

# Personal and political consequences of the cold war period



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Texts written in the After the Bomb period represent the personal and political consequences of an era. George Clooney's *Good Night And Good Luck*, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Cormac McCarthy's novel, *The Road*, and Oliver Stone's film, *Platoon* represent this in light of their differing perceptions of the period, but each ultimately foreshadows a diminishing of the self and a challenging of values. These texts foreshadow the politically unstable era where the threat of Communism and the breakdown of government systems engenders a sense of destruction and creates ideologically conflicting situations.

*Good night and Good luck* represents these personal consequences through the challenging of an individual's integrity, and the anxiety generated as a result. This is depicted by Don Hollenbeck's suicide after he is routinely accused of being a Communist sympathizer. In portraying his suicide the mournful tone of the music followed by the subsequent absence of music speaks to the human cost of this hunt for communist sympathizers. Richard Lippe states in 'History Replays Itself'; "McCarthy's tactics were...making often outrageous accusations...McCarthy had instilled fear into the media". Clooney reflects this by capturing the exploitation of the paranoia of individuals like Hollenbeck for financial gain. The film further lays bare the personal consequences of the fear that McCarthy's anti-Communist position generated. As Joe and Shirley speak in the copy room at CBS, the over the shoulder shots capture their conversation in a way that essentially traps them and creates a paranoid sense of awareness for them. The fearful tone in Shirley's question to Joe: "If you and I don't sign this, are you a target?" accompanied by the extreme close up of their faces reflects this anxiety that

has resulted from McCarthy's position. This reflects the nature of an era that is afraid of the spread of Communism to the extent that its people are forced to exist in a closed and paranoid manner.

Samuel Beckett presents similar personal consequences in *Waiting for Godot* through this crushing of the self and an individual's reliance upon hope despite the inevitability of a purposeless existence. He presents this as Vladimir and Estragon contemplate ending their lives as a source of comfort through their exchange of dialogue where Vladimir states: " We'll hang ourselves tomorrow...Unless Godot comes...We'll be saved". This contradiction of ending their lives with the hope of Godot's arrival allows them to endure this suffering and pass the time to find a meaning to their existence. Andrew K. Kennedy supports this idea in ' Active Waiting': " Waiting ... can involve...the empty or anxious mind trying to cope by inventing distractions'. The flippant tone of Pozzo's self effacing rhetorical question: " I am perhaps not particularly human, but who cares?" highlights that his absence of humanity is irrelevant to him; that his concern is more for his belongings than it is for having the values considered meaningful. Beckett again highlights this as Pozzo trivializes the idea that they are waiting for: " Godot...Godot...Godin..." who ultimately offers them hope. Beckett is ultimately reflecting on the flimsy nature of their hope highlighting these specific consequences.

Oliver Stone presents the same consequences in *Platoon* through an intensified challenging of values resulting from a sharp ideological divide between leaders. As the soldiers are ambushed, Sergeant Barnes murders a fellow soldier Elias, leaving him to die. No music was played in this scene <https://assignbuster.com/personal-and-political-consequences-of-the-cold-war-period/>

which emphasized the diegetic sounds of fighting, highlighting the direct consequences of the dehumanizing Vietnam war that diminished any humanity within the soldiers. The close-up shots of the men's faces show the "suspicion and hate" generated from this diminishing of the self where the demarcation lines between enemy and fellow soldier are eradicated. As Barnes holds an innocent child hostage, the absence of music contrasted against the child's crying accentuates the threatening nature of the soldiers as a result of the existential sense of the war that plagues them as they centralize their focus on their own self-preservation. Taylor's voice-over narrating his letters to his grandmother: "we did not fight the enemy, we fought ourselves and the enemy was in us", where they could not "find a goodness and meaning to this life" foreshadows these consequences of the war that has led to a decline in human morality and inevitable loss of self.

In *The Road*, Cormac McCarthy explores the intricate interplay between conflicting ideologies and the consequences of disintegrating societal values. The setting of a ruined America: "Sketched upon the pall of soot downstream the outline of a burnt city..." foregrounds the setting to which this decline in human morality has emerged following the destruction of civilization. He presents vivid visual imagery depicting how cannibalism has been conceptualized as a societal norm as the father details his findings of 'bones and...skin piled together with rocks over them' whilst noticing "a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt". This exhibits the consequences of the degradation of human morality that appears to be a direct manifestation of an absence of religion and a change in individual circumstances where the increasingly present capitalist systems

have eroded the human being and their values. He metaphorically represents this by comparing 'men' to 'Creedless shells tottering'. That they would have no ideologies to fall back on. McCarthy is ultimately foregrounding a destruction of humanity where the extent to which any sense of hope is degraded as is evident as the man explains; 'part of him always wished it to be over'. This ultimately foregrounds McCarthy's reflection on the challenging of values that characterized the After the Bomb period.