

DE GAULLE VS THE ODYSSEY

Fiche de Vocabulaire d'Actualité pour Étudiants de CPGE (TSI)

For weeks now, anglophone cinephiles have been focusing their attention on the virtues and vices of Christopher Nolan's \$250m adaptation of *The Odyssey*. Across the Channel, however, Homer's epic tale of a **flawed** Greek hero has been facing **stiff** domestic competition. A two-part biopic of General Charles de Gaulle, concentrating on his struggles to liberate France during the second world war, has been the word-of-mouth box office hit of the French summer.

It may be that five hours' worth of *De Gaulle* attracted some **punters** seeking airconditioned sanctuary from the heatwaves. But there have been rave reviews both from critics and audiences, and a notable **upsurge** of interest among the young. The success of the films has already had a cultural **knock-on effect**, boosting the number of visitors, for example, to the Museum of the Liberation of Paris.

The buzz around them is all the more striking given that the austere, **aloof** De Gaulle – in stark contrast to Winston Churchill – has remained a somewhat shadowy and elusive cinematic presence. Some of the **cut-through** has been attributed to a fastpaced, skilful screenplay, based upon British historian Julian Jackson's acclaimed biography. The strategy of the veteran film producer Jérôme Seydoux to revitalise French historical drama through some blockbuster productions, including *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, has also been emphatically vindicated.

Intriguingly though, other more political factors may be playing a part. In portraying the heroic role of the Free French Forces in north Africa – made up mostly of Black colonial troops – the *De Gaulle* films speak to a new generation which has grown up amid far-right-inspired controversies over nationhood and identity. And at a time when Europe's relations with a Trump-led United States have become **fraught**, and the economic threat posed by China has become pressing, a resurgence of interest in Gaullist notions of leadership is perhaps unsurprising.

FLAWED (adj.)

Syn: imperfect, defective, faulty, blemished

Trad: imparfait, faillible, présentant des failles

STIFF (adj.)

Syn: fierce, intense, severe, strong

Trad: rude, acharnée, féroce (compétition)

PUNTERS (n. pl.)

Syn: customers, clients, theatergoers, spectators

Trad: spectateurs, clients, public

UPSURGE (n.)

Syn: rise, increase, escalation, growth

Trad: regain, montée, poussée d'intérêt

KNOCK-ON EFFECT (n.)

Syn: ripple effect, domino effect, indirect consequence

Trad: effet domino, répercussions

ALOOF (adj.)

Syn: distant, detached, remote, reserved

Trad: distant, réservé, hautain, inaccessible

CUT-THROUGH (n.)

Syn: impact, public reach, resonance, penetration

Trad: impact auprès du public, résonance

FRAUGHT (adj.)

Syn: tense, strained, filled with anxiety / difficulties

Trad: tendu, lourd, chargé d'anxiété

The same might be said of a series of other high-profile films dealing with France and the second world war. Cinemas are currently hosting, or about to host, two psychological portraits of collaboration with Marshal Philippe Pétain's Vichy regime, an account of the life of the Resistance hero Jean Moulin, and a reconstruction of a famous attempt to rescue over 100 Jewish children awaiting deportation. In the pages of *Le Monde*, a French historian, Henry Rousso, has argued that "unlike the so called 'retro wave' of the 1970s, these films do not claim to expose a repressed chapter of history ... they are **sounding alarm bells**, with varying degrees of subtlety."

Ahead of a presidential election that could see the daughter of a notorious defender enter the Élysée, it is not hard to see why. As Mr Rousso observes, it would be false to equate Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National party with the fascism of the 1930s. But its willingness to **flout** republican values in relation to immigration policy, for example, carries deeply undesirable echoes of dark times. Cinematic trends often reflect back to audiences their own preoccupations. If the focus this summer and autumn in France is on a period defined by the **stark** moral choices it imposed, and the biggest homegrown hit is a film about leadership, that may tell us something about present anxieties as well as past traumas.

SOUND ALARM BELLS (v. phr.)

Syn: give warnings, sound warnings, raise the alarm

Trad: tirer la sonnette d'alarme

FLOUT (v.)

Syn: disregard, defy, violate, ignore

Trad: bafouer, transgresser, faire fi de

STARK (adj.)

Syn: harsh, severe, plain, sharp, absolute

Trad: cru, tranchant, sans concession