate the evacuations as a Western triumph of liberal democracy. Regarding Walter Lord's book, it was published during the Cold War, a time that, according to Fukuyama, was characterized by a perceived halt in the progression of history. Far from this, Lord's work gave the evacuation of Dunkirk a romantic tone because he portrayed Dunkirk as a victory, while in reality, it was a blunder. In *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, he asserts the significance of the event for the British particularly, and the West generally. Additionally, he gave his work a common title that the majority is already familiar with.

Lord argues that due to the evacuation of Dunkirk Germany focused on Britain, rather than the invasion of the Soviet Union. Thus, Walter Lord celebrates the triumph of the Dunkirk evacuation. Alternatively, the Soviet Union had only been able to repulse the Wehrmacht because Hitler did not focus his efforts on it, according to Lord's assumption of Dunkirk's significance. In the light of Lord's bias to Britain, it is important to mention that he is an American patriot, and received awards for his dedication to American history, such as the Francis Parkman Prize for Special Achievement by the Society of American Historians. Lord's statement was reached by considering his idealized depiction of Dunkirk and aligning it with Fukuyama's argument regarding the persistent promotion of Western values.

Additionally, Walter Lord displays Western triumph in his book by romanticizing the miracle of Dunkirk; as he sheds light on every detail in the individual chapters, where each problem is solved. The book features many political and historical figures telling each other their stories such as Commander Gört and Ramsey. Lord also reports on how people perceived Churchill's speech "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" as a victory rather than a loss. Here, we can deduce that Lord gave a romantic image to Dunkirk. Moreover, incorporating Fukuyama's ideas, one can consider that Lord has adopted Dunkirk as a triumph in which he promotes Western values which aligns with the defeat of fascism in WWII and Communism at the end of the cold war. Therefore, capitalism and liberal democracy are triumphant, and Dunkirk boosted the triumph of liberal democracy.

As regards the film *Dunkirk*, Christopher Nolan managed to give a romantic image to Dunkirk through different means. He recalled this idea to celebrate the British commemoration of the Dunkirk evacuation, in which he depicted the heroic desire of the British in winning the war. The continuity of the triumph of Western values in WWII is associated with Fukuyama's ideas. In addition, the day the flotilla scene was filmed rhymed

with the 76th anniversary of Dunkirk, further asserting the continued narrative of the Dunkirk myth, and the promotion of Western values in the process.

Nolan was said to have had the film idea back in 1992 right after the end of the Cold War, which Fukuyama perceived as the celebration of the triumph of liberal democracy. In the final stages of the film, the speech of Dunkirk appears on the tongue of the soldiers celebrating the success of the Dunkirk evacuation. It is also important to note that this film has introduced a global representation of this evacuation, without forgetting that films are more common than literature nowadays. Most people have seen it because it was streamed on many popular platforms such as HBO, Netflix, and Amazon Prime Video. Thus, we see how much this movie celebrates the triumph of the Dunkirk evacuation and or which promotes Western values.

When watching Nolan's film, we notice many significant scenes in which Western values are highlighted. The opening scene serves as a poignant illustration of the somber atmosphere experienced by British soldiers, reflecting the depths of despair they endured on the shores of Dunkirk. In stark contrast, the final scene of the film depicts the long-awaited rescue of the BEF, accompanied by a noticeable shift in climate. The presence of sunlight in this scene creates a sense of comfort and relief, symbolizing the transformative change from despair to hope; this is one of the film's signs of romanticizing the evacuation, which delivers the marking of the success of the West. Another sign of the romanticization of Dunkirk is the use of sound throughout the whole film, using the ticking clock sound, which indicates the struggle with time. This resulted in the pressure that BEF was held and how they managed to flee the beaches of Dunkirk. The solidarity and the resilience of the British soldiers is also a factor that signifies the mythical tale of Dunkirk because the focus of the film is all on the soldiers trying to save each other, such as the rescue of Tommy to Alex when the torpedo hit

the ship they were going to escape on. Additionally, the film also focuses on the civilians aiding in the evacuation.

Overall, regarding Fukuyama's thesis on the death of history, and as far as the miracle of Dunkirk is concerned with our work, we see the relationship between the notion of the death of history and the sanctification of the historians and the filmmakers to this event. Therefore, the discourse romanticizing Dunkirk is a reinforcement of Fukuyama's triumph of Western values argument, as explored above. However, in the light of the contemporary period and the resurgence of the Cold War, it would be plausible to suggest that History has not ended as Fukuyama argued. Consequently, Dunkirk's contemporary narrative can be explored as a cold war discourse, notably in Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*.

2.4. Echoes of the Cold War: Dunkirk as a Narrative of Western Victories

In his article "A Great Escape? Dunkirk Was Actually a Humiliation for British Forces", British journalist and writer Adrian Hamilton writes:

In strictly military terms, the "miracle of Dunkirk" was not the evacuation but Hitler's decision to hold his forces back from the kill for a precious three days in which the British and French were able to gather their forces and regroup around the beaches. Hitler later implied that he'd done it almost as an act of charity, in the hope that the British would now come to terms with him, as several members of Churchill's newly formed War Cabinet were advising him to do (Hamilton).

Hamilton's statement puts into question the Dunkirk narrative, as it asserts that the evacuation was almost allowed by the Germans, thus distorting the discourse of a "victory against all odds". We deduce that the Dunkirk narrative is a propaganda campaign, throughout

time, as Hamilton notes, the British constructed a propaganda victory (Hamilton). Additionally, propaganda is often associated with Cold War tendencies, which is our argument in this section: the Dunkirk narrative is a cold war discourse, constructed to attribute a victory to the West.

The Cold War officially ended with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, paving the way for American and Western hegemony, after it was in a constant state of struggle with the Eastern bloc led by the USSR. Hence, the end of the Cold War established an ideological hegemony led by the collective West: mainstream media, pop culture, cinema, and economy to mention a few. However, two decades later, this hegemony is, arguably, challenged once more by the East, as rising power centers such as Russia and China offer an alternative to Western hegemony. In his article “Cold War and New Cold War Narratives”, Kenneth Paul Tan notes: “The narrative of American decline and its struggle to retain its preeminent status in the world includes pessimistic accounts of economic stagnation, unaffordable military commitments around the world, the rise of authoritarian populism, cultural-intellectual exhaustion, institutional decay, and dysfunctional domestic politics”(20-21). The notion of cultural intellectual exhaustion conveys that American hegemony over cinema, media, and pop culture is waning, thus, competing narratives resurge with the echoes of a new Cold War.

Therefore, the Cold War is echoing, shaping, and influencing narratives and the overall discourse, resulting in competing narratives. It would be a valid assertion to frame the idea of competing narratives as the essence of the Cold War, as it captures the fundamental nature of the struggle. Each side sought to promote and establish its narrative. Therefore, the concept of competing narratives can only be aligned with the modern Cold War as the notion remains relevant in the contemporary period with the resurgence of the Cold War. Kenneth Paul Tan argues that although the Cold War officially ended in 1991, its tendencies and mentalities still influence modern geopolitics, popular culture, and arts, the presence of these

tendencies is not formally declared, he adds, but rather implicitly drives the narratives of the Eastern and Western bloc (06). As a result, we can deduce that competing narratives is present nowadays as much as it was during the Cold War, but what differs is how it is present.

The contemporary relevance of competing narratives and their influence on the Dunkirk narrative can be understood in the contemporary geopolitical climate, as tensions between the East and West have reemerged. With the rise of alternative power centers such as Russia and China, challenging Western hegemony, there is a renewed clash of narratives, as the modern Cold War is likely to adopt the same style of competing narratives as the Cold War, notably in films, television, arts, and pop culture (Tan 21). Additionally, the East now provides an alternative to liberal democracy, and counters Western values. In this light, the West continues to promote its values and its narrative. As a result, films like *Dunkirk* which romanticize and celebrate Western feats in World War II, contribute to the overall idea of Western superiority and hegemony. Hence, the reasoning that Dunkirk is a cold war discourse aligns with the previous analysis of its narrative, which showed that Dunkirk is a romantic story influenced by historical bias and British Exceptionalism. Dunkirk is not a victory, nor is it a heroic feat; it was rather the retreat of a defeated army after the Germans allowed them to, as explained above.

In this contemporary Cold War; competing narratives and the promotion of distinct values and governance systems are central, and the role of the past and its representation become evident. A notable example is the Russian Federation's annual celebration of its World War II victory through the grand military parade on May 9th. This exemplifies how past victories are commemorated to shape national identity, particularly in the context of an ideological struggle. In this light, Dunkirk, as a past reality, or a victory as portrayed, assumes a similar role as "Stalingrad" does for the Russians, standing out as an emblem of courage, heroism, and sacrifice for the collective West in general and the British in particular.

Nolan's 2017 blockbuster brought a story of heroism and sacrifice to the public, the film has been critically acclaimed and praised for its accuracy. While the film does not fail to capture the events of Operation Dynamo, in the sense that it bears an accurate representation of the stable elements of the event, the film still conveys a romanticized version of Dunkirk. Many people learned about Dunkirk from Nolan's film, given the reputation of the director and the scale of investment in the production. Therefore, it would be reasonable to say that the film played a role in shaping public perception of Dunkirk. Additionally, *Dunkirk* was nominated for eight Oscars, and best director, knowing that the latter was the first instance in Nolan's career, that is to say, the film is quite popular and is often regarded as a cinematic masterpiece. Consequently, the film is suited to promote a narrative, as its reputation and visual advantage further enhance reception.

Furthermore, *Dunkirk* conveys a victory against all odds, coupled with a hopeful, almost triumphant ending, similar to Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk*. Notably, they both employ the same plot structure to convey this message. By examining the alignment in plot structure and narrative message between *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and *Dunkirk*, we can deduce that both works serve to reinforce a specific narrative about Dunkirk. It is also worth noting that these sources, despite being produced three decades apart, were created within the context of the Cold War. This shared historical backdrop suggests that cold war tendencies and its associated narratives influenced the construction and interpretation of the Dunkirk narrative, further reinforcing the argument that Dunkirk is a cold war narrative.

Overall, the romanticization of Dunkirk is a cold war discourse in the midst of competing narratives. The alignment of the reinforcement and construction of a romanticized narrative in Nolan's *Dunkirk* and Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk* for the event, within the geopolitical climate of their production, indicates a connection. Moreover, the Cold War being a struggle of ideologies and narratives sets the stage for the romanticization of historical

discourse featuring Western victories, or in this case reshaping the event into a victory. Moreover, Dunkirk's symbolic and mythical status is further reinforced and influenced within the context of the contemporary Cold War.

Conclusion

The analysis of Dunkirk as a Western romantic in Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, and Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk* reveals the interplay between historical representation and narrative. Through an examination of the plot structure, in conjunction with Hayden White's theories, it is evident that Dunkirk is a romantic plot in both sources, constructed with the aim of conveying heroism and triumph. This narrative construction goes beyond historical objectivity, as the storytelling techniques employed by Walter Lord and Christopher Nolan serve to create a romantic portrayal of Dunkirk. Additionally, the latter serves as a manifestation of British exceptionalism, as the narrative reinforces the notion of British resilience and victory, revealing an intertwined complementary relation between Dunkirk's narrative and British exceptionalism.

Furthermore, on a broader scale, Francis Fukuyama's work on the end of history offers additional insight into Dunkirk's romanticization, as the representation of Dunkirk in the film and historical account, contribute to the celebration of Western triumph, and the promotion of Western values. Lastly, the exploration of the Dunkirk narrative as a cold war discourse, within the contemporary geopolitical climate and the Cold War, uncovers the influence of competing narratives in shaping the representation. Overall, the exploration of Dunkirk through these four elements reflects a combination of historical bias, national pride, ideological struggles, and geopolitical influence; each partaking in the construction of Dunkirk as a Western romantic narrative.

General Conclusion

The present research explores Dunkirk as a Western romantic narrative, examining the correlation between narrative and history in Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*. Through reviewing the historical background of Dunkirk, an analysis of the event's portrayal within these texts, based on; a theoretical framework that speculates Hayden White's theory on historical narrative, the myth of British exceptionalism, Fukuyama's work on the end of history and the contemporary Cold War. This paper showcases the interplay between geopolitics, culture, ideology, and history. This work develops through a general introduction, three chapters, and a general conclusion. The first chapter reviews the events of World War II, Operation Dynamo (Dunkirk), and the Cold War, highlighting Dunkirk as a historical event in the titanic context of World War II, and reviewing the post-war era (the Cold War). This background provides a historical context for this research, and sets the stage for the analysis of Dunkirk as a narrative, as the elements reviewed in the first chapter are needed for further understanding of the Dunkirk narrative and the elements influencing it.

The second chapter examines the main sources, reviewing, and analyzing Walter Lord's book, and Nolan's film. The exploration of *The Miracle of Dunkirk* provides an in-depth understanding of the book's main themes and arguments. The first section reviews and analyses the content of the book and the context of its writing, in addition to the author's biography and publication. This section dives into the historical account, and provides an understanding of this source, its author, and the context of its creation, thus, setting the stage for analyzing *The Miracle of Dunkirk* as a reinforcement of a narrative. Then, the following section adopts a similar approach to the film, as it dives into the film's plot and incorporates an analysis of the film's main themes and arguments. Similarly to the book's analysis, this section also provides a biography of Christopher Nolan, in addition to an exploration of the context and the background of the film's production. The latter provides an insight into the

film, its director, and the context of its production, to set the stage for its analysis as a reinforcing account of Dunkirk's narrative. The third section of this chapter presents the criteria for text selection as well as, a comparison between *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and the film *Dunkirk*, further enhancing their understanding, and reinforcing the argument that a historical account and a cinematic representation contribute to a common narrative. Overall, the second chapter offers a solid foundation for subsequent analysis of Dunkirk as a Western romantic narrative.

Lastly, the third chapter of the thesis delves into the romanticization of Dunkirk in Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*. It explores the interplay between historical representation and storytelling techniques, drawing on Hayden White's theories to showcase the plot structure of Dunkirk. By examining the latter in the book and film, it becomes evident that Dunkirk is a romantic story featuring a heroic, resilient, and decisive stance. In this light, the subjective nature of historical narrative stands out as a key factor behind Dunkirk's romanticization, as both Walter Lord and Christopher Nolan recounted a romantic tale of triumph, while in reality, the Dunkirk evacuation was merely an escape as argued by several critics, researchers, and historians. This analysis highlights the role of storytelling in shaping public perception.

Furthermore, the chapter explores Dunkirk as a manifestation of British exceptionalism, as intertwined notions of British resilience and victory, and national pride partake in reinforcing the Dunkirk narrative. Therefore, British exceptionalism highlights the ideological and cultural dimensions of the Dunkirk narrative. These dimensions are further expanded upon in conjunction with Francis Fukuyama's thesis on the end of history. The chapter examines Dunkirk as a reflection of Francis Fukuyama's triumph of Western values, deducing that the Dunkirk narrative is a promotion of Western triumphs, and its representation reinforces the superiority of Western values. Hence, this analysis highlights the

role of geopolitics in shaping the representation of historical events. Finally, the chapter explores the echoes of the cold war in the Dunkirk narrative. The analysis uncovers how competing narratives of the cold war era shape the representation of Dunkirk, by considering the contemporary geopolitical climate and ongoing ideological struggle. Therefore, the relationship between history, geopolitics, and context plays a major role in shaping Dunkirk as a Western romantic narrative.

This research examines the historical account and cinematic representation of Dunkirk, its methodology involves a comprehensive review and analysis of the primary sources, as well as the incorporation of relevant and supportive secondary sources. In this light, this paper contributes to the field of study of World War II studies, particularly, the study of Dunkirk studies through exploring the interplay between history, narrative, and geopolitics in shaping the representation of Dunkirk. Additionally, by examining both a historical account and a cinematic representation, this research sheds light on how storytelling techniques, cultural narratives, and ideological struggles influence the representation of historical events.

Overall, this paper provides a comprehensive analysis of Dunkirk as a Western romantic narrative in Walter Lord's *The Miracle of Dunkirk* and Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*, offering insight into the interplay between history and narrative. The analysis of their plot structure, contextual influences, and cultural dimensions, highlights the subjective nature of these narratives and their influence on representations of past events. Moreover, the analysis reveals how Dunkirk is shaped into a romantic story of triumph, despite the realities of the evacuation. In this respect, it becomes evident that representations of history are not observations of the past but rather active creations of history.

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02 May 2023.

Abstract in French (Résumé)

Ce travail de recherche examine Dunkerque en tant que récit romantique de l'Occident dans l'œuvre historique intitulé *The Miracle of Dunkirk* écrit par Walter Lord et *Dunkirk*, dirigé et produit par Christopher Nolan. À travers une analyse des sources primaires à la lumière des idées de Hayden White sur le récit historique, du concept de l'exceptionnalisme britannique, du travail de Francis Fukuyama sur la fin de l'histoire et de la guerre froide contemporaine, cette recherche vise à mettre en évidence les interactions entre l'histoire, la géopolitique, la culture et le cinéma, ainsi que leur rôle dans la construction de Dunkerque en tant que récit. En examinant la structure de l'intrigue, la construction narrative et l'influence contextuelle, notre mémoire de master met en lumière la nature subjective des récits historiques et leur impact durable sur notre compréhension de l'histoire.