

**The Representation of the Second World War in Polish
Cinema 1945-1970: Directors, the State and the
Construction of Memory**



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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of History at the University of Oxford

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Short Abstract

This thesis provides an in-depth analysis of war films made in Poland between 1945 and 1970. The Second World War was an important topic for both filmmakers, and the government, and thus this genre provides a fascinating insight into the complex relationship between directors and the Communist Party during this period of rebuilding and political change. The government recognised the potential cinema held in creating and disseminating a socialist agenda, and creating a new national narrative of the conflict, that united the country around an image of unified resistance, and strong anti-German sentiment. This thesis will hypothesise that due to a number of factors, including the decentralisation of the film industry, the PZPR never fully controlled cinema, and as such a number of diverse images of the Second World War emerged during this period.

This work studies a selection of films from a number of leading directors, discussing their distinctive styles, and how their image of the war fit with the prevailing narrative of the time in which it was made. It will look at the circumstances surrounding film production and how the movies were received by reviewers. It examines the impact that the structure of the film

industry; the changing political climate; and the experiences of the filmmakers had on the portrayal of the Second World War in cinema. It will also use this specific genre to investigate, and draw conclusions about the nature of censorship in Poland between 1945 and 1970

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Abstract

The Second World war, and occupation by Germany and the Soviet Union, was especially brutal for Poland. Its Jews were murdered in their millions, and any Poles caught assisting them, or suspected of opposition or resistance were also killed. Twenty thousand officers and members of the intelligentsia were murdered by the Soviets during the Katyń Massacre, and their families, along with three million others, were deported to Siberia. The Polish nation was left traumatised by this, and at the same time, had to adjust to the new, imposed, political system. In the immediate postwar years, the topic became of great importance to filmmakers, and was also used by the new communist regime to legitimise their rule. This raises the question of to what extent directors were able to create their own image of the Second World War, and how much impact the PZPR had on the development of cinema.

This thesis on the representation of the Second World War in Polish cinema between 1945 and 1970 seeks to answer some key questions. Firstly, what impact did the structure of the film industry have on the relationship between filmmakers and the PZPR and, therefore, the representation of the Second World War? Cinema was decentralised comparatively early in

Poland, and the film unit system functioned very effectively: how was this possible, and how great a role, therefore, did the central authorities play in the day to day running of film? The film units were collaborative and nurturing for young filmmaker: this work investigates to how they defended directors and if they were able to protect them from the worst excesses of censorship and how involved party members were in their organisation.

Secondly what image of the Second World War was presented in cinema during this period? Were there events that were more commonly shown, or those that were not covered at all? Did directors tend to return to the same topics and themes repeatedly? This thesis explores the way in which some filmmakers challenged the dominant narrative, while others sought to contribute to it; in some cases directors opened up debate on subjects that had previously been off limits from public discussion.

Thirdly this thesis will attempt to answer the question of what factors influenced the portrayal of the conflict onscreen. It will explore the historical context of the films' production, as well as any personal stake that the filmmakers had in the subject matter. Every director working in this period had been involved in the conflict, and so this thesis will map how they married their own views with any political compromises they had to make. It will also look at whether directors had to make any major concessions at the behest of the authorities, or whether provided they did not push the limits too far, they were able to largely make films as they wished.

This study will argue that although the PZPR were eager to use cinema for their own ends, they found it difficult to exert control over filmmakers. Directors were involved in the rebuilding of the film industry from the very beginning, and helped to shape its structure, which led to an initial period of relative freedom. When cinema was centralised, and socialist realism enforced, film production drastically reduced; this, combined with the cultural thaw of the mid 1950s, meant that the PZPR made concessions, to revitalise the film industry. Once this had happened, and the Polish School was allowed to flourish, with their particular focus on the Second World War, the central authorities did not return to the strict control of the Stalinist period, and allowed directors to continue to make movies that challenged and questioned the dominant narrative of the war. While there is evidence from Film Assessment Commission meetings that the PZPR had serious concerns about certain films, and suggested that amendments were made, directors were almost always able to defend their choices, and release their work unaltered.

This is a qualitative, source-based research project, that gives due attention to the control of the state over cinema, the impact of the structure of the film industry on its relationship with the PZPR, and the conflict about the portrayal of the Second World War that often arose between the central authorities and filmmakers. It will focus its chapters around directors who had commonalities, whether it be ideology, artistic style, or membership of a film movement. This is not, however, always possible, and there are some directors who will have their own chapters. The first chapter will be devoted to an in-depth study of the workings of the Polish film industry, to show in detail, the system that directors worked under, and the impact this had on the relationship between filmmakers and the PZPR.

The greatest resource for this thesis are the films themselves. They are diverse and wide ranging, as this thesis attempts to piece together the image of the war that each individual director was trying to project, as well as to what extent that mirrored or challenged the views of the communist government. The other large source of material for the basis of this thesis is newspaper and film magazine clippings. There is a vast collection at the Filмотека Narodowa (National Film Archive) in Warsaw. Their collection includes reviews from the films written at the time and more recently, interviews with filmmakers, and obituaries. Due to the lack of published biographies of directors, obituaries were a vital source of biographical information, while contemporary interviews allowed for some insight into directors' decision-making processes and inspiration. This provides important context about the films and their production background. Newspapers, and dedicated film magazines *Film*, *Ekran* and *Kino*, contain reviews and reports from set. These are useful in several ways. The diversity of opinion that was often seen in the reporting on films gives an indication of the level of state control over critics and publications; while articles in the state press organs, such as *Trybuna Ludu* and *Żołnierz Wolności* gives some evidence as to how the PZPR viewed certain movies. There are collections for every film, ranging from the national newspapers, to regional publications.

This thesis also examines official government papers, including minutes from the Script and Film Assessment commissions. These documents provide a great deal of important information. From the Script Assessment meetings, it is possible to see if any changes were made at this stage in production, or whether any concerns were raised by party bureaucrats. The Film Assessment Commission meetings are even more illuminating. It is possible to gauge the feelings of the Party by analysing statements made by any bureaucrats present and looking for any recommended changes. They also show how directors reacted to suggested alterations, and how they defended their work, along with how other filmmakers often spoken in support

of the director in questions, in particular those from the film unit producing the movie, who supported the director and his choices. This gives an insight into the relationship between members of the units, and for some movies, the extent to which the heads of the units were willing to stand up for a project. Those present at the meeting were always recorded, which shows how the makeup of the commissions changed over time, as did the ratio of industry professionals to party apparatchiks. In some cases, the presence of a large number of bureaucrats suggested that the PZPR had some concerns about the content of the film, while in others, it was because several had been involved in the making of a movie as consultants. These documents, however, do not still exist for every film. Files from the Ministry of Culture, the Main Office of Cinematography and the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party (KC PZPR), housed at the Archiwum Akt Nowych (Archive of Modern Files, AAN), allow for an exploration of the structure of the film industry: how it was run, how far it was decentralised, and how involved the central authorities were in the day to day control and function of cinema.

The first chapter highlights the distinctive structure of the film industry in Poland, which thanks to the way the semi-autonomous film units were organised, gave directors a high level of control over the projects they chose, and allowed them to be involved from the very beginning, which only really became possible in Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the 1960s. Czechoslovakia and Hungary also had film units and this chapter will discuss the ways in which their composition was different to those in Poland, and the impact this had on film production. It will focus on the impact that the film units had on the development of cinema in Poland, and show how they were constructive and nurturing environments, that fostered young talent, and, to an extent, shielded filmmakers from too much interference from the PZPR. This first chapter

will also look at the tight bond between film and literature, and in turn the relationship between directors and screenwriters. As well as the organisational hierarchy of the film industry, it will also cover the various state policies that affected its running, and to what extent censorship played a role.

The second chapter will look at Aleksander Ford and Wanda Jakubowska, who were both prewar communists, and leading figures in the rebuilding of the Polish film industry post 1945. They each chose concentration camps and the mass murder of the Jews as the subject for their work, and made some of the earliest films about the war. Ford and Jakubowska began their postwar careers at a time when Polish cinema was in something of a state of limbo, between nationalisation and the full implementation of socialist realism, resulting in an interesting creative period. This chapter looks at the way in which they paired their political ideology with their experiences, the challenges they faced getting their films put into production, and the way they were received by critics. As Jakubowska continued to make films about the concentration camp universe throughout her career. This chapter focuses on two of her works, made twenty years apart, and looks at the similarities and differences in her approach to the subject, and the impact of the change in political climate.

Chapters Three and Four study the Polish School movement. Chapter Three looks at Andrzej Munk and Kazimierz Kutz, two of the leading figures of the School, and the second focuses on Andrzej Wajda, the most notable and prolific director of the movement. This section analyses the political changes that allowed for the cultural liberalisation of the Polish School to flourish. It investigates how these directors challenged the dominant narrative of the war, and covered sensitive topics that had never previously been seen in cinema. Chapter Three also discusses any issues they encountered with the communist authorities when trying to put their films into

production, any changes that were made at script level and whether they were implemented, as well as any comments made at the Film Assessment Commission meetings. It includes movies that were made throughout the period, in order to investigate the impact of political change on their portrayal of the conflict. Finally, these chapters look at how Munk, Wajda and Kutz's films were received by domestic, and where applicable, international audiences, as well as the diversity of opinion expressed by the critics.

Chapter Five revolves around the war films of Stanisław Różewicz. Różewicz has his own chapter because he largely remained outside of any wider trends in Polish cinema. Although some of Różewicz's movies are considered to be part of the Polish School not all were, but at the same time he avoided overt support of the ideology of the communist regime. As such his work is best analysed by itself, with a discussion of the ways in which he was different to a number of his peers. Różewicz was heavily influenced by both his older brothers, who were writers, and he developed a close working relationship with his middle brother Tadeusz. This chapter looks at the interesting dynamic this created, and how the films they made together stood out from those Różewicz made with other writers. Różewicz was also one of the first directors to challenge the Stalinist interpretation of the September Campaign, and frequently touched on subject matter than no other filmmakers had treated before. Różewicz is a director who has largely been overlooked, in particular by scholars in English, and this chapter highlights the very meaningful contribution he made to war cinema in Poland.

The final chapter investigates the role that Jerzy Passendorfer, and Czesław and Ewa Petelski played in promoting the image of the Second World War created by the communist regime. This chapter first of all sets out the characteristics of the communist party's representation of the war, and how they used it to legitimise their rule. It discusses the shift in the political climate in the 1960s, and the way in which the PZPR felt it needed to use cinema to promote its ideology, regaining some of the ground it lost to the Polish School. This led to a significant

increase in the number of movies that showed the whole country working together to defeat Germany and harmonious co-operation with the Red Army. The chapter analyses why these films became popular, both with some directors, and audiences in the 1960s, but also highlights that the films made by the Petelskis, in particular, did not always follow the national communist line, and in fact similarities can be found with the work of the Polish School. This chapter shows that the PZPR was never able to fully control the image of the war put out by cinema.

List of Abbreviations

AAN	Archiwum Akt Nowych (Archive of Modern Files)
AK	Armia Krajowa (Home Army)
AL	Armia Ludowa (People's Army)
BCh	Bataliony Chłopskie (Peasant Battalions)
CBF	Centralny Biuro Filmowy (Central Film Office)
CUK	Centralny Urząd Kinematografii (Central Office of Cinematography)
FIPRESCI	International Federation of Film Critics (Fédération Internationale de la Press Cinématique)
FN	Filmoteka Narodowa (National Film Archive in Warsaw)
GL	Gwardia Ludowa (People's Guard)
GUKPPIW	Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy Publikacji i Widowisk (Main Office for the Control of Press Publications and Entertainment)
KK	Komisja Kolaudacja (Film Assessment Commission)
KOA	Komisja Ocen Artystycznych (Artistic Assessment Commission)
KOR	Komitet Obrony Robotników (Worker's Defence Committee)
KOS	Komisja Ocen Scenariuszy (Script Assessment Commission)
KPP	Komunistyczna Partia Polski (Communist Party of Poland)
NSZ	Narodowe Siły Zbrojne (National Armed Forces)
NZK	Naczelny Zarząd Kinematografii (Main Board of Cinematography)
PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice)
PKWN	Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego (Polish Committee of National Liberation)
POP	Podstawowa Organizacja Partyjna (Basic Party Organisation)
PPR	Polska Partia Robotnicza (Polish Communist Party)
PPS	Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party)
PRL	Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa (Polish People's Republic)
PZbWP	Polski Związek byłych Więźniów Politycznych (Polish Union of Political Prisoners)
PZPR	Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Worker's Party)

RAP	Rada Artystyczna Produkcyjna (Council of Artistic Production)
RPPS	Robotnicza Partia Polska Socjalistów (Worker's Party of Polish Socialists)
SAF	Stowarzyszenie Autorów Filmowych (Association of Film Authors)
START	Stowarzyszenia Miłośników Filmu Artystycznego (Society for the Promotion of Film Art)
TVP	Telewizja Polska (Polish Television)
UPA	Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiya (Ukrainian Insurgent Army)
WiN	Wolność i Niezawisłość (Freedom and Independence)
ZBOWiD	Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację (Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy)
ZWM	Związek Walki Młodych (Union of Fighting Youth)
ZMP	Związek Młodzieży Polskiej (Union of Polish Youth)
ZWZ	Związku Walki Zbrojnej (Union of Armed Struggle)
Żegota	Rada Pomocy Żydom (Council for Aid to the Jews)

Introduction

In February 2016, Paweł Pawlikowski's *Ida* was shown on the Polish public television station TVP2. Before the film itself there was a twelve-minute programme entitled *Around Ida*, which contained clips and monologues from two TVP commentators, the film critic Krzysztof Kłopotowski and journalist Piotr Gursztyn. The broadcast also included contributions from Maciej Swirski, a founder of the Polish Anti-Defamation League, which campaigns against perceived attacks on Poland's reputation. They all claimed that the story told in *Ida* was inaccurate, and presented an overly negative picture of the actions of the Polish people during the Second World War. Swirski stated: 'If a film is to be part of a nation's catharsis it should have a meaning that Polish people agree with.'¹ He added: 'you should talk about horrible things in a nation's history but you cannot do it in a way that offends the nation.'²

This one-sided, ideological interpretation, which was supported by the ruling Law and Justice Party, was roundly criticised by filmmakers. The Polish Directors' Guild wrote a protest letter, maintaining that this was 'a clear example of manipulative propaganda practices' and that *Ida*'s 'one and only correct interpretation' was enforced by the government.³ *Around Ida* represented a significant shift in the way the Polish government viewed the Second World War. Critical analysis of, in particular, the Poles' attitude towards their Jewish neighbours was no longer acceptable. Like the period studied in this thesis, the government were once again interfering in the writing of history. *Ida* was considered especially dangerous, because of its international audience, and international validation through its Academy Award for Best Foreign Language

¹ Leo Barraclough, 'Polish Directors' Guild Express Outrage at Public Television Network's Attack on Oscar-Winning Film *Ida*' <https://variety.com/2016/film/global/polish-directors-guild-outrage-attack-ida-1201718107/> (1 January 2017)

² *ibid*

³ *ibid*

Film. Anton Kaes argues that historical films interpret national history for the broad public, thus producing and organising, to a large extent, a homogenised public memory. Consequently, the power over what is shared as popular memory has passed into the hands of those who produce those images.⁴ In Poland, however, the influence of filmmakers has not been willingly bestowed by the government, no more so than between 1945 and 1970.

Memory of the Second World War in Poland has always been heavily politicised, and between 1945 and 1970 was used to legitimise the communist regime. In the initial half decade after the war, government war crimes trials of Poles accused of German collaboration, set the foundation for official discourse.⁵ The early criminal justice process laid the blame on the weakness of traitorous individuals, exceptions proving the rule, which did not affect collective memory of heroic resistance.⁶ The postwar trials purged predominantly anti-communist Poles, particularly members of the Home Army.⁷ The beginnings of a one-sided memory of the conflict, in which there was only one, German enemy, was confirmed with the omission and concealment of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and other Soviet crimes, including Katyń and the Gulags. During the Stalinist period this vision was solidified.⁸ The nationwide official symbol of the conflict was the Grunwald swords, a symbol of the defeat of the Teutonic Knights by Poland-Lithuania at the Battle of Grunwald in 1410, thus shifting attention away from the Soviets, and effectively erasing public memory of Soviet occupation.⁹ The contribution of the Polish Armed Forces in the East was celebrated, not those in the West, and the communist People's Army were commemorated, rather than the Home Army.¹⁰ The September defeat was blamed on the

⁴ Anton Kaes, 'History and Film: Public Memory in the Age of Electronic Dissemination', *History and Memory*, Vol.2, No.1 (Autumn, 1990), p.113

⁵ Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, 'New Threads in an Old Loom: National Memory and Social Identity in Postwar and Post-Communist Poland', in Richard Ned Lebow et al. (eds), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (London, 2006), p.179

⁶ *ibid.* p.182

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.* p.187

¹⁰ Orla-Bukowska, 'New Threads in an Old Loom', p.179

incompetent, bourgeois, interwar government who refused to accept assistance from the Soviet Union.¹¹ Communism was shown to be the only way to guarantee peace and safety. Under Władysław Gomułka, the Second World War formed an integral part of his national communism, and was a key tool of legitimising his regime. It was built on three central pillars: anti-German sentiment; the myth of universal resistance, and mutual friendship with the Red Army.¹²

This political reimagining of the Second World War ran alongside a more private memory of the conflict, which, as Annamaria Orla-Bukowska argues, can be seen as a continuation of the dominant 19th century interpretation of Polish history, in which Poles came to view their past, present and future as conscious martyrdom, a series of sacrificial uprisings and battles against any power that would conquer them, or the people of Europe.¹³ War memory followed a similar pattern. Poles were the war's first official victims, laid on the altar to be slaughtered as they fought against two totalitarianisms. They were the purest, noblest of heroes as they were the only nation which did not collaborate, and did not formally surrender. Although Poland was sacrificed to Soviet totalitarianism, it saved Europe from German fascism and contributed to peace on the continent. The years of war inspired a return to the popular Romantic stereotypes of martyrdom and heroism.¹⁴

Historians have traditionally seen history books as the 'designated preservers of memory'; however, increasingly the visual arts are shaping collective memory of past events.¹⁵ Films have the potential to be very powerful, because they can make history come alive more readily; reaching a larger audience than speeches, papers and books. Cinema and television, unlike

¹¹ Gryzelda Missalowa and Janina Schoenbrenner, *Historia Polski* (Warsaw, 1951).

¹² Joanna Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD I pamięć drugiej wojny światowej 1949-1969* (Warsaw, 2009), p.212

¹³ Orla-Bukowska, 'New Threads in an Old Loom', p.179

¹⁴ Stanisław Eile, *Literature and Nationalism in Partitioned Poland, 1794-1918* (London, 2000), p.192

¹⁵ Yosefa Loshitzky, 'Introduction', in Yosefa Loshitzky (ed), *Schindler's Holocaust Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington, 1997), p.1

historiography, play a decisive role in the construction of collective memories, particularly as events slip out of living memory; and while they are unsuitable for the reproduction of academic history, they are very effective for shaping historical consciousness.¹⁶

War films are amongst cinema's most recognisable products, and have shaped expressions of an entire conflict for generations. Iconic action scenes and memorable lines have given movies about the Second World War a distinguished place in public awareness. This is the case worldwide, and Poland is no exception. Between 1946 and 1970, one in six Polish movies were about the conflict, and every notable director of the period covered the topic at least once. For filmmakers such as Andrzej Wajda, Andrzej Munk, Stanisław Różewicz and Jerzy Passendorfer it defined their careers. The Polish School of cinema owes its international reputation to its original approach to the theme of the Second World War, and films about the conflict were some of the most impressive and notable of Polish cinema.

Anna Bikont and Joanna Szczęśna, in their book *Lawina i kamienie. Pisarze wobec komunizmu*, looked at the relationship between the PZPR and writers, and the influence of political change on the literary world, through the prism of some of the key authors of this period.¹⁷ This thesis will take a similar approach in relation to cinema, which has not been done before. It will look at the factors that impacted the portrayal of the Second World War in Polish cinema through the life and works of several important directors of the period. An in-depth look at some of the most significant movies, and the individuals that made them, provides an important insight into how the films came to be made, obstacles the filmmakers encountered, and if they were required to make any changes to their work. As each of the directors studied made films over a period of time, taking this approach also allows for a sustained discussion of the political changes that took place, and the effect they had on memory of the conflict. This then allows

¹⁶ Wulf Kansteiner, 'History, memory and film: A love/hate triangle', *Memory Studies*, 2018, Vol.11, (2), p.132

¹⁷ Anna Bikont and Joanna Szczęśna, *Lawina i kamienie. Pisarze wobec komunizmu* (Warsaw, 2006), p.1

for conclusions to be drawn as to what extent cinema about the Second World War followed the official narrative of the conflict at any given time. This thesis will also chart the institutional changes that took place in the film industry, and the importance these had for the portrayal of the war on film.

Research Questions

This thesis on the representation of the Second World War in Polish cinema between 1945 and 1970 seeks to answer some key questions. Firstly, what impact did the structure of the film industry have on the relationship between filmmakers and the communist authorities and, therefore, the representation of the Second World War? Cinema was decentralised comparatively early in Poland, and the film unit system functioned very effectively: how was this possible, and how great a role, therefore, did the central authorities play in the day to day running of film? The film units were collaborative and nurturing for young filmmaker: this work investigates how they defended directors and if they were able to protect them from the worst excesses of censorship and how involved party members were in their organisation.

Secondly what image of the Second World War was presented in cinema during this period? Were there events that were more commonly shown, or those that were not covered at all? Did directors tend to return to the same topics and themes repeatedly? This thesis explores the way in which some filmmakers challenged the dominant narrative, while others sought to contribute to it; in some cases, directors opened up debate on subjects that had previously been off limits from public discussion.

Thirdly this thesis will answer the question of what factors influenced the portrayal of the conflict onscreen. It will explore the historical context of the films' production, as well as any personal stake that the filmmakers had in the subject matter. Every director working in this period had been involved in the conflict, and this thesis will map how they married their own

views with any necessary political compromises they had to make. It will also look at whether directors had to make any major concessions at the behest of the authorities, or whether provided they did not push the limits too far, they were able to largely make films as they wished.

This study will argue that although the Central Committee of the PZPR were eager to use cinema for their own ends, they found it difficult to exert control over filmmakers. Directors were involved in the rebuilding of the film industry from the very beginning, and helped to shape its structure, leading to an initial period of relative freedom. When cinema was centralised, and socialist realism enforced, film production drastically reduced; this, combined with the cultural thaw of the mid 1950s, meant that the government made concessions to revitalise the film industry. Once this had happened, and the Polish School was allowed to flourish, with their particular focus on the Second World War, the central authorities did not return to the strict control of the Stalinist period, and allowed directors to continue to make movies that challenged and questioned the dominant narrative of the war. While there is evidence from Film Assessment Commission meetings that the government representatives present had serious concerns about certain films, and suggested that amendments were made, directors were almost always able to defend their choices, and release their work unaltered.

Dates

This thesis looks at cinema between 1945 and 1970 which as previously mentioned was the most prolific period of war film production, and also the time in which there was the greatest conflict between directors and the regime when it came to the portrayal of the Second World War. State policy towards cinema, and the relationship between the PZPR and filmmakers, were not uniform during this time. Between 1945 and 1949 there was a relative degree of freedom, as the PZPR was consolidating its power, and a great deal of public discussion on the

conflict.¹⁸ In 1949, after a series of conferences, which criticised the ideological merit of Polish culture, socialist realism was strictly imposed, and central government control over cinema was at its height.¹⁹ This continued until 1955. During this time, the majority of those people making films had done so before the war, and had been involved in organisations that attempted to improve the artistic quality of cinema. The two most famous figures, Aleksander Ford and Wanda Jakubowska, were both committed communists, and had been politically active during the interwar years. Both Jakubowska and Ford made their most notable war films, *Ulica graniczna* (*Border Street*, 1949) and *Ostatni etap* (*The Last Stage*, 1948) before socialist realism was introduced. Once the doctrine was fully enforced, film production significantly reduced, and there were virtually no war films made at all.

A political thaw, beginning as early as 1955, and which culminated in Khrushchev's Secret Speech denouncing Stalin's crimes and Władysław Gomułka's ascension to power led to a relaxation of cultural restrictions, allowing for a greater freedom in terms of topics shown in film, as well as the questions asked and conclusions reached about wartime events.²⁰ Concurrently a new generation of directors emerged, including Andrzej Wajda, Andrzej Munk, Kazimierz Kutz and Stanisław Różewicz, who did not have the same political convictions as a number of their older colleagues. It was under these political and creative circumstances that the Polish School developed, as a reaction to the heavy ideological content of the films produced before 1955.²¹ For the first time, topics such as the Warsaw Uprising, which had been taboo until 1956 could be discussed in cinema. During this brief window some of the

¹⁸ Marta Fik, 'Kultura Polska, 1945-1956', in Barbara Otwinowska and Jan Żaryn (eds), *Polacy wobec przemocy 1944-1956*, (Warsaw, 1996), p.222

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD*, p.172

²¹ Marek Haltof, *Polish Cinema. A History*, (New York, 2019), p.116

greatest works of Polish cinema were made, most notably Wajda's *Popiół i diament* (*Ashes and Diamonds*, 1958).

In June 1960, the *Uchwała Sekretariatu KC w sprawie kinematografii* (*Resolution of the Secretariat of the Central Committee on cinema*) was passed, which condemned the films of the late 1950s as being pessimistic, with too many western influences, and deviating too far from the party programme.²² This resulted in an increase in films that took a more positive outlook on the Second World War, as the focus moved to images of victory and solidarity. Although those directors who had become prominent as part of the Polish School continued to make war movies during the 1960s, their output was dwarfed by, in particular, Jerzy Passendorfer, who made a significant number of pro-regime productions during this time, most notably *Barwy walki* (*Battle Colours*). Alongside this, the PZPR made a more concerted effort to use cinema to help develop their own brand of national communism.²³

By the end of the 1960s, the Gomułka regime's historical doctrine came up against a series of problems. In 1967 the government launched an antisemitic campaign in which Mieczysław Moczar, Gomułka's rival, and one of the main proponents of national communism, played an important part. This led to mass Jewish emigration from Poland, and the disappearance of Jewish life in Poland for almost a decade, which had major implications for film, as we will see in chapters 2 and 6. In 1968 Polish troops were involved in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, and two years later Gomułka sent troops to break up the striking workers on the Baltic coast, killing dozens and wounding thousands. The Polish Army, an integral part of the Second World War narrative, massacred their countrymen, and brutally pacified the Czechs. The image of the virtuous military, defeating the evil Nazi oppressor was broken.

²² FN A-208 poz.7 'Uchwała sekretariatu KC w sprawie o kinematografii' in *Materiały dla zespołu filmowego Komisji Sekretariatu KC PZPR*

²³ Piotr Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.324

Edward Gierek, who came to power in 1970, had a very different relationship with cinema, and television began to replace it as the more popular visual art. The most significant impact on war films, however, was the 1970 mutual recognition treaty between the People's Republic of Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany. This treaty greatly reduced the regime's level of Germanophobia, which had been an important part of their story of the Second World War. This meant the war no longer held the significance it had during the Gomułka era.

Selection criteria

This thesis defines a war film as any production that has the Second World War as its central plotline. This incorporates combat, occupation and Holocaust cinema, and movies that look at the long Second World War in Poland and the civil war that erupted in some regions after the cessation of hostilities against Nazi Germany. The central characters do not have to have been involved directly in the conflict, but they must have been affected by it in some manner.

With over one hundred war films made between 1945 and 1970, from numerous different directors, it would be impossible to include them all. The chapters in this thesis are focused on filmmakers who were the most acclaimed both at home and abroad and those who best represented wider trends in Polish cinema. Each director included made a significant contribution to the war film genre and held an important position within the industry. Most importantly, they influenced debates about the Second World War in Poland.

A wide range of films have been chosen, that illustrate that war movies during this period showed at times vastly different viewpoints. This thesis includes works that supported an official narrative, and those that challenged it. They show how cinema opened up debate on topics that had not been discussed previously, and provide some information on the subjects that were considered to be undesirable by the PZPR. The films selected also highlight debates that took place at the Film Assessment Commission meetings and give insight into the

supportive role played by members of the film units. Where possible, this thesis explores a number of films from each of the directors studied, made over a period of time to investigate whether their perception of the war changed, and what factors might have influenced any shifts.

The most difficult chapter to pare down was that of the Polish School. The most notable omissions are Jerzy Kawalerowicz and Wojciech Has. Has' *How to Be Loved (Jak być kochaną, 1963)*, is one of the gems of the movement, but there is far more to be said about its artistic merits, and the way it showed the outcome of a tragic love story, than what it contributed to discussions of the war.²⁴ Kawalerowicz's 1959 film *The Real End of the Great War (Prawdziwy koniec wielkiej wojny)*, is a moving and tragic picture of the psychological trauma suffered by many of those who had been imprisoned in concentration camps, and the devastating toll this could take on their families. While it is an extremely interesting film, that portrays an important issue, it has not been included because analysis of the film; its Script Assessment Commission meeting, and the press coverage, did not add anything further to the arguments made in this thesis. The response to *The Real End of the Great War* in the press was lukewarm, and Jerzy Andrzejewski spoke for many at the Script Assessment Commission when he said: 'I do not like the film, but I have full confidence in the director'.²⁵

Jerzy Passendorfer's work was also difficult to narrow down. Passendorfer's first two war films, *Zamach (Answer to Violence, 1959)* and *Powrót (Return, 1960)* were about the Home Army and so thematically stemmed from the Polish School. *Answer to Violence* was about the assassination of Franz Kutschera, the commander of the SS and police in Warsaw, but Passendorfer's approach to the subject differed vastly from Munk and Wajda's treatment of the AK. Passendorfer's film had a collective hero and took its inspiration from heist and

²⁴ The English names of the films are either taken from the Internet Movie Database, or are the most commonly used translation

²⁵ FN A-214 poz.68 Protokół z posiedzenia Komisji Ocen Filmów i Scenariuszy w dniu 2.X.1956 r

gangster films. It has not been included because it is not the best example of the way in which Passendorfer promoted the myths of the Second World War developed by the PZPR. *Return* looked at the Home Army some fifteen years after the war, with a Warsaw Uprising veteran returning to Poland after living in the West. He is looking for a country and sense of comradeship and solidarity that no longer existed. This type of psychological drama did not sit well with Passendorfer and he did not return to it, which is why *Return* has not been discussed in this thesis.²⁶

For some directors, such as Witold Lesiewicz, it is very hard to find source material about. Lesiewicz was responsible for completing *Pasażerka* (*The Passenger*, 1963), after Andrzej Munk's death, but he also directed a trilogy of his own: *Dezerters* (*Deserter*, 1958), *Rok Pierwszy* (*First Year*, 1960) and *Kwiecień* (*April*, 1961). These films were all released at a time when the cinema was saturated with war films. *Deserter* even shared a scriptwriter with Wajda's *Kanal* and Munk's *Eroica* but as the reviewer K.T.Toeplitz noted it was simply an 'average' work.²⁷ *First Year* and *April* did not fare much better, and did not say anything new about the war, so have been left out.

Sources and methodology

This is a qualitative, source-based research project, that gives due attention to the control of the state over cinema, the impact of the film industry's structure on its relationship with the government, and the conflict about the portrayal of the Second World War that often arose between the central authorities and filmmakers. It will focus its chapters around directors who had commonalities, whether it be ideology, artistic style, or membership of a film movement.

²⁶ Mikołaj Kunicki, 'Optimism Against All Odds', p.6

²⁷ K.T.Toeplitz, *Dezeter*, *Świat*, (5 October 1958)

This is not, however, always possible, so there are some directors with their own chapters. The first chapter will be devoted to an in-depth study of the workings of the Polish film industry, to show in detail, the system that directors worked under, and the impact this had on the relationship between filmmakers and the PZPR.

Films form the greatest source of material for this thesis. Most of the movies are widely available and there is a sizeable collection at the Taylor Institution at the University of Oxford. The films are diverse and wide ranging, as this thesis pieces together the image of the war that each individual director was trying to project, as well as to what extent that mirrored or challenged the views of the communist government. These movies present the past in a particular way and this thesis seeks to map and understand the reason for these portrayals. The films have been analysed to show the conclusions their directors reached about the war, in light of what is suggested both through the narrative and through any omissions or obfuscations. It is not just the content of the movies that are relevant, but also the production context. This includes a discussion of any relevant political factors, and any personal connection the filmmakers may have had to the events being shown in the film. The final stage of analysis is the historical influence of the movies. This has two elements. The first is if the movies had an impact on future depictions of specific wartime events; and the second the extent to which they contributed to, or contradicted the dominant narrative of the war, at the time of production.

The other large source of material for this thesis is newspaper and film magazine clippings. There is a vast collection at the Filмотека Narodowa (National Film Archive) in Warsaw. Their collection includes film reviews written at the time and more recently, interviews with filmmakers, and obituaries. Due to the lack of published biographies of directors, obituaries were a vital source of biographical information, while contemporary interviews allowed for some insight into directors' decision-making processes and inspiration. This provides important context about the films and their production background. Newspapers, and dedicated

film magazines *Film*, *Ekran* and *Kino*, contain reviews and reports from set. These are useful in several ways. The diversity of opinion that was often seen in the reporting on films gives an indication of the level of state control over critics and publications; while articles in the state press organs, such as *Trybuna Ludu* and *Żołnierz Wolności* gives some evidence as to how the PZPR viewed certain movies. There are collections for every film, ranging from the national newspapers, to regional publications such as *Dziennik Łódzki*, *Życie Warszawy* and *Tygodnik Powszechny*. The significant local newspapers often had contributions from a noted film critic, and in the small publications often contained interviews with directors, or coverage from local premieres, which gives some insight into how widely films were released. This is useful as one form of censorship was to limit the distribution of a movie.

This thesis also examines official government papers, including minutes from the Script and Film Assessment Commissions. These documents provide a great deal of important information. From the Script Assessment meetings, it is possible to see if any changes were made at this production stage, or whether any concerns were raised by party bureaucrats. Additionally, Film Assessment Commission meetings illuminate the feelings of the Party through analysis of statements made by any bureaucrats present and looking for any recommended changes. They also show how directors reacted to suggested alterations, and how they defended their work, along with how other filmmakers often spoken in support of the director in questions, in particular those from the film unit producing the movie, who supported the director and his choices. This gives an insight into the relationship between unit members, and for some movies, the extent to which the unit heads were willing to stand up for a project. Those present at the meeting were always recorded, illustrating how the makeup of the commissions changed over time, as did the ratio of industry professionals to party apparatchiks. In some cases, the presence of a large number of bureaucrats suggested that the PZPR had some concerns about a film's content, while in others, it was because a number of them had been

involved in the making of a movie as consultants. These documents, however, do not still exist for every film. Files from the Ministry of Culture, the Main Office of Cinematography and the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party (KC PZPR), housed at the Archiwum Akt Nowych (Archive of Modern Files, AAN), allow for an exploration of the structure of the film industry: how it was run, how far it was decentralised, and how involved the central authorities were in the day to day control and function of cinema.

Andrzej Wajda has his own archive at the Manggha Centre in Kraków, that contains a vast array of his own personal notes and papers; correspondence between Wajda and other filmmakers; reviews of his work from around the world and some Script and Film Assessment Commission meeting notes that are missing from the National Film Archive. Wajda also kept a detailed diary called *Kalendarium*, which provides details about his life, going back to the Second World War. I also conducted an interview with Wajda in June 2013, in which he talked about his war trilogy of the 1950s and provided some of the circumstances around the films being made and released. Wajda has also published memoirs, as have other filmmakers such as Stanisław Różewicz and Jerzy Stefan Stawiński. Różewicz's memoirs, in particular, offer extensive information about the production of each of his films, and his relationship with his scriptwriters.

It is important to recognise the limitations of these sources. Most newspapers were under heavy state control. Therefore, there is always the possibility that journalists were put under pressure to adopt a certain viewpoint. Professional critics, however, particularly those who did not work for the party press organs, were able to provide interesting analysis of films. There were a several reviewers who regularly contributed pieces to newspapers and periodicals; however, none of them wrote exclusively about cinema, as would be expected today. These journalists came from a variety of backgrounds, some having formal training at the film school in Łódź,

whilst others were simply generally involved in the cultural sphere, and gradually moved into film.

This thesis is based on the documents that are available. Documents from the Main Office for the Control of the Press Publications and Entertainment, (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy Publikacji I Widowisk, GUKPPiW), are currently unavailable, due to the documents being recatalogued. Therefore, this thesis does not include information about any censorship by this office, which, however, was mostly responsible for controlling film distribution, so its absence should not have a significant impact.

Thesis Summary

Chapter One highlights the distinctive structure of the Polish film industry, which thanks to the way the semi-autonomous film units were organised, gave directors a high level of control over the projects they chose, and allowed them to be involved from the very beginning, which only really became possible in Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the 1960s. Czechoslovakia and Hungary also had film units and this chapter will discuss the ways in which their composition was different to those in Poland, and the impact this had on film production. It will focus on the impact that the film units had on the development of cinema in Poland, and show how they were constructive and nurturing environments, that fostered young talent, and, to an extent, shielded filmmakers from too much interference from the PZPR. This first chapter will also look at the tight bond between film and literature, and in turn the relationship between directors and screenwriters. As well as the organisational hierarchy of the film industry, it will also cover the various state policies that affected its running, and to what extent censorship played a role

The second chapter will look at Aleksander Ford and Wanda Jakubowska, who were both prewar communists, and leading figures in the rebuilding of the Polish film industry post 1945.

They each chose concentration camps and the mass murder of the Jews as the subject for their work, and made some of the earliest films about the war. Ford and Jakubowska began their postwar careers at a time when Polish cinema was in something of a state of limbo, between nationalisation and the full implementation of socialist realism, resulting in an interesting creative period. This chapter looks at the way in which they paired their political ideology with their experiences, the challenges they faced getting their films put into production, and the way they were received by critics. As Jakubowska continued to make films about the concentration camp universe throughout her career, this chapter focuses on two of her works, made twenty years apart, and looks at the similarities and differences in her approach to the subject, and the impact of the change in political climate.

Chapters Three and Four study the Polish School movement. Chapter Three looks at Andrzej Munk and Kazimierz Kutz, two of the leading figures of the School, and the second focuses on Andrzej Wajda, the most notable and prolific director of the movement. This section analyses the political changes that allowed for the cultural liberalisation of the Polish School to flourish. It investigates how these directors challenged the dominant narrative of the war, and covered sensitive topics that had never previously been seen in cinema. Chapter Three also discusses any issues they encountered with the communist authorities when trying to put their films into production, any changes that were made at script level and whether they were implemented, as well as any comments made at the Film Assessment Commission meetings. It includes movies that were made throughout the period to investigate the impact of political change on their portrayal of the conflict. Finally, these chapters look at how Munk, Wajda and Kutz's films were received by domestic, and where applicable, international audiences, as well as the diversity of opinion expressed by the critics.

Chapter Five revolves around the war films of Stanisław Różewicz. Różewicz has his own chapter because he largely remained outside of any wider trends in Polish cinema. Although

some of Różewicz's movies are considered to be part of the Polish School not all were, but at the same time he avoided overt support of the ideology of the communist regime. As such his work is best analysed by itself, with a discussion of the ways in which he was different to a number of his peers. Różewicz was heavily influenced by both his older brothers, who were writers, and he developed a close working relationship with his middle brother Tadeusz. This chapter looks at the interesting dynamic this created, and how the films they made together stood out from those Różewicz made with other writers. Różewicz was also one of the first directors to challenge the Stalinist interpretation of the September Campaign, and frequently touched on subject matter than no other filmmakers had treated before. Różewicz is a director who has largely been overlooked, in particular by scholars in English, and this chapter highlights the very meaningful contribution he made to war cinema in Poland.

The final chapter investigates the role that Jerzy Passendorfer, and Czesław and Ewa Petelski played in promoting the image of the Second World War created by the communist regime. This chapter first of all sets out the characteristics of the Communist Party's representation of the war, and how they used it to legitimise their rule. It discusses the shift in the political climate in the 1960s, and the way in which the PZPR felt it needed to use cinema to promote its ideology, regaining some of the ground it lost to the Polish School. This led to a significant increase in the number of movies that showed the whole country working together to defeat Germany and harmonious co-operation with the Red Army. The chapter analyses why these films became popular, both with some directors, and audiences in the 1960s, but also highlights that the films made by the Petelskis, in particular, did not always follow the national communist line, and in fact similarities can be found with the work of the Polish School. This chapter shows that the PZPR was never able to fully control the image of the war put out by cinema.

Literature Review

Polish war cinema

Films about the Second World War feature in every wider study of Polish cinema. From current scholarship, we know that a number of the directors who were involved with the rebuilding of the film industry had been members of the Communist Party prior to the war. Works by Patrick Babyracki and Marek Haltof, however, have shown that for filmmakers such as Aleksander Ford, and Wanda Jakubowska, their political beliefs came into conflict with their desire to educate the wider public about the fate of the Jews, and the truth about the concentration camp universe. Haltof argues, therefore, that, both Jakubowska's *The Last Stage* and Ford's *Border Street* were more representative of the time in which they were made, than the realities of the events they depict.¹ Babyracki and Haltof also show that despite Ford and Jakubowska being faithful party members, they also went through a number of ideological struggles in bringing the movies they made in the 1940s, into production. Babyracki claims that Ford struggled to make a film that satisfied both Polish and Jewish audiences.² Haltof describes the important place *The Last Stage* has in the history of Holocaust cinema, and the impact it had on later works in Poland and abroad, despite the fact it was not explicit in its depiction of the extermination of European Jewry. Scholarship shows that the period between 1945 and 1948 was something of an anomaly in filmmaking, due to the fact that the Communist Party was still consolidating its power, and had not yet developed any cohesive policy for control over cultural production.³ During the Stalinist period, film output was very low, and once it revived, post October 1956, the new group of filmmakers tried hard to distance themselves from the aesthetics of their older colleagues.

¹ Marek Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory* (New York, 2012), p.48

² Patryk Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power in Poland: Culture and the Making of Stalin's New Empire, 1943-1957* (Chapel Hill, 2015), p.127

³ Fik, 'Kultura polska, 1945-1956', p.222

The most widely discussed topic in Polish cinema is the Polish School movement, and existing scholarship shows that the Second World War was one of its leading themes. Every director involved covered the topic at least once, and these were some of the great artistic achievements in Polish history. There have been multiple debates amongst scholars, such as Stanisław Ozimek and Tadeusz Lubelski, about issues relating to the School, including the dates, and the number of films included. Tadeusz Miczka is fairly conservative in his estimate, claiming just thirty movies released between 1957 and 1963 belonged to the Polish School;⁴ while others, such as Hendrykowski and Nurczyńska-Fidelska take a wider, more inclusive view, seeing the School as an artistic formation that was created by many authors, and was open, multi-faceted and evolutionary.⁵ Ozimek identified three stylistic trends: the romantic-expressive, the rationalistic and the psychological-existential; while Aleksander Jackiewicz differentiates simply between the romantic and plebeian traditions within the school.⁶ There is very little that academics agree on when it comes to the Polish School, except that the new generation of filmmakers who made up the movement were united in their disenchantment with the ideology and aesthetics of their older colleagues, and wished to create their own artistic styles, based on the influence of international film movements and directors.

The war films made during the Polish School period are most often viewed through the lens of their relationship to notions of Polish heroism, and the romanticism of the 19th century. There are scholars who argue that Andrzej Wajda is in many ways a descendent of the romantic poets, while Andrzej Munk is a rationalist, and critical of a Polish propensity to lose their lives while fighting for a doomed cause.⁷ There is also the plebeian trend, represented by Kazimierz Kutz,

⁴ Tadeusz Miczka, 'Cinema Under Political Pressure: A brief outline of Authorial Roles in Polish Post-War Feature Film 1945-1995', *Kinema*, 4, (1995), p.37

⁵ Ewa Nurczyńska-Fidelska, 'Uwagi na marginesie doświadczeń – polskiej historii filmu', in Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska and Bronisława Stolarska (eds), *Szkoła polska – powroty* (Łódź, 1998), p.30-1

⁶ Stanisław Ozimek, 'Spojrzenie na szkołę polską' in Jerzy Teoplitz, *Historia filmu polskiego 1957-1961* (Warsaw, 1980), p.201-2; Aleksander Jackiewicz, 'Kordianowskie i plebejskie tradycje w filmie polskim', *Kino* (November, 1969), p.2-11

⁷ Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (New York, 2002), p.84

which tried to avoid depiction and discussion of any large military action and questions about their validity, but instead focused on the life of ordinary people.⁸ Wajda and Munk are the most commonly discussed directors, and scholars like Nurczyńska-Fidelska, Lubelski and Haltof, see them as the antithesis of each other.⁹ More recently, however, Marcin Darmas has examined Munk and Wajda through the prism of what he describes as the ‘knightly ethos’ (*obywatel rycerz*), which he argues continues to be a significant feature in Polish identity and culture.¹⁰ He disagrees with the prevailing view, and claims that both Munk and Wajda strengthened the idea of Polish heroism based on this knightly ethos. He suggests that Wajda’s *Kanal*, *Lotna* and *Ashes and Diamonds* show the passing of the epoch of these heroes, who value death above dishonour, into the past. He theorises that Munk, on the other hand, far from being critical of these knightly principles, strengthened their place in Polish culture, by showing the central character, Dzidzius, at the end of the film, abandoning his previously cynical views, and choosing a return to the doomed Uprising, rather than safety.¹¹ To an extent, Piotr Zwierzchowski agrees with Darmas’ analysis, as he states that although Munk was vocally outspoken against the Polish romantic tradition, the main protagonist in *Bad Luck*, had a number of similarities to those in Wajda’s films.¹²

The films of the Polish School often looked at subjects for the first time, or offered a different perspective to the prevailing narrative. While Zwierzchowski and Hendrykowski, in their works on *Kanal* and *Bad Luck*, have identified the problems that Munk and Wajda faced in getting their films onto the screen, current scholarship lacks an in-depth investigation into how

⁸ Tadeusz Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego 1895-2014* (Kraków, 2014), p.239

⁹ Ewa Nurczyńska-Fidelska, *Andrzej Munk* (Kraków, 1982), p.72

¹⁰ Marcin Darmas, *Obywatel Rycerz: Zarys socjologii filmu* (Warsaw, 2014), p.194

¹¹ *ibid.* p.187

¹² Piotr Zwierzchowski, *Zezowate szczęście* (Poznań, 2006)

the communist authorities reacted to these individual movies, and the impact of the decentralisation of the film industry on relations between filmmakers and the PZPR.

The most comprehensive study of Polish war cinema focuses on the 1960s. In his book *Kino nowej pamięci. Obraz II wojny światowej w kinie polskim lat 60*, Piotr Zwierzchowski argues that during the late 1950s the authorities unintentionally allowed directors to create an alternative narrative of the Second World War. Zwierzchowski further claims that the 1960 *Resolution of the Secretariat of the Central Committee on Cinema* effectively put an end to the relative freedom of the last four years.¹³ While the war films of the 1960s asked similar questions to the Polish School, they answered them quite differently, avoiding raking over old ashes, recollecting complexes or demythologising Polish national myths. Zwierzchowski uses extensive archival material to show how some filmmakers during this period helped the government to create a ‘new memory’ of the Second World War. This thesis will, by looking at the work of Polish School directors not just during the height of the movement, but into the 1960s, challenge Zwierzchowski’s assessment, and instead hypothesise that the PZPR was never truly able to control the image of the war that was presented onscreen, and that this began in the 1940s.

The Holocaust in Polish cinema is a complex topic, and scholarship that refers to it exclusively is still relatively rare, although in the aftermath of the publication of Jan Gross’ *Neighbours* there was a small explosion, with three books on the subject published in 2012. Marek Haltof’s *Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory* is the most comprehensive overview. Haltof argues that ‘Polish films about the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations, in general, reflect the postwar political status quo and changing historical and political circumstances more than historical truth.’¹⁴ This thesis will take a similar approach to Haltof’s work, looking at the

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust*, p.4

way in which films about the camp universe followed themes similar to those in official memory of the time, but will also challenge Haltof's assertion, and show instances in which this was not the case. Katarzyna Mąka-Malatyńska and Joanna Preizner, who both also released books in 2012, have attempted to do something similar to Haltof, and provide a comprehensive overview of Polish Holocaust cinema, not just looking at the most well-known pieces, but also some mediocre and unsuccessful projects.¹⁵

Individual directors

Detailed studies of the work of individual directors are still relatively scarce, but this number has increased in recent years. From them we have learnt more about the artistry of these films, and about the personalities who made them. They have also focused on directors such as Stanisław Różewicz, who is often only given a brief mention in wider studies of Polish cinema. Ewa Nurczyńska-Fidelska was the first to provide a more in-depth analysis of the work of Andrzej Munk, in which she argues that his work was distinctive within the Polish School, as his films were the only ones to be both opposed to the Romantic tradition and also entangled in it.¹⁶ Nurczyńska-Fidelska claims that Munk's movies were more continuations of literary trends than cinematic ones.¹⁷ Marek Hendrykowski seconds this, and also suggests that Munk was the first director to turn cinema into a forum for public debate, and an arena for discussions about important issues.¹⁸ Hendrykowski also wrote about Różewicz and argued that, while Różewicz's films may not have been as great as those from the Polish School, they were, nonetheless, important contributions to the history of cinema in Poland.¹⁹ Hendrykowski also claimed that 'for the individual director, the camera becomes an instrument for communicating

¹⁵ Katarzyna Mąka-Malatyńska, *Widok z tej strony. Przedstawienia Holocaustu w polskim filmie* (Poznań, 2012), p.3; Joanna Preizner, *Kamiennie na macewie: Holocaust w polskim kinie* (Kraków-Budapest, 2012), p.10

¹⁶ Nurczyńska-Fidelska, *Andrzej Munk*, p.6

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ Marek Hendrykowski, *Andrzej Munk* (Poznań, 2011), p.83

¹⁹ Marek Hendrykowski, *Stanisław Różewicz* (Poznań, 1999), p.11

his own view of the world, which remains the most important thing for cinema as art.²⁰ Monika Maszewska-Łupiniak took up this assertion, and to an extent agreed with Hendrykowski as she argues that although Różewicz does not present his own internal experiences, he did portray events he was a witness to.²¹ Maszewska-Łupiniak also claims that while Różewicz showed the reality of events in his films, he also encouraged viewers to discover their own point of view, and the correct way to talk about their own reality.²² Monika Talarczyk-Gubała, in 2015, wrote about Wanda Jakubowska from a feminist perspective, and chose to focus on her life and work, because despite her importance for both women in cinema, and the industry as a whole, her achievements have been overlooked.²³ Talarczyk-Gubała looks beyond the politics to show *The Last Stage* as an important feminist piece, as it moved beyond the tendency to show women in cinema only as grateful objects of glances, or passive victims.²⁴

The directors of the Polish School have garnered far greater interest from scholars than the filmmakers who were more interested in popular cinema, and enjoyed a much more cordial relationship with the PZPR. Krzysztof Kornacki, in his chapter on Czesław and Ewa Petelski in *Autorzy kina polskiego*, attempted to explain why they were both so loyal to the communist regime, by showing that they felt they owed their lives to the Red Army.²⁵ Mikołaj Kunicki, in a number of articles, has focused on the work of Jerzy Passendorfer, and argues that he fully

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Monika Maszewska-Łupiniak, *Rzeczywistość filmowa Stanisława Różewicza* (Kraków, 2009), p.225

²² *ibid*

²³ Monika Talarczyk-Gubała, *Wanda Jakubowska. Od nowa* (Warsaw, 2015), p.13

²⁴ *ibid.* p.173

²⁵ Krzysztof Kornacki, 'Ewa i Czesław Petelscy – w krainie PRL-u', in Stachówna, Grażyna and Zmudziński, Bogusław (eds.), *Autorzy kina polskiego* (2 vols, Kraków, 2007), ii, p.45

conveyed the historical and cultural aspirations of the regime, and in particular of Mieczysław Moczar's Partisans faction.²⁶

Politics and Polish cinema

Very few studies of Polish cinema during this period make extensive use of the archival sources that are available, to provide some insight into the way in which the government and the film industry co-existed. There are, however, two notable works that use this approach. Paul Coates and Piotr Zwierzchowski both look at government papers, and the Script and Film Assessment Meetings in their film analysis.

Paul Coates' work *The Red and the White: The Cinema of People's Poland* centres around the duality of Polish cinema, torn between aesthetics and ideology. The only war film that Coates writes about is *Ashes and Diamonds (Popiół i diament, 1958)*, and he picks apart the film's dual personality, as both a rewriting and an adaptation of Jerzy Andrzejewski's novel.²⁷ Coates concludes that while the duality of cinema in Poland, torn between the aesthetic and the political, was a defining characteristic of film in any totalitarian state, Poland represented a special case due to its ambiguous affinity with socialist ideology.²⁸ This meant that filmmakers were perpetually shifting between half-hearted compliance and covert resistance.²⁹ Coates comes to this conclusion, however, without sustained analysis of the work of directors like Jerzy Passendorfer, and Ewa and Czesław Petelski. This thesis will take into account a wider variety of directors when drawing conclusions on how far Coates' analysis can be applied to war films. Coates makes some general observations about the function of the Script and Film Assessment meetings, and concludes that the Script Assessment, in particular, could both help

²⁶ Mikołaj Kunicki, 'Optimism Against All Odds: Polish National Identity in Jerzy Passendorfer's War Films, *Sprawy Narodowościowe*, (49/2017), p.1

²⁷ Paul Coates, *The Red and the White: The Cinema of People's Poland* (London, 2005), p.46

²⁸ *ibid.* p.1

²⁹ *ibid.*

shape, and censor a project.³⁰ He does not, however, provide any in depth or contextual analysis of these bodies.

Zwierzchowski, as previously stated, focuses on the war films of the 1960s, and the way in which they built a 'new memory' of the Second World War, that was intended to counterbalance the work of the Polish School in the 1950s.³¹ Zwierzchowski looks at the role of government resolutions in affecting this change, as well as the myths of the Second World War that were developed by the Gomułka regime, and the way in which some directors actively promoted this image.³² He uses the Script and Film Assessment Commission minutes to show how the PZPR members present reacted to the films being discussed. Ewa Gębicka, in her article in *Syndrom konformizmu?*, focused her attention on the 1960s, and her research has long been used by other scholars as a source of information about the political changes that had an impact on cinema. Gębicka also laid out the increase in state involvement in film throughout the decade.³³ This thesis will in some ways follow Coates and Zwierzchowski's approach, and use government documents to show how the PZPR reacted to specific films, but it will also use them to make broader observations about the censorship role of these bodies. It will investigate to what extent directors were able to debate their work, and how common it was for changes to be made. It will also try to establish the role of the members of the film units in these meetings.

Polish cultural production

There are a handful of studies about other forms of cultural production and their relationship with politics. They show how the PZPR's control was not uniform, and that artists from

³⁰ *ibid.* p.80

³¹ Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.324

³² *ibid.*

³³ Ewa Gębicka, 'Obcinanie kantów, czyli PZPR i państwa wobec kinematografii lat sześćdziesiątych', in Tadeusz Miczka and Alina Madej (eds), *Syndrom konformizmu? Kino polskie lat sześćdziesiątych* (Katowice, 1994), p.42

different spheres developed their own distinct ways of working with, and against, the Communist Party. Barbara Fijałkowska charts the development of cultural policy between 1948 and 1959, and examines the relationship between state institutions and creators during the same period. She identifies the way in which state intervention impacted on cultural production, and notes that during periods of greater creative freedom, output was much greater, with higher artistic value.³⁴ Fijałkowska shows, however, that the PZPR achieved its greatest successes in working with the creative intelligentsia, when it had a staff of its own intellectuals.³⁵

David Tompkins' book *Composing the Party Line: Music and Politics in Early Cold War Poland and East Germany* studies the development of the relationship between the PZPR and musicians, and how in many ways they used each other. Tompkins concludes that the PZPR were unable to fully master the musical world. He uses archival documents to show how the PZPR attempted to use music as propaganda, and created various institutions that controlled the music industry. As such, Tompkins shows how initially composers were willing to work with the PZPR, but as time went on, they began to push for greater independence.³⁶

Research into authors working in Poland during the same period shows that, like composers, initially a number of writers were supporters of the PPR and later PZPR. Anna Bikont and Joanna Szczęśna focus on some of the leading writers of the immediate postwar years, including Tadeusz Borowski, Jerzy Andrzejewski and Tadeusz Konwicki and show how their enthusiasm ultimately led to disillusionment.³⁷ This thesis will take a similar approach to Bikont and Szczęśna's work, focusing on specific directors to show, as Tompkins does, that

³⁴ Barbara Fijałkowska, *Polityka i twórcy 1948-1959*, (Warsaw, 1985), p.518

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ David. G. Tompkins, *Composing the Party Line: Music and Politics in Early Cold War Poland and East Germany* (West Lafayette, 2013), p.247

³⁷ Bikont and Szczęśna, *Lawina i kamienie*, p.15

directors had a number of different reasons for making the choices they did. While they may have been products of the society in which they grew up, and were living at the time, Bikont and Szczęsna also illustrate how their wartime experiences impacted their relationship with the PPR and later PZPR.³⁸ Barbara Fijałkowska illustrates how literary figures were seen as very important to spreading socialism, and as such young writers were given particular ideological training.³⁹ The Literary Union had a greater proportion of party members, than the Composers' Union, and by 1954 over half of the general board were PZPR members.⁴⁰ Fijałkowska shows that, as a result of these factors, the party was able to exert greater control over writers than it did over musicians.⁴¹ This thesis will explore the relationship between the party and filmmakers, and whether it follows any similar patterns to that of authors and composers.

There are no similar studies in relation to cinema. This thesis seeks to address this gap. Making comparisons with the way in which artists from other media interacted with the regime, and to what extent they were subjected to centralised control, will provide some insight into whether the gradual decentralisation of the film industry, and the relative freedom it was allowed constituted an anomaly. It will also show whether the level of co-operation displayed by directors was typical of other intellectuals.

Polish Memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust

Studies of Polish memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust have become much more prevalent post 1989. They recognise the complex nature of remembrance under a totalitarian regime, and show how there was often a difference between public and private memory. Both Michael C. Steinlauf recognised the significance of personal accounts of family and friends, both in the dissemination of Holocaust memory, and also in resistance to

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ Fijałkowska, *Polityka i twórcy*, p.200

⁴⁰ *ibid.* p.358

⁴¹ *ibid*

communism. Andrzej Waśkiewicz made a similar observation in his article about the Home Army, in which he argued the main source of information about the AK was family members and close friends.⁴² He also claims that while totalitarian regimes were strong enough to promote their version of the history of the Second World War, they were not able to suppress all incompatible versions.⁴³ This was particularly noticeable in short periods of thaw, when political opposition devoted much of its limited resources to so called ‘blank spots’ in recent Polish history.⁴⁴

Both works on the memory of the Holocaust and the war in general show the significant impact political change had on institutionalised remembrance. Annamaria Orla-Bukowska has identified phases of memory in Poland, much like Rousso in his research on France. She likens memory in Poland to a tapestry. She argues that between 1945 and 1950, due to the emotional, living memory of direct shared experiences there was discourse about the conflict: Orla-Bukowska names this the Unspun Fibres period.⁴⁵ She then characterises 1950 to 1980 as the Double-Sided Tapestry, during which time official memory was institutionalised by ignoring some events, and overplaying the significance of others. The Battle of Lenino was celebrated, not Monte Cassino, and the Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) was ignored in favour of the communist People’s Army (Armia Ludowa, AL). Communist generals were honoured, rather than those who served with the Allies. Orla-Bukowska argues that at this time, the more public discourse highlighted ties to the East, the more the private one accented historical, especially wartime, ties to the West.⁴⁶

⁴² Andrzej Waśkiewicz, ‘The Polish Home Army and the Politics of Memory’, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol.24, No.1, (Winter, 2010), p.46

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ Orla-Bukowska, ‘New Threads in an Old Loom’, p.182

⁴⁶ *ibid*

Zofia Wóycicka makes a similar argument about the immediate postwar years, in relation to memories of the Nazi camps. Wóycicka claims that the Holocaust was part of public discussion immediately after the war, and it was only later, with the advent of communist hegemony that it fell under a 'powerful taboo'.⁴⁷ Like Orla-Bukowska, Wóycicka also identifies the intensification of Stalinism as the most significant factor in silencing different memory groups.⁴⁸ Both of these studies, however, make broad generalisations about the thirty years between 1950 and 1980. This thesis builds on these more overarching works to investigate in more detail, the way in which cinema contributed to Holocaust memory in the Gomułka era.

Cinema, history and memory

Robert Rosenstone claims, in the introduction to his book *History on Film/Film on History*, that 'history films, even when we know they are fanciful or ideological renditions of history, have an effect on the way we see the past.'⁴⁹ Rosenstone is primarily responsible for the realisation that film could be a legitimate form of history. He also argues that a history film is not produced according to the same criteria as written history, and as such, should also not be judged in the same way.⁵⁰ Since Rosenstone's initial work there have been a number of studies that have further explored the relationship between film, history and memory, as well as developing methodologies for the analysis of historical cinema. Wulf Kansteiner agrees with Rosenstone to an extent, claiming that historical film and mainstream historiography share key characteristics, including their ideological commitments to narrative reconstruction and myths of historical authenticity.⁵¹ Kansteiner, however, also claims that film and television are structurally unsuitable for the reproduction of academic history, but they offer superb platforms

⁴⁷ Zofia Wóycicka, *Arrested Mourning: Memory of the Nazi Camps in Poland 1944-50* (Frankfurt Am Main, 2013), p.15

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p.274

⁴⁹ Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, (London, 2005), p.10

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Wulf Kansteiner, 'History, memory and film: A love/hate triangle'. *Memory Studies*, 2018, Vol.11 (2), p.131

for the invention of social memory, that they strive to teach viewers how the past might have felt.⁵² Anton Kaes argues that historical films interpret national history for the broad public, thereby, to an extent, creating a homogenised public memory.⁵³ This thesis will look at how cinema in Poland contributed to memory of the Second World War, at what was included and what was omitted from films, to ascertain whether they were attempting to create something that they perceived to be authentic, or whether they manipulated facts to tell a specific narrative. Sian Baber argues that it is important to recognise how and why a film has been created, along with what it presents and what is suggested through the narrative.⁵⁴ John O'Connor also stresses the importance of understanding the production background of a film, and the political or other purposes a film may be meant to serve.⁵⁵ This thesis will follow this approach.

There are significant gaps, however, which this thesis seeks to address. It will use the way in which the authorities dealt with the films, and the way in which they were written about in the press, to draw broader conclusions on the nature of censorship, and the relationship between the PZPR and filmmakers. It will exploit the underutilised resources of the minutes from the Script and Film Assessment Commission meetings, to investigate how often objections were raised to the way in which the war was portrayed in these films, and whether changes were proposed, particularly in relation to films such as *Kanal*, *Eroica*, *Ashes and Diamonds*, and *Bad Luck*, which all discussed subjects for the first time. These meetings will also be used to create a better understanding of the role of the film units, in particular, whether the heads of the units were vocal in the defence of their members. This thesis will also investigate where the films of the Polish School fit in the narrative of the war that was prevalent at the time in

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ Kaes, 'History and Film: Public Memory in the Age of Electronic Dissemination', p.112

⁵⁴ Sian Baber, *Using Film as a Source* (Manchester, 2016), p.18

⁵⁵ John O'Connor, 'History in Images/Images in History: Reflections on the Importance of Film and Television Study for an Understanding of the Past', *The American Historical Reviews*, Vol.93, No.5, (December, 2988), p. 1205

which they were made. There are specific studies that look at the relationship between artists and the PZPR, in the fields of literature and music, but there are not the same analyses in relation to cinema. Current work shows that writers and musicians showed different levels of engagement and disillusionment with communism, and diverse motivations: film directors may have had a different experience again. Marcin Adamczak and Edward Zajiček have shown that the decentralisation of the film industry, and in particular the unit system, contributed to the high artistic value of Polish cinema under communism, and that the heads of the units were able to provide some sort of protection from the worst excesses of censorship.⁵⁶ The present thesis investigates how this was done, and which people were most forceful in this regard.

⁵⁶ Marcin Adamczak, 'Film Units in the People's Republic of Poland' in Marcin Adamczak, Piotr Marecki, Marcin Malatyński (eds), *Film Units: Restart* (Kraków, Łódź, 2012), p.241

Chapter 1: How the film industry worked

Between 1945 and 1970, cinema in Poland developed in a very particular way, very different to other cultural products, and the other countries of East Central Europe, in particular Czechoslovakia, which, like Poland, had a nationalised film industry, and developed some form of unit system. This chapter seeks to answer the question of how the structure of the film industry impacted the production of war cinema during the period, by focusing on the move from a more centralised system, to the film units, and on the everyday functioning of the organs of censorship. It also explores the hierarchy of film professionals, and how the relationship between directors and scriptwriters affected the image of the war that was presented on screen.

In no other country in East Central Europe did directors reach the elevated status that they did in Poland. They did not have subjects or projects dictated to them by the State. As artistic directors of the units they were responsible for mentoring the younger members of their team and providing feedback on their work, which therefore made them instrumental in influencing the new generation of filmmakers. It was common in Poland for directors to have the idea for a project and commission a script, or to co-write a screenplay. This was unusual in the Soviet bloc. From the very beginnings of the Polish postwar film industry, directors played a significant role, beginning with Aleksander Ford as the head of Film Polski, and this was only continued with the structure of the film units.

One in six films made between 1945 and 1970 were about the Second World War, or its direct aftermath, including the very first postwar film *Zakazane piosenki* (*Forbidden Songs*, 1946). For Jerzy Passendorfer the conflict made up the subject matter of his entire repertoire during this period. Almost every director working at this time covered the subject at least once; one of the only noticeable exceptions was Roman Polański, but he did act in Andrzej Wajda's debut *Pokolenie* (*Generation*, 1955). In this regard Poland was very different to its neighbours

Hungary and Czechoslovakia, whose war film output was much lower during this period, and instead on a par with the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Of the thirteen feature films produced in Yugoslavia by the end of 1950, all but one either dealt with the National War of Liberation or with socialist reconstruction after the war, and it remained a dominant theme.¹ War cinema was exceptionally important to Soviet cinema, as Denise Youngblood notes: it provided a highly contested space for supporting and challenging official views of Soviet history, and gave filmmakers a chance to subvert official history in the guise of art and entertainment.²

Introduction

At the end of the Second World War, the civilian film industry in Poland was virtually non-existent. There were film units attached to military organisations. The Referat Filmowy, which was a part of the Home Army propaganda division, and was especially active during the Warsaw Uprising, and the Film Company of the Polish Armed Forces (Wytwórnia Filmowa Wojska Polskiego), connected to the Army's political department. Both the authorities and filmmakers were eager to distance themselves from prewar productions. In 1946 Jerzy Bossak suggested that 'today we have to create conditions in which Polish film can flourish',³ whilst an early Information Bulletin from Polish Film (Film Polski) stated that 'everyone is aware of the fact that new Polish production must move on from the nonsense of prewar Polish films'.⁴ The new Polish government started by gradually erasing many of the links with prewar Poland, including cinema. Jerzy Bossak further claimed that there were no good films before 1939 as 'we did not know how to make them.'⁵ As a result, a desire was born to improve the training of the next generation of filmmakers, which led to, in 1948, the opening of the Leon Schiller

¹ Daniel J. Goulding, *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience, 1945-2001* (Indiana, 2002), p.11

² Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005* (Lawrence, 2007), p.3

³ Tadeusz Lubelski, *Strategie autorskie w polskim filmie fabularnym lat 1945-1961* (Kraków, 1992), p.39.

⁴ AAN, 366 10/1 (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki), Film Polski Biuletyn Informacyjny, 23 września, 1945

⁵ Lubelski, *Strategie autorskie*, p.39.

Film School, an institution which trained Wajda, Munk and Polański, among others. By 1955, 158 graduates were employed in the national film industry, vastly outnumbering prewar filmmakers. The wide-scale wartime destruction of Warsaw rendered filming there almost impossible, thus Łódź was chosen as the new centre for the film industry, as it had largely been spared during the occupation.

Centralised Authority

The nationalisation of the film industry began in the early days of the Polish People's Republic. On 27 September 1944, within the framework of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego, PKWN), the first civilian film administrators were appointed. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Information and Propaganda a Film Division was created, headed by the director Aleksander Ford. This gradually evolved into the Department of Film Propaganda and it was widely believed, within the circles of the PKWN and the Ministry of Information, that nationalisation of the film industry would not be a problem as it was clear that the physical structures of Polish film production had been destroyed by the Nazis.⁶ In January 1945, as the film studio of the Polish Army moved westward along rapidly advancing frontlines, it became evident that film was to be owned by the State, not by co-operative groups. This solution, in the opinion of Ford and most of his colleagues, ensured the survival of film art.⁷ They echoed the views of some of their Czech counterparts, who during the Nazi occupation were already making plans for nationalisation.⁸ Centralisation of the film industry in Poland was not a new phenomenon. The policy had been implemented to a lesser extent during the interwar years. In 1928 the Central Film Agency, (Centralny Biuro

⁶ Edward Zajiček, 'Aleksander Ford – organizator kinematografii', *Miesięcznik Literacki*, (2/85)

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ *ibid*

Filmowy, CBF) was founded within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This gave the government greater control over film production, as it was responsible for censorship, overseeing filmmaking, film importation and exportation.⁹

On 13 November 1945 the film industry was nationalized as Film Polski, its remit being to control film production and distribution. In the immediate postwar years, however, there was room for other film organisations, the largest of these being Kinor, an outfit which contained surviving members of the Jewish film-making community. After the implementation of the doctrine of socialist realism on cinema in 1949, however, there was no longer a place for this American- funded organisation: thus it disbanded, leaving Film Polski as the sole, centralised, authority.¹⁰ Aleksander Ford became the first head of Film Polski, running the organization in an almost dictatorial manner.¹¹ At first, it controlled cinema directly: therefore during the late 1940s and early 1950s officials had considerable influence over the subject matter and composition of film crews. Film Polski was responsible for running movie theatres, international sales of Polish films renting of foreign films. In addition to this, its main objectives were the use of film as a means of information, education and social development and the dissemination of film culture in society. Income was handled by Film Polski, aiding the material reconstruction and development of Polish film. Cinema ceased to be a medium solely for instant financial gain, instead becoming an important factor in Polish social, educational and cultural life.¹²

Through nationalisation Poland was able to rapidly regenerate the material side of its film industry, with the number of open cinemas more than doubling between 1945 and 1949 and

⁹ Sheila Skaff, *The Law of the Looking Glass: Cinema in Poland, 1896-1939* (Ohio, 2008), p.87

¹⁰ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, p.48.

¹¹ Zajiček, 'Aleksander Ford – organizator kinematografii'

¹² Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, p.48

Film Polski running four main studio spaces in Warsaw, Kraków, Łódź and Wrocław.¹³ Lost equipment was replaced and new filmmakers were trained, but output was much slower; thus, despite ambitious targets, only thirty eight films were produced between 1947 and 1955. Prior to 1947 nothing was released, largely because of the difficulty in creating scripts that were considered ideologically correct and an unwillingness by directors to broach sensitive issues.¹⁴ The central authorities argued that creating a monopoly was the only way in which film in Poland could develop, and other countries would soon implement the same policy.¹⁵ Nationalisation undoubtedly allowed Polish cinema to rebuild, but as Bolesław Michałek states: 'Nationalisation came in the form of appropriation'.¹⁶

On 15 December 1951 the Sejm passed a law that created the Central Office of Cinematography (Centralny Urząd Kinematografii, CUK), effective from 1 January 1952. Film Polski therefore ceased to exist, but there was very little difference between the roles, and staff, of these two government organisations. The Central Office assumed responsibility for managing, supervising and controlling all matters relating to cinema through three separate divisions: feature films, documentaries and educational productions. The CUK management section oversaw the development plans of subordinate enterprises, improving production and quality control, and the supervision and co-ordination of financial management.¹⁷ Any activities relating to films intended for public distribution were to be carried out exclusively by state enterprises subordinate to the CUK, or on their authorisation.¹⁸ As part of the Ministry of Culture the CUK was tasked with maintaining political unity within the film industry and would run parallel to other departments within the Ministry, with three seats reserved for its

¹³ Dina Iordovana, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London, 2003), p.25.

¹⁴ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, p.49.

¹⁵ AAN, 366 10/103 (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki), Uzasadnienie Dekretu o Monopolu Filmowym, 1947

¹⁶ Bolesław Michałek and Frank Turaj, *The Modern Cinema of Poland*, (Bloomington, 1988), p.2

¹⁷ AAN, 366 10/107 (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki), Instrukcja, 1951

¹⁸ AAN, 366 10/107 (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki), Generalna Dyrekcja Filmu Polskiego Pismo Okolne Nr. 13, 31 grudnia, 1951

representatives at the Script and Final Assessment commissions.¹⁹ In 1957 the CUK was replaced by the Main Office of Cinematography, (Naczelny Zarząd Kinematografii, NZK). The NZK's role was lessened somewhat by the film units, as the industry became more decentralised. While it is unclear exactly why the NZK replaced the CUK, it is likely due to criticism during the Stalinist era, that it responsible for the low level of film output.

On behalf of the Government, the Minister of Culture played a key role in the running of the Polish film industry, supervising its political and ideological activities.²⁰ Often he was the one constant between the Script Assessment (Komisja Ocen Scenariuszy, KOS) and Film Assessment (Komisja Kolaudacyjna, KK) Commissions, for although, on most occasions, the composition of the two committees was very different, the Minister was almost always present at both. As well as generally overseeing the CUK, he was responsible for appointing its Director, who, in turn, was charged with the setting up and disbanding film units, giving the Minister a great amount of potential overall control. It also meant that he was often the scapegoat when mistakes were made. The Vice Ministers of Culture also had an important part to play in the oversight of Polish cinema: often times they were a more significant figure than the Minister.

Film interested many of the most important members of the Communist Party and within the Cultural Section (Wydział Kultury, WK) of the PZPR, there was a section dedicated to it. The concern of the Politburo over film matters was due to the potential cinema had as a means of disseminating State propaganda. In 1946 Film Polski reported on ways in which movies had been used for propaganda purposes, not just in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, but also

¹⁹ AAN 1843 1/34 (Naczelny Zarząd Kinematografii) Statut Przedsiębiorstwa Państwowego pod nazwa Zespoły Autorów Filmowych, 24 sierpień 1956

²⁰ AAN, 366 10/107 (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki), Generalna Dyrekcja Filmu Polskiego Notatka, 8 marzec, 1951

in America, where it was argued that the promotion of the American ideology of free, private, capitalist activity in the land of unlimited possibilities was exercised more in film than in state press releases.²¹ With the success of films during the war it was anticipated that, in the postwar period, nations would continue to harness the power of this medium. In free Poland it was considered that film could contribute to deepening and popularising the ideology of the new Poland and the creation of national communism. It was suggested by the authorities, that the production of films without clear educational propaganda was unthinkable for the foreseeable future.²²

The Central Committee of the PZPR was most significant, in regards to cinema, when the industry was more centralised, setting the ideological tone which led to the imposition of socialist realism in 1949.²³ After the 1955 decentralisation, the KC PZPR played almost no role in the day to day running of the film industry. Members were not regularly involved in the Script and Film Assessment Commissions and they made no decision regarding the work and composition of the Film Units: this was left to the Ministry of Culture and the Main Office of Cinematography. There was also no real central policy towards cinema between 1955 and 1958.²⁴ In 1959 the Politburo discussed the state of cinematography and put together a committee to review and verify upcoming film production.²⁵ This led to the April 1960 Resolution of the Secretariat of the KC PZPR on the matter of cinematography. The Resolution was very critical of cinematic achievements between 1957 and 1959 stating that during this time, Polish film could not be clearly defined as speaking for socialist ideology.²⁶ It acknowledged that there was no proper ideological and thematic inspiration from either the

²¹ AAN, 366 10/103, Uzasadnienie Dekretu o Monopolu Filmowym, 1947.

²² AAN, 366 10/1 (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki), Film Polski Biuletyn Informacyjny, 23 września, 1945

²³ Fijałkowska, *Polityka i twórcy*, p.126

²⁴ FN A-208 poz.7 'Notatka o sytuacji w kinematografii' in *Materiały dla Zespołu Filmowego Komisji Sekretariatu KC PZPR*

²⁵ FN A-208 poz.7 'Aktualny stan produkcji filmów fabularnych – listopad 1959' (Ocena programowe) in *Materiały dla Zespołu Filmowej Komisji Sekretariatu KC PZPR*

²⁶ FN A-208 poz.7 'Uchwała sekretariatu KC w spraw o kinematografii'

Party or the Ministry of Culture. As a result, the KC PZPR was going to observe cinema more closely in the following years, to strive to restore the importance of party ideological inspiration.²⁷ This Resolution had some impact on war films but not as much as the Party expected. The most significant impact that the KC PZPR had on the development of war cinema was its creation of taboo subjects. No depiction of Soviet crimes was permitted, meaning that the role the Soviet Union played in the destruction of Poland was ignored, and a large part of the population did not see their struggles portrayed onscreen.

A state-owned industry, to a certain extent, also removed unprofitability as a concern for directors. They no longer had to worry about financial success; in theory this meant that a director was free to concentrate solely on his vision and the artistic quality. This was viewed by some directors, including Wajda, as an advantage to working within a communist system. Their main objectives, therefore, could be originality, innovation and the message, rather than box office success.²⁸ There were, however, financial prizes awarded to films considered by the Artistic Council (Komisja Ocen Artystycznych, KOA) and the Economic and Production Council (Komisja Ocen Ekonomiczno-Produkcyjny, KOE-P) to be 'good'. This was largely decided on ideological grounds and the money was then shared amongst the other implementers of the movie, so filmmakers were aware how useful that money could be.²⁹

Film Units

The film unit system, which was later implemented in several East Central European countries, was particularly successful in Poland. It is unclear exactly why this was the case, and why the independence they gave filmmakers in Poland could not be replicated. A key factor, however, was that directors were involved in the rebuilding of the film industry from the outset, and so

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Michałek & Turaj, *Modern Cinema*, p.xii.

²⁹ Edward Zajiček, *Poza ekranem. Kinematografia polska 1896-2005* (Warsaw, 2009), p.120.

had a say in the way in which it was organised. This was unlike their counterparts in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, where it took much longer for directors to gain any recognition, and to instigate their own movies. The Czechoslovak units saw a number of personnel changes, delaying their effective functioning and emergence as respected centres for initiation and preparation of work. Like their Polish counterparts, however, they did become well known for the fostering of new talent. In Hungary not only did centralisation take a long time, but the Hungarian National Filmmaking Company was also slow to appoint unit heads based on talent, rather than party loyalty.³⁰

In 1948, the bi-weekly magazine *Film* announced: 'In order to properly divide its competences Film Polski has established three production units, responsible for enlisting writers and screenwriters to cooperate and produce films.³¹ They were led by Wanda Jakubowska, Aleksander Ford and Ludwik Starski. The Cultural Committee of the PZPR was not complimentary about their work claiming they had no real plan.³² Consequently, at the meeting of the Film Commission on December 23 1949 it was decided to liquidate these groups and instead use them on an ad hoc basis to create specific films.³³ The dissolution of these early units was met with opposition from some directors, and it was especially sharp from Ford and Jakubowska, who correctly stated that the units were a group in which methods of collective and creative work developed. Ford correctly predicted that this move was a way of subordinating creative issues, to administrative and technical ones.³⁴

By 1955 the Department of Culture and Science were aware that there was a need to increase the quantity and quality of film output, as such the film community was able to propose the re-

³⁰ Balázs Varga, 'Co-operation. The Organization of Studio Units in the Hungarian Film Industry of the 1950s and 1960s', in Marcin Adamczak, Piotr Marecki, Marcin Malatyński (eds), *Restart Zespołów Filmowych: Film Units Restart* (Poznań, 2012), p.338

³¹ Leon Bukowiecki, 'Zespół produkcyjny Warszawa', *Film* (1948)

³² AAN, CAKC/237/XVIII-31 'Uwagi w sprawie sytuacji w *Filmie Polskim* z 1950 r.'

³³ AAN, CAKC/237/XVIII-1 'Protokół posiedzenie Komisji KC do Spraw Filmu z dnia 30 listopada 1949 r.'

³⁴ *ibid*

creation of film units. The units allowed filmmakers a certain degree of creative freedom and relief from government officials, although this was never the Party's intention. This is shown in the XVI Sesji Rady Kultury i Sztuki Wydział Kultury PZPR on 27 June 1955, in response to suggestions made by the III Plenum KC PZPR, which was the Party's last attempt to develop a uniform counter offensive to the social criticism that was emerging.³⁵ One recommendation was: 'strive to create organisational conditions enabling the appointment of permanent ideological and artistic teams to replace the current ad hoc ones.'³⁶ The role of these units was to create conditions for artistic and production independence in the field of filmmaking.³⁷ Wanda Jakubowska wrote that the units' objective was: 'to enable cooperation between the screenwriter and director from the moment that the film is born, that is from the emergence of the idea.'³⁸ On 1 June 1955 six such units came into being, each headed by a well-known director, and aided by a literary director and production manager. *Iluzjon* was run by artistic director Ludwik Starski and literary director Anatol Stern, *Kadr* by Jerzy Kawalerowicz and Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz, *Rytm* by Jan Rybkowski and Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski, *Start* by Wanda Jakubowska and Mirosław Żuławski, *Studio* by Aleksander Ford and Roman Bratny and finally *Syrena*, headed by Jerzy Zarzycki and Jerzy Andrzejewski. Whilst initially it was prewar filmmakers who were in charge of the units, each director took the next generation of filmmakers under their wings, and, in many cases, later made way for them. *Kadr* was perhaps the most significant, as it was responsible for fostering the talents of Wajda, Munk and Kutz. *Iluzjon* was later taken over by Jerzy Passendorfer and *Rytm* worked with Stanisław Różewicz. Inevitably, units tended to attract colleagues with similar outlooks and could contain up to thirty associates, including those running the unit, permanent members, aspiring members and

³⁵ Fijałkowska, *Polityka i twórcy*, p.290

³⁶ AAN, CAKC/237/XVIII-102 Wytyczne pracy rocznej Wydziału Kultury i Sztuki z dnia 27 VI 1955 r. Projekt

³⁷ AAN, 1843 1/77 (Naczelny Zarząd Kinematografii) Statut Przedsiębiorstwa Państwowego pod nazwa Zespoły Autorów Filmowych, 30 lipca, 1956

³⁸ Wanda Jakubowska, *Zespoły początek przełomu*, *Film* (1955)

service workers. Entry into the unit required mutual consent and the artistic director had to give express permission.³⁹ Admission came at the request of current members, with prospective candidates required to have already achieved personal success. An inner members' council had a say on films accepted, and on general matters affecting the group.⁴⁰

The film unit's task was to create movies and train a new filmmaking generation. Their work included co-operation with other film units and studio teams. The artistic director was appointed by the President of the Central Office of Cinematography, while the literary director and production manager were selected by the Director of the Central Office of Film Studios (Centralny Zarząd Wytwórni Filmowych, CZWF). Units were under the supreme supervision of the CUK President, and they existed within the framework of national economic frameworks plans, funding from the central budget. The artistic director exercised general control over the unit's productions, allocated work of supervised training. The literary director acted as an assistant to the artistic director and was responsible for establishing and maintaining contacts with the literary world, while overseeing the development of new projects. Their other key function was to help the artistic director to maintain the ideological direction and artistry standards. The production manager was charged with areas of movie construction. His main role was economic matters and overseeing film implementation.⁴¹

A federal council, the Council of Artistic Production (Rada Artystyczna Produkcyjna, RAP), which comprised artistic directors, productions managers and other professionals appointed by the Minister of Culture, made decisions division of filmmaking funds and whether there were too many movies on the same theme.⁴² This work was overseen by a Director, also appointed

³⁹ Edward Zajiček, *Poza ekranem*, p.169.

⁴⁰ AAN, 1843 1/99 (Naczelny Zarząd Kinematografii), Regulamin wewnętrzny Zespołów Autorów Filmowych, 30 września, 1956

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² AAN, 1843 1/99 (Naczelny Zarząd Kinematografii), Statut Przedsiębiorstwa Państwowego Zjednoczone Zespoły Realizatorów Filmowych, 30 lipca, 1956

by the Minister of Culture. Council activities covered the wider issues regarding film units, including their establishment and dissolution, and appointments and dismissals of artistic directors and production managers. The RAP's director was tasked with co-ordinating the units' political programmes, submitting applications for the approval of screenplays, allocating funds, as well as monitoring and analysing the production teams and co-ordinating co-operation.⁴³ Despite this monitoring of political agendas, the units developed diverse ideological and artistic principles.

The inception of each film was discussed within the unit, which would supply the initial script funding. The unit approved the script and subsequently forwarded it to the government authorities; if it was not rejected, the unit budgeted for it accordingly. It was the director who was responsible for selecting the film crew. The completed work was then sanctioned by the unit and sent forward for approval by an administration appointed commission, at which point the unit lost control over the product, as the government became the de facto distributor. The units determined their output, but there remained the possibility that a project would be blocked in the pre-production stage by the Script Assessment Commission. Without the film units the history and quality of Polish cinema would have been very different.⁴⁴

Between 1954 and 1967 authors, screenwriters and directors governed the theory and practice of film creation. Some devoted themselves to the improvement of cinema, with works in which principles were more important than artistic vision; others appeared to serve the regime. In 1968, however, filmmakers became caught up in the antisemitic programme; there were direct attacks, not just on Jewish filmmakers like Ford, but also on Jakubowska and Kawalerowicz, who were criticized for a lack of ideological activity and making harmful films. So the PZPR's Cultural Section of the Central Committee demanded the dismissal of almost all the film unit

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ Michałek & Turaj, *Modern Cinema* p.xiii

heads, who, according to one report, had avoided political subjects linked to contemporary history.⁴⁵ Wincenty Kraśko, who was then head of the Department of Culture in the Central Committee, asked for the creation of a ‘political atmosphere’ in cinema circles.⁴⁶ This ultimately led to a reshuffle of the Party’s cinema department ruling committee, with Passendorfer being appointed as the new secretary.

The new film structures had very little in common with the old ones, giving power back to the old central committees under greater state control. Filmmakers automatically lost all freedom of action, or any chance of managing their own enterprises. After this largely antisemitic purge, only Iluzjon and Tor, founded in 1967, were able to retain their names, on the condition that they submit to totally new working practices. Three years later, following the crisis of 1970, the previous system was re-established.⁴⁷ This rearrangement of the film units broadened the ground for negotiations between filmmakers and authorities. The top management now consisted of people of ‘genuine professional accomplishment’, who enjoyed the confidence of the cinema community.’⁴⁸ The Polish Filmmakers’ Association, founded in 1966, played an important role, particularly during tense periods of debate about artistic autonomy and integrity. The association represented all those who worked within the film industry, from directors to stunt men. Andrzej Wajda and Jerzy Kawalerowicz were early Presidents of the organisation.

The decentralisation of the film industry into the individual units had an extremely significant impact on creativity and the ability of directors to get their films released. They created communities of likeminded individuals, with more experienced filmmakers to mentor those

⁴⁵ Haltof, *Polish National*, p.111.

⁴⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁷ Six film units remained, but only Iluzjon and Tor were recognisable. They were joined by Kraj, Nike, Plan and Wektor. Tor, which was headed by Różewicz became the home of Wajda while Kutz worked with Wektor. The Kadr unit that had been so influential was disbanded.

⁴⁸ Haltof, *Polish National*, p.70

who were just starting their careers. This allowed new directors to further their training once they had left the film school and, in many cases, develop their artistic style outside of the constraints of communist ideology. The heads of the units also provided support at the Script and Film assessment commissions and helped directors to defend their choices. Tadeusz Konwicki is a very notable example of this. As literary director of *Kadr*, he spoke for Munk and *Bad Luck*, as well as Wajda's *Kanal*. This assistance often helped to counter the concerns of Ministry of Culture officials and party bureaucrats who were present at the meetings. Ultimately, the film units meant that directors were not alone, and often times had people to defend their work and push for its production and release.

Film Units in Czechoslovakia and Hungary

The film industries in Czechoslovakia and Hungary were also nationalised, but the process by which this was done differed slightly in each country. Czechoslovakia and Hungary both had film units, loosely based on the Polish system but none of them functioned in the same way as they did in Poland. Which professional, director, writer or production manager, was in charge of the units varied and the composition was also slightly different in each incarnation.

Czechoslovakia was the first East Central European nation to nationalise its film industry: it happened in May 1945. Before cinema was fully centralised in Czechoslovakia there were early prototypes of film units. Between 1945 and 1947, they were modelled on the structure of the film industry in the First Republic and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, which were in turn based on the German studio system.⁴⁹ The units in this form were headed by experienced production chiefs, who ran the units in a similar way to private companies.⁵⁰ In 1947, the units were restructured, and they increased in number from two to six. Artistic

⁴⁹ Petr Szczepanik, 'Between Units and Producers: Organization of Creative Work in Czechoslovak State Cinema 1945-1990', in Marcin Adamczak et al. *Film Units: Restart*, p.279

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p.281

chiefs, who were directors, were now in charge and the direct superiors of production chiefs. For a brief period, the Czechoslovak units were run in a similar way to those in Poland and the directors had very broad responsibilities.⁵¹ They managed both the artistic aspects and production, and their role was similar to that of an independent producer, although they did not always understand how to undertake all their jobs. With the communist coup in 1948 Czechoslovak cinema became more centralised, and remained that way until the death of Stalin and greater cultural liberalisation. By the mid 1950s the organisational structure of the units in Czechoslovakia had stabilised, and this continued until the aftermath of Prague Spring. There was a significant difference between the units in Czechoslovakia and Poland. In Czechoslovakia it was writers whose status was elevated as the units were tasked with the development of screenplays, then deciding on the director and production manager.⁵² As such Czechoslovak directors did not have the same involvement in all aspects of filmmaking as their Polish counterparts.

Nationalisation in Hungary did not take place until 1948 after the communist takeover. The process of decentralisation and creation of film units did not happen in Hungary until the 1960s, almost a decade later than in Poland and Czechoslovakia and there were a far smaller number of units. This delay was largely due to the tensions that led to the 1956 Uprising, which put any liberalisation on the back burner.⁵³ In the 1950s it was writers who held a prominent position in the Hungarian film industry while directors were devalued. This was partly because in the first half of the 1950s Hungarian films were created by experienced professionals who made their debut in the 1930s before the outbreak of the war. The political leadership did not trust them, whereas the new group of writers that emerged in the postwar years were considered

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.* p. 292

⁵³ Varga, 'Co-operation. The Organization of Studio Units in the Hungarian Film Industry of the 1950s and 1960s', p.323.

to be more politically correct. In the 1960s, however, this changed and directors played a significant role.⁵⁴ At the beginning of 1962, within the Hunnia Film Studio, directors, writers and producers were divided into three creative groups. For the first time, under this structure, directors became active participants in the process of creating films and scriptwriting. Unlike Poland, however, in Hungary the Artistic Council assigned themes to directors. Directors were not head of the units in Hungary: this role was given to production managers, but they worked closely with the directors.⁵⁵

The decentralisation and collaborative nature of the Polish film industry was also responsible for the rapid growth of the Polish film industry following the end of Stalinism and socialist realism. While the Film School in Łódź employed professors who were members of the PZPR, the students were also shown international cinema, that they would not have otherwise had access to. The film units were so much more than just a means of production, the film units were collections of likeminded individuals that provided advice and training. They also provided an element of competition between younger members, which helped to increase creativity and production. This collaborative system made it harder for communist ideology to spread. Throughout the history of the units proportionally the number headed by those who were supportive of the communist government was small. With the film units having control over who they accepted, it meant that being a member of the PZPR did not necessarily bring about any significant career advantages within cinema.

These methods of training and organisation of the film industry were very different to other modes of cultural production. While there were unions that supported artists, they were also often battlegrounds between the members and party apparatchiks who sought to influence them. To a large extent writers, painters and musicians were individuals, which made them

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p.331

⁵⁵ *ibid.* p.335

more reliant on the goodwill of cultural officials. As David Tompkins argues in his book about musicians and politics, ‘money made available by the state for commissions was of great importance for securing composers’ material existence.’⁵⁶ Composers had limited options to support their creative efforts and the PZPR provided generous sums for new contemporary works; the caveat was that they wanted to commission music that fit their political aims.⁵⁷ In the film industry, however, it was very different: the party did not assign movies, so filmmakers were in fact reliant on the patronage of the units to get their projects off the ground. This meant that their films had to be attractive to other professionals and the heads of the units, before it came before the authorities at the Script Assessment and Film Assessment meetings. Consequently, artistry was more significant to most filmmakers, than ideological conformity.

Censorship

It is a common misconception that the censors in Poland were all inefficient and incompetent. According to Paul Coates this myth was perpetuated by directors dining out on stories of idiocy.⁵⁸ In fact, almost the opposite was true and the organs of censorship conducted themselves in an intelligent fashion. Changes made at script level were done in a subtle, rather than violent way, so that they became almost imperceptible. Revising the finished product was much more problematic once the process of filming was over. Very few cuts, therefore, were made at this final stage. It was far more common practice to shelve potentially subversive films until the political climate was more amenable, or, limit the film’s release and advertising. The Script Assessment and Film Assessment Commissions were responsible for the vetting of screenplays and finished products, although the former was abolished in 1967. They comprised officials from the Main Office of Cinematography, the Minister of Culture and other state

⁵⁶ Tompkins, *Composing the Party Line*, p.131

⁵⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁸ Coates, *The Red and the White*, p.74.

officials, film critics, directors, the head of the film unit producing the film and the director himself. It is difficult, however, to label these meetings as organs of censorship. The Script Assessment Commission was supposed to judge the political and artistic merit of a screenplay, and sometimes suggested changes or a complete rewrite. On the whole, it was a chance for discussion and for directors to take on board the comments and criticism of their peers. Paul Coates argues that in many ways this was a benefit for filmmakers, as they had to have a clear and concise idea of their project to be able to successfully defend it.⁵⁹

Censorship occurred on all levels, from the Politburo down to the local branches of the Main Office of Press, Publications and Public Performances. It also existed in the form of self-suppression by filmmakers themselves. In particular, in the case of war films, there were some subjects that appeared to be implicitly known to be off limits, most notably anything relating to the Soviet occupation. This resulted in a distorted picture of the conflict, with some of Poland's greatest tragedies and triumphs completely unrepresented. Pro-regime directors were particularly adept at editing their own works, creating films that were ideologically acceptable to the authorities. Andrzej Wajda, on the other hand, took particular pleasure in attempting to evade the eye of the censor, by using silence and metaphors. In *Kanal* Daisy and Korab look out of the sewer grate over to the far bank of the Vistula, where the audience knows the Red Army was camped, watching the Uprising play out. *Ashes and Diamonds* contains a number of subversive elements: 'Czerwone maki na Monte Cassino' ('The Red Poppies on Monte Cassino') is sung while Maciek and Andrzej are discussing their fallen former comrades and ultimately Maciek meets his end on a rubbish dump. 'The Red Poppies on Monte Cassino' is one of the best-known Polish military songs of the Second World War. It was composed on the eve of the Polish Army's capture of the German stronghold of Monte Cassino in Italy in May 1944. During the Stalinist period the song was banned as the government were trying to

⁵⁹ *ibid*

minimise the memory of the wartime Polish armed forces in the West.⁶⁰ In the case of both *Kanal*, and *Ashes and Diamonds*, pictures say more than words ever could, but also require a level of audience knowledge to be able to interpret them.

The Script and Film Assessment meeting minutes studied for this thesis tell an interesting story about the censorship of war films. During the discussion of a number of films there were concerns raised about them by the Ministry of Culture representatives and other party bureaucrats present. These were, at times, seriously ideological issues, or a belief that the movie could prove to be subversive. This will be discussed in the relevant chapters. Once the system of film units was developed, however, it was very unusual for a war film to be heavily edited, either at the script stage, or once there was a finished product. Kazimierz Kutz's *Nikt nie wola* (*Nobody Calling*) was shelved, but ultimately released, and while Aleksander Ford tried to prevent *Kanal* from being made, his opinion was largely ignored by the Script Assessment Commission.⁶¹ In relation to war films, therefore, censorship was not all encompassing and a number of films were released, unmodified, despite significant concerns. Where censorship was most effective in Poland, was in preventing key topics from being developed for the screen. It is vitally important to recognise that the regime was unable to exert a high level of control over those who were determined to defy them.

Literature and Scriptwriters

Polish cinema is renowned for its close bonds with national literature that began from the birth of the film industry. At the beginning of the twentieth century novels provided an abundance of patriotic social themes, not only for the stateless nation, but also for an emerging national cinema. By the interwar years adaptations of literary works were a popular choice, but they

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p.29

⁶¹ FN, A-214 Pos. 55 'Komisji Ocen Filmów *Kanał* (24 styczeń 1956)'

took on a new significance after the Second World War. Many of the authors whose novels and memoirs were adapted for the screen had also fought in the Second World War; therefore it was natural that they drew on their own experiences. Some, such as Wojciech Żukrowski and Jerzy Andrzejewski supported the regime, while others, like Jerzy Stefan Stawiński, became associated with directors like Munk and Wajda. Boleslaw Michałek argues that its connection to literature shaped cinema, and that while most national cinemas are related to literature, in Poland the tie was deeper and special.⁶²

Post World War Two Polish cinema stepped into the role previously played by literature. It was mostly concerned with social issues, covering two main themes: the individual versus society and the individual in the light of history. Problems of nationhood, the fate of the individual caught up in the historical process and choices, in the face of social crisis, were the traditional subjects. With few exceptions there was little space for lightness and comedy, thus cinema inherited this commitment to analysing the complex and painful experiences of the nation.⁶³ Inevitably the Second World War played a very significant role with writers, as well as filmmakers, as they too regarded it as the defining moment of modern Polish history and society as a whole.

In 1945 Film Polski was concerned about both the ideological content and artistic level of the screenplays as well as the lack of writers with experience. Screenplay politics were seen to be at the forefront of the problem. It was important to find valuable material for scenarios, while creating the opportunity to develop screenwriting as a new and interesting field of creative work. This was to be achieved by developing a wide circle of co-operation between writers, playwrights and journalists, all of whom would provide interesting themes and ideas concerning the realities of life. The problem, however, within the film industry was the lack

⁶² Michałek and Turaj, *The Modern Cinema*, p.50

⁶³ *ibid*

of established writers who would be able to guide those transforming the texts into a visual form. Often the complaint was that new writers were unable to think in images, lending their work too literary a feel; thus, at the beginning, scripts were often returned by Film Polski with numerous modifications. The burgeoning Polish film industry had high expectations of the literary world: without its active participation, the authorities believed that a revival would be impossible. What film took from literature was necessary for its existence.⁶⁴

It took some time for writers to become involved in cinema, and some early attempts at scriptwriting by leading authors left a nasty taste in the mouth. In 1945 Jerzy Andrzejewski and Czesław Miłosz, both leading lights in the literary scene, created a script based on the wartime memories of Władysław Szpilman. Film Polski, however, made a number of script changes, so much so that Miłosz removed his name from the screenplay.⁶⁵ The problem of finding writers to engage with film was one that required action, and between 1949 and 1951 there were screenplay units, that were designed to not only supply scripts, but also to invite writers to work together and launch competitions for screenplays.⁶⁶ They were not, however, successful and were disbanded after only two of the works they provided were made into films in 1951.⁶⁷ While the role of screenwriter did not really exist in the period 1945-1970 there were a number of authors who became synonymous with cinema, and their cause was helped by the literary directors of the units. They suggested adaptation of lesser known novels by renowned authors or of once famous novels which had been forgotten. The way the units were organised in Poland, however, granted almost all the status to the director, and it was they who most often commissioned new projects. A number of very successful collaborations between writer and director were made during the Gomułka era.

⁶⁴AAN, 366 10/1 (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki), Film Polski Biuletyn Informacyjny, 23 września, 1945

⁶⁵Tadeusz Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego 1894-2014*, (Kraków, 2015), p.156

⁶⁶Adamczak, 'Film Units in the People's Republic of Poland', p.259

⁶⁷ibid

Jerzy Stefan Stawiński became one of the most significant film writers of the Gomulka period, although he did not consider himself to be a scriptwriter. When interviewed in 2007 he stated that directors always came to him to request scripts, yet he wrote because of a personal need, rather than a professional obligation.⁶⁸ During the Second World War he was involved in the conflict on many fronts: firstly during the September campaign, then as part of the underground Home Army and finally during the Warsaw Uprising. On 27 September 1944 he led a platoon of soldiers through the sewers, from Mokotów to Śródmieście, before spending the rest of the conflict in a prisoner of war camp in Bavaria. His experiences became the key inspiration for his most famous scripts: *Kanal* (1957), directed by Andrzej Wajda, and *Eroica* (1957) directed by Andrzej Munk. At the Cannes Film Festival in 1957, where *Kanal* won a Special Jury Prize, Stawiński was amused by other filmmakers commending him for his imagination. As far as he was concerned, he had lived a real version of his actors' cinematic performances.⁶⁹ Stawiński was not the only author and scriptwriter whose works drew directly from his own experience. Józef Hen was a chronicler in his army division, using the people he encountered as inspiration for the script of Witold Lesiewicz's *Kwiecień* (*April*, 1961); he did not consider the dialogue to be invented.⁷⁰ One of Jerzy Passendorfer's favourite scriptwriters, Wojciech Żukrowski, wrote both the novel and script for *Skąpani w ogniu* (*Fire Bath*), a film about his own happenings and observations as an officer in a vehicle battalion.⁷¹ Tadeusz Hołuj, who was responsible for both the novel and the script of *Koniec naszego świata* (*The End of Our World*) had, like Jakubowska, been a prisoner in Auschwitz himself and a member of the Auschwitz Fighting Group. His ideas were taken from his own wartime encounters, coupled with

⁶⁸ 'Dziś w Cannes Obchody 50-lecia powstania *Kanalu*, do którego scenariusz napisał Jerzy Stefan Stawiński', *Dziennik*, (21 May 2006)

⁶⁹ *ibid*

⁷⁰ Bohdan Węsierski, 'Kwiecień', *Express Wieczorny*, (10 November 1961)

⁷¹ 'Spotkanie z twórcami filmu *Skąpani w ogniu*', *Trybuna Robotnicza*, (17 March 1964)

documentation that he gathered about the camp after the war.⁷² These stories had real significance to the writers and, in turn, the directors that chose to bring them to life onscreen.

Many directors developed long-term relationships with writers, and these collaborations were often between likeminded individuals. Wojciech Żukrowski and Roman Bratny, who were both very close to the nationalist section of the Party and stalwarts of the regime, frequently worked with Passendorfer. Stanisław Różewicz made films with both his brother Tadeusz and Jan Józef Szczepański. It is not surprising that directors continually went to authors with whom they had a successful and productive connection. This was not always the case however, and authors who were prominent members of the PZPR worked with directors who were not. Bohdan Czeszko and Jerzy Andrzejewski collaborated with Wajda; however, the modified works bore very little resemblance to the originals, and with emphasis on different areas to alter the message. Wajda stated, in an interview, that the *Pokolenie*, (*Generation*, 1954) that would be seen on-screen would be very different to the novel. Unlike ordinary film adaptations he suggested it would be a new, critical look at a work of literature through a film lens. The goal of these changes was to make everything more compact and simple.⁷³ While the movie retained the atmosphere and ideological sense of the novel, it lacked many of the threads.⁷⁴ Having directors who were members of the PZPR, however, worked to Wajda's advantage, as he had their full support, and they championed his work.

In 1962 *Film* magazine printed a debate over the complex dynamics between director and scriptwriter, attempting to answer the question of who was the real author of a film. Stawiński claimed that there was a problem with the rights of writers with regard to their films and suggested that the contribution of creators should be accepted, along with their individuality.

⁷² Tadeusz Hołuj, 'Jak powstawał *Koniec naszego świata*', *Film*, (5 April 1964)

⁷³ A.W. Wysocki, 'Za Kulisami *Pokolenia*', *Świat*, (9 January 1955)

⁷⁴ Zbigniew Zapert, 'Pokolenia', *Dziennik Bałtycki*, (5 February 1955).

Ford referred to the detrimental effect of exaggerating the role of the director and diminishing the part played by the author of the screenplay.⁷⁵ There were two schools of thought: the first suggested removing scriptwriters and simply equating writer with director, while the second advocated that writers should be more involved with film, reworking what they wanted to say for the screen. So there was a contest for fame between directors and writers, with the majority of writers feeling that their work was undervalued by critics and those involved in the financing of projects.⁷⁶ Generally speaking directors and scriptwriters worked together harmoniously, although Hołuj wrote that he did not always agree with Jakubowska when working on *The End of Our World*: this was not a disagreement about personal artistic ambitions, but one which resulted from the awareness and added pressure of the fact this was the last chance to depict Auschwitz on film.⁷⁷ Szczepański claimed that both *Westerplatte* (1967) and *Wolne miasto* (*Free City*, 1958) came from the imagination of Różewicz himself.⁷⁸ When it came to war films it was common for directors to commission scripts, so it stands to reason that they chose the themes and topics that appealed to them and it appears that the voice of writers often got lost. This may also, to some extent, explain why it's harder to find movies about the Second World War that conformed to the ideological expectations of the PZPR: directors simply did not ask for them.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explain the particular structure of the Polish film industry post 1945 and how it shaped the role of the director and screenwriter, while also defining the relationship between filmmakers and the state. The development of film units gave a real level of autonomy

⁷⁵ Krystyna Garbień, 'Mówi Aleksander Ford', *Film*, (11 November 1962)

⁷⁶ Krystyna Garbień and Stanisław Janicki, 'Czy możliwe jest pokojowe współistnienie literatury i filmu? Kto jest autorem filmu? Czy telewizja wywołała zmiany w filmie?', *Film*, (19 May 1963).

⁷⁷ Hołuj, 'Jak powstał koniec naszego świata'

⁷⁸ Hendrykowski, *Stanisław Różewicz*, p.147

to the industry, more so than any other countries of the Soviet bloc, with directors holding the greatest level of responsibility and the ability to choose with who they wished to work. Some of the artistic and literary directors of the film units would become extremely significant, not only thanks to their own careers, but also due to their role nurturing the talents of others. The units created a real community, providing guidance and inspiration to young film professionals, including at Script and Film Assessment Commissions. This level of protection was not seen in other cultural mediums. Within the units, artistic merit was more highly valued than ideological conformity, which set the tone for the entire film industry.

Decentralisation had a significant impact on the relationship between filmmakers and the organs of the state. The Central Committee of the PZPR was very far removed from the activities of the units, and while the KC was very effective in removing any reference to crimes committed by the Soviet Union from cinema, they were unsuccessful in attempts to make all directors present a unified image of the Second World War. With no clear and concise policy from the KC PZPR to pass down to the Ministry of Culture and the Main Office of Cinematography often, despite objections from party officials at Script and Film Assessment Commissions, movies were released unchanged. This was particularly the case post 1956. Despite film being considered to be a vitally important medium by the KC PZPR, as a means of propaganda and education, during this period they were not able to use it to its full potential.

Chapter 2: Communist directors and the Holocaust

The very first film in postwar Poland was about the conflict: filmmakers started as they meant to go on. *Zakazane piosenki* (*Forbidden Songs*, 1947), told the story of the occupation of Warsaw through some of the popular songs from the time. It, however, was criticised by the communist authorities, and was consequently remade. The two other war films made in the 1940s, however, were to have a significant impact on Polish cinema. *The Last Stage* and *Border Street*, were two of the first films not just in Poland, but the world, to refer to the mass murder of the Jews. This makes them the most important films of the 1940s. The Holocaust was to become a topic that was frequently referred to in Polish cinema.

Aleksander Ford and Wanda Jakubowska were both personally touched by the mass murder of the Jews. Ford lost the majority of his family and Jakubowska was an eyewitness to it. As well as their personal connection to the Holocaust, Ford and Jakubowska were both prewar communists, and were instrumental in the revival of the Polish film industry post 1945. These two factors meant that Jakubowska, and in particular Ford, faced something of a conflict when making their movies about the Holocaust, between a desire to present their own version of the truth, and ideology.

Introduction

A number of the directors working in the first decade after the war were committed communists and willingly followed the path set out by the government. Many had also been members of the Society for the Promotion of Film Art (Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Filmu Artystycznego, START), a small film movement, whose main goal was ‘the elevation of the level of film culture in Poland’, and its main work took the form of cultural activism, publishing, and

production.¹ For those who had been involved in START, their attitude was a logical progression of their prewar political beliefs and their struggle for a socially and politically committed cinema. Wanda Jakubowska was perhaps the greatest example of this: she remained a communist till she died in 1998. Jakubowska's political ideals led her to become part of a split within the filmmaking community that began in the mid-1950s, between those trained at the Łódź Film School, who believed in a genuine depiction of important national themes, and those, generally the older directors, who created their films on the model of Soviet epics. Both Ford and Jakubowska played a large role in the film industry in the immediate postwar years. They each headed a film unit in their first incarnation, and regularly participated in Script and Film Assessment Commission meetings

Between 1944 and 1947 culture was relatively liberal, certainly in comparison to later periods. Although cultural regulation began in 1944, and the GUKPPiW was established in 1946, before 1948 there was very little coordinated cultural policy; this included cinema.² Despite the nationalisation of film from 1945 to 1949, Film Polski did not produce a single movie that fully satisfied Marxist criticism; this included *The Last Stage* and *Border Street*. After the unification of the PPR and PPS in 1948 issues of filmmaking and the direction of its development were dealt with in the Central Committee of the PZPR on film. Up until this point there had been very little government involvement in the control and approval of screenplays and novels intended for production.³ The best example of changes that took place in 1948 is the case of *Forbidden Songs*, that was initially made and released with no comment or suggested changes from Film Polski. It was hugely popular with audiences, and more than 10.8 million people watched it between 1947 and 1950.⁴ In 1948, however, *Forbidden Songs*

¹ Skaff, *The Law of the Looking Glass*, p.144

² Fik, 'Kultura Polska', p.224

³ *ibid*

⁴ Haltof, *Polish Cinema: A History*, p.81

was edited and re-released to put a greater emphasis on the Red Army as the liberator of Poland, and the main ally of the postwar communist regime. It also put more emphasis on the brutality of the German occupation of Warsaw, and German brutality in general.

A number of Polish directors have attempted to deepen our understanding of the annihilation of the Jews and the way in which it was carried out by Nazi Germany and their assistants but only a few were as interested in the subject as Wanda Jakubowska and Aleksander Ford. Both had a personal stake in the topic: Jakubowska was a political prisoner at Auschwitz and Ford was a Jew who escaped to the Soviet Union after the German invasion. The Holocaust and the camp system were a constant presence in their work, with Jakubowska turning to the issue three times during her career with *The Last Stage*, *The End of our World* and *Zaproszenie (The Invitation, 1985)*. Jakubowska and Ford were among the first directors in the world to fictionalise the Holocaust and to this day Ford remains one of the only filmmakers to create a movie about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Their experiences, however, would come into conflict with their political beliefs, as they combined being ideologically correct, with presenting events the way they wanted to.

Wanda Jakubowska

Wanda Jakubowska is a rare example of a prewar filmmaker who maintained a career until the end of the 1980s. She was one of the world's first female directors and her 1948 film *The Last Stage* brought widespread international recognition to Polish cinema for the first time. Jakubowska held a lifelong commitment to the Communist Party and believed in its ideology until the end of her life, although Leon Bukowiecki claimed that she was always tolerant and friendly to those with differing opinions to hers.⁵ The socialist realist aesthetics that were characteristic of her work were her own decision and were typified by positive Russian

⁵ Leon Bukowiecki, 'Wanda Jakubowska 10 X 1907-25 II 1998', *Życie Warszawy*, (2 March 1998)

characters, and deep mistrust and dislike of Germans and a clear socialist message. Barbara Hollender described her as part of an older generation of directors who were not concerned with money or awards, but instead were driven by a true passion for the art of filmmaking.⁶

Biography

Wanda Jakubowska was born in Warsaw in 1907, then part of the Russian Empire. Her father trained as an engineer at the Technical University in Warsaw and her mother was a housewife who spoke French fluently, so Jakubowska came from an educated family. When the First World War broke out the family moved to Russia where her father was later promoted to the foreman at a steelworks thanks to his contribution to the Bolshevik Revolution. They would not return to Poland until 1923.⁷ After Jakubowska completed her education she tried journalism, attended a business college and studied at theatre school, before realising that film was her true passion. Eugeniusz Cękański, who at the time was studying Polish literature, was instrumental in her decision to take up a career in cinema. In 1930 they were introduced by one of Jakubowska's colleagues at the theatre school and after an initial meeting they created the idea for START. Members of START came from mostly upper middle-class families with left-wing tendencies. They promoted ambitious art cinema, through screenings, lectures and seminars, and considered themselves to be cultural educators, interested in changing the landscape of film production. For the followers of START, movies were more than just entertainment, they were 'united by the struggle to make films for the public good.'⁸ When START disbanded in 1935 Cękański, Jakubowska and Jerzy Zarzycki founded Stowarzyszenie Autorów Filmowych (Association of Film Authors, SAF). During this time her inspiration was not the Polish films of the interwar period, but instead Russian epics such as *Battleship*

⁶ Barbara Hollender, 'Wierna sobie', *Rzeczpospolita*, (27 February 1998)

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Marek Haltof, *Screening Auschwitz. Wanda Jakubowska's The Last Stage and the Politics of Commemoration* (Evanston, 2015), p.14

Potemkin and *Storm over Asia*.⁹ Her first film, *Nad Niemnem* (*On the Niemen*, 1939) adapted from the novel by Eliza Orzeszkowa that made reference to the January Uprising, was finished shortly before the war. It was due to premiere on 5 September 1939 but that never took place. The negatives were hidden during the war by three young men, but none of them survived, and the only full copy was destroyed during the conflict.¹⁰

After the September Campaign Jakubowska became an activist in the Warsaw section of the Worker's Party of Polish Socialists (Robotnicza Partia Polska Socjalistów, RPPS). She was arrested on October 30 1942 and sent to Pawiak prison and from her cell she watched the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising unfold.¹¹ In an interview just before she died, Jakubowska recalled: 'through the window we could see the burning flames. There were high temperatures in the prison cell and a terrible stench'.¹² She was transported to Auschwitz on April 28 1943 and was given the number 43513. For six weeks she was housed in Block 9 at Auschwitz I. The camp resistance knew she was being sent to Auschwitz and so Jakubowska was immediately contacted by socialist and communist prisoners. She registered herself as a photographer and was transferred to work at Rajsko, an auxiliary camp two miles from Birkenau.¹³ Rajsko was created in 1940, under the management of SS Obersturmbannführer Dr Joachim Caesar, who began recruiting women with appropriate science degrees, from a number of different nationalities. Although Jakubowska worked at Rajsko, she was housed at Birkenau. In June 1943 she was moved permanently to Rajsko, where living conditions were much better due to the importance their research had for the war effort. Prisoners in Rajsko were able to have contact with others in Auschwitz-Birkenau and there are several testimonies to Jakubowska's involvement in the camp's resistance, as a member of the Auschwitz Combat Group (Grupa

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, p.55

¹¹ Haltof, *Screening Auschwitz*, p.17

¹² Anna Zięba, 'Podobóz Rajsko', *Zeszyty Oświęcimskie* 9, (1965), p.82

¹³ *ibid.* p.85

Bojowa Oświęcim).¹⁴ She was a liaison between the women and men's underground movement in the central camp. In October 1944, suspected of political activities, Jakubowska was moved back to Birkenau. She was then moved to Auschwitz I, where thanks to the Auschwitz Fighting Group she was hidden in the women's camp. In January 1945 she went on a death march with 25,000 other prisoners to Wodzisław Śląski, and from there she was moved to Ravensbrück, and was eventually liberated.¹⁵ For Jakubowska the idea of making a film showing the horrors of Auschwitz occurred while she was a prisoner in the camp. She often claimed that this sense of purpose and the desire to educate the world about Nazi crimes was the reason she was able to survive.¹⁶ These experiences were particularly significant because she was the only film director who had survived internment in any form of camp, which gave her a unique perspective. It was difficult for her to be criticised for exaggerating, or not capturing the mood accurately by reviewers and Party officials who had no experience of Auschwitz themselves. All the women in Auschwitz knew she was a director and so they shared their stories with her.¹⁷ Following liberation, she went on the road and talked to other inmates about their experiences, gathering a large amount of oral documentation that formed the basis of the script for *The Last Stage*.

The Last Stage

The Last Stage holds a significant place in the history of cinema as one of the first films in the world to cover the topics of concentration camps and the Holocaust. It put Jakubowska's own memories together with those of fellow inmates to paint an almost documentary style picture of the women's camp at Birkenau. Some of its sequences looked so authentic that later

¹⁴ Talarczyk-Gubała, *Wanda Jakubowska. Od nowa*, p.160

¹⁵ Haltof, *Screening Auschwitz*, p.17

¹⁶ Barbara Hollender, 'Wierna sobie', *Rzeczpospolita*, (27 February 1998)

¹⁷ Stuart Liebman 'I was Always in the Epicentre of Whatever Was Going on...' An Interview with Wanda Jakubowska, *Slavic and East European Performance*, (vol 17, no. 3 Autumn 1997), p.20.

directors took them as actual documentary footage from Auschwitz and put them into their own films and as recently as 1993 Steven Spielberg used it as a reference for *Schindler's List*.¹⁸ *The Last Stage* premiered in Poland on 28 March 1948 and was released all around the world, introducing international audiences to Polish cinema for the first time. It had more than 7.8 million viewers, and was number three on the list of biggest box office successes in Poland.¹⁹

The Last Stage is made up of miniature stories that each showed a different aspect of life in Birkenau. At the centre of the plot are two women who the audience follow from their arrival at the camp. The first is Helena, a Polish prisoner, who gives birth in the camp and becomes a leading figure in the resistance after her baby is killed by the SS. The second is Marta, a Polish Jew who arrives in the middle of the night on a large transport. She speaks several languages and so the camp commandant appoints her as a translator. Consequently, Marta becomes a pivotal figure because she is the only person who is able to communicate with everyone. A large portion of the scenes take place in the hospital block, which becomes a focal point for the resistance movement. Eugenia the Russian doctor does her best to administer healthcare with limited supplies and when the women learn that an international commission is coming to monitor conditions in Auschwitz, Eugenia learns some key phrases in German, to tell the observers the truth. Her claims are dismissed by the SS guards. She is tortured by the commandants to find out who taught her the German but she refuses to tell them and so is killed. Eugenia is replaced by a Polish woman, who claims to be a doctor but is in fact a pharmacist's wife. Rather than distributing the medicine she gives it to the kapos in return for luxury items. The film ends with Marta under the gallows: she has been sentenced to death for smuggling information to an outside resistance movement. With her wrists cut and her hands bleeding she pushes the commandant and proceeds to make a speech against fascism. She dies

¹⁸ Tadeusz Lubelski, Różna od wyobrażeń, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, (28 February-1 March 1998)

¹⁹ *ibid*

in Helena's arms, uttering a request that Auschwitz never be allowed to be repeated, as Allied planes fly overhead.

The Last Stage was released at a time when neither official nor social memory of the Holocaust had been codified: indeed the term was not in use yet. Between 1944 and 1949 there were numerous, and often competing narratives. The subject was discussed in media, academic studies, memoirs and fiction. Zofia Wójcicka argues that the high level of public discourse about the Holocaust during this period was because, until the 1940's, Jewish Holocaust survivors constituted a small, but statistically significant proportion of Polish society, and were represented by various political parties and social and cultural organisations.²⁰ As Michael C. Steinlauf notes, the upsurge in Jewish activity in the late 1940's was supported by the government, because at the time the goodwill of the West, and western Jews, was still important to the new Polish state.²¹ Paradoxically, however, this dialogue took place against a background of an intense period of anti-Jewish violence. Between 1944 and 1947, 1,500 to 2,000 Jews were murdered, mostly individually, or in small groups, but a significant number were killed in pogroms that took place in a dozen towns and cities, most notably in Kielce in 1946. Despite the early commemoration, and debate about the Holocaust, over time, as Stalinism progressed, an ideological image of the Second World War emerged, in which martyrdom of the Polish nation was highlighted, stressing that it had suffered the greatest losses. Any themes that did not fit were ignored and the Holocaust was no longer discussed.

Immediately after the war it was not certain that Auschwitz-Birkenau would become the central place of remembrance of the Holocaust. Initially it seemed that it would be Majdanek as it was liberated first; however, it was soon overshadowed by Auschwitz-Birkenau.²² There were a

²⁰ *ibid.* p.92

²¹ Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, p.48

²² Wójcicka, *Arrested Mourning*, p.168

number of reasons why this was the case. Firstly, it was scale of Auschwitz, the largest Nazi concentration and extermination camp in Europe, both in terms of prisoners and victims. There were also 70-75,000 Polish victims, which meant that besides Warsaw it was the largest site of Polish death. Another key factor was the international character of the camp, with Jews and others from a number of different countries. Not only that, but Auschwitz was one of the few camps where there was an organised, and to some extent multinational resistance movement, in which Left wing and communist activists played a critical role, which made Auschwitz convenient propaganda for the new authorities.²³ Finally, a relatively high number of people survived the camp, amongst them Polish political prisoners. This community came to be dominated by left wing activists, including Józef Cyrankiewicz, who was to become prime minister.²⁴ Former Auschwitz inmates managed to secure many of the top posts in the Polish Union of Political Prisoners, (Polski Związek byłych Więźniów Politycznych, PZbWP) and formed a lobby that actively sought to have the camp commemorated.²⁵

The development of the state museum at Auschwitz almost immediately marginalised Holocaust survivors, although it was not initially intentional. Birkenau, the main symbol of wartime martyrdom for Jews, was almost entirely abandoned, in favour of Auschwitz I, which had the greatest significance for Polish political prisoners, as it housed Block 11, one of the Poles' 'holiest relics'.²⁶ The failure to commemorate Birkenau not only side-lined the theme of the Holocaust, but also ignored the fate of women. Jakubowska's film, however, made sure that the female experience in the camp was not overlooked. At Auschwitz-Birkenau any mention of the Jews on the permanent memorials was conspicuously absent until 1994.²⁷ The

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ *ibid.* p.169

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ *ibid.* p.177

²⁷ Marek Kucia, 'Auschwitz in the Perception of Contemporary Poles', *Polish Sociological Review*, (No. 190, 2015), p.196.

original plaque under the Birkenau monument read: ‘The place of martyrdom and death of four million victims murdered by the Hitlerite perpetrators of genocide 1940-45’.²⁸ On 2 July 1947 the Polish Parliament passed an Act on the commemoration of the martyrdom of the Polish Nation and other Nations in Oświęcim (Ustawa z dnia 2 lipca 1947 r.o upamiętnieniu męczeństwa Narodu Polskiego i innych Narodów w Oświęcimiu). The notable exclusion in the wording of the Act is any reference to the Jews.²⁹ The murdered Polish Jews were incorporated into Polish collective memory of its citizens killed in concentration camps. There is still no perpetual monument to the Jewish victims of Auschwitz; only items that people bring and leave at the camp. *The Last Stage* by no means erased the Holocaust, and this was not Jakubowska’s intention, but she did contribute to the Jewish experience being subsumed into a wider narrative of martyrdom and resistance.

Producing a film about Auschwitz was a personal duty for Jakubowska. As she stated herself: ‘I promised over three hundred women working in the same work company that if I get out of the camp, the film will be made.’³⁰ When making *The Last Stage*, Jakubowska wanted not just to show the horrors of the camp, but also that they were an inevitable consequence of fascist ideology. Her purpose in focusing on the left-wing resistance was two-fold: firstly, it reflected Jakubowska’s own role and experience, and secondly, it highlighted her view that only communism could protect against fascism. Jakubowska wrote the script for *The Last Stage* with Gerda Schneider, a German communist, who was first imprisoned by the Nazi regime in 1933. She too was involved in the resistance movement, but had a more chequered camp past. While a number of prisoners testified that Schneider saved the lives of others with her actions, others claimed her lengthy incarceration changed her, and that she regularly beat other inmates

²⁸ Marek Kucia, *Auschwitz Jako Fakt Społeczny. Historia, współczesność i świadomość społeczna KL Auschwitz w Polsce* (Krakow, 2005), p.33

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Haltof, *Screening Auschwitz*, p.29

and was sent to Birkenau as punishment.³¹ After liberation Schneider and Jakubowska spent months in the Soviet zone of Berlin and used the time to look for materials for their film: this included not only collating stories from fellow prisoners, but also interviews with former guards. This all indicates the level of commitment that both women had to presenting Auschwitz as it was experienced by so many. Many of Jakubowska's characters were grounded in reality, created around people she met or heard about and a number of the extras in the film had been prisoners themselves. Marta is based on a Belgian Jew who decided to escape with a Frenchman. Following their capture, she was hanged in the square. This happened before Jakubowska arrived at Auschwitz, but the story had already become legend. Béla Balázs argues that *The Last Stage* was nourished by the fact that it came from lived encounters, and not second hand memories.³²

Not only was Jakubowska inspired by true events; she also used the most authentic location possible. Although Jakubowska was wary about filming at Birkenau she ultimately decided it was the right decision, but was shocked that most of the barracks had been torn down by looters so the production crew had to build new ones. Using Birkenau rather than a recreated set provides for some very evocative images and makes the location instantly recognisable. The scenes in *The Last Stage* which depict arrivals at the camp show amazing restraint and are very matter of fact. For all the talk of validity Jakubowska did have to make concessions to make *The Last Stage* more commercially viable and as a consequence, viewers were spared some of the real horrors of Auschwitz.³³ There are no human skeletons; no piles of dead bodies; no lice or rats and no evidence of the terrible diseases that plagued the inmates, as it was felt that this

³¹ Wanda Jakubowska, 'Kilka wspomnień o powstaniu scenariusza (na marginesie filmu *Ostatni etap*), *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 1 (1951), p.42

³² Stuart Liebman 'Pages from the Past Wanda Jakubowska's *The Last Stage*', *Slavic and East European Performance*, (vol. 16, no.3, Autumn 1996), p.62

³³ Stuart Liebman 'I was Always in the Epicentre of Whatever Was Going on...', p.29

would have been too much for postwar audiences. Even in this, however, Jakubowska set a precedent, as the Polish films set in the camps which followed took a similar approach

The Last Stage is widely hailed as the mother of all Holocaust films, providing a model for numerous, ideologically orientated representations of victimhood and heroism under Nazi rule.³⁴ The plight of the Jews, however, happens in the background while the focus of the story is the solidarity between the women in the camp. There are very few explicit references to the murder of the Jews: Jakubowska never shows any killing onscreen and they are rarely spoken about. Instead, Jakubowska uses images that are clear allusions to the main function of Birkenau and relies on the viewer's knowledge of the mechanisms of the death camps. The scenes of transports arriving obviously contained Jews from the ghettos; Jakubowska shows Jewish women marching silently towards death and children crying for their parents. Jakubowska claimed that this representation was 'my moral duty' as only the Jews went straight from the transports to the gas chambers.³⁵ Tadeusz Hołuj, on reading the screenplay, wanted Jakubowska to avoid portraying the transports as Jews but instead as human beings, in order not to suggest that what happened in Auschwitz mainly concerned the Jews.³⁶ She categorically rejected this proposal. It is hardly a surprise that Jakubowska's film focused on political prisoners rather than Jews, as it followed Jakubowska and Schneider's own experiences, but they were by no means entirely erased from the film's narrative. After all, her central character was Jewish, which some Polish camp survivors did not approve of.³⁷ This conflict was very characteristic of the period in which the film was made and the two groups of survivors, Jews and political prisoners, who were fighting to have their voices heard in debates over memory.

³⁴ Marek Haltof, *Polish Film and The Holocaust*, p.28

³⁵ Liebman 'I was Always in the Epicentre of Whatever Was Going on', p.29

³⁶ FN, S-5934 'Scenopis filmu fabularnego *Ostatni etap*'

³⁷ Liebman 'I was Always in the Epicentre of Whatever Was Going on', p.29

As previously stated, *The Last Stage* was intended to be ideologically correct and as such it contained a number of themes and images which corresponded with the image of the war and the concentration camps that the fledgling PZPR was trying to construct. There are a number of very positive Russian characters, most notably Eugenia who sacrifices herself to expose the truth of Auschwitz. There is a clear suggestion that those who had completed a Marxist education were the good guys and anyone who did not work with them were the bad guys, still stuck in a prewar bourgeois mentality. Jakubowska emphasises the role of the Red Army of the communist resistance in the liberation, both within and outside the camp. Jakubowska shows the women in Birkenau working together and uniting in a common goal to fight fascism, not unlike the international communist movement. *The Last Stage* perpetuates the attitude of the Communist Party towards the memory of the Jews, although Jakubowska never stated whether this was intentional. The characters are distinguished by nationality above all else and there are a number of languages being spoken, although no Yiddish. The group of French Jews sing the Marseillaise on their way to the gas chambers, not Jewish songs. Jakubowska makes no distinction between the death camp at Birkenau and the concentration camp Auschwitz I, with Marta interned at the main camp rather than with her fellow Jews. This may have been because explaining the difference would have been too cumbersome. There were also some Jews imprisoned at Auschwitz I and some gentiles in Birkenau, for example the French author Charlotte Delbo and Jakubowska herself.³⁸

It is clear, however, that these ideas were not forced on Jakubowska. She always maintained that *The Last Stage* was independent and not Soviet propaganda.³⁹ Jakubowska did, however, agree to make some concessions and incorporated suggestions made by the artistic board that discussed the screenplay in 1946 and 1947. The experts in the meeting asked for more political

³⁸ Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, (London, 1995).

³⁹ Liebman 'I was Always in the Epicentre of Whatever Was Going on...', p.29

impact and a clear message relating to the cause of the resistance.⁴⁰ Consequently, Jakubowska put more emphasis on the activities of the resistance movement and their relationship with underground fighters outside the camp. She elevated the status of Eugenia, the Russian doctor, to dilute the impact of Jewish martyrdom, and cut out most of Helena's story, which introduced her life before she was imprisoned.⁴¹

The road to making *The Last Stage* was not an easy one. It was Jakubowska's determination to see the film made, and her powerful connections, that saw it come to fruition. The authorities in Poland were afraid of similarities between Soviet and German camps and so preferred not to touch such a sensitive topic. Film Polski bought the script but there was subsequently a six-month conflict about putting it into production. Jerzy Bossak said that it needed a male director like Ford to make the best of the project.⁴² At several points the script was subjected to substantive criticism and was attacked in general, destructive terms. The Film Polski artistic board wanted Jakubowska to collaborate with Georg C. Klaren, the chief screenplay editor at DEFA in East Berlin to 'facilitate' Jakubowska's writing skills, both on a dramaturgical and ideological level, but she refused to have any consultants forced on her.⁴³ Jakubowska decided to go over all of their heads and went to Moscow to get permission for the film to be made. She met with Mikhail Kalatozov, the deputy Minister of Cinematography, who was responsible for Soviet cinema, who in turn sent the script to the Minister of Culture Zhdanov. He showed it to Stalin himself, who was allegedly moved to tears.⁴⁴ Using significant allies was a tactic that would be used by later directors. Despite this Soviet approval, Jakubowska met conflict at every stage: she had to fight to be able to rebuild barracks at Birkenau and she was refused permission to employ German extras. Despite their initial misgivings, *The Last Stage* was well

⁴⁰ FN S-364 *Ostatni etap*, 'Wyciąg z protokołu nr.11 z posiedzenia Rady Artystycznej w dniu 24.IV.1947'

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² Alina Madej, 'Jak powstawał *Ostatni etap*', *Kino*, (May 1995)

⁴³ *Ostatni etap*, 'Wyciąg z protokołu nr.11 z posiedzenia Rady Artystycznej w dniu 24.IV.1947'

⁴⁴ Liebman 'I was Always in the Epicentre of Whatever Was Going on', p.32

received by the Politburo and Jakubowska always claimed that when Bierut saw it for the first time he cried and hugged her, telling her it was a wonderful film. Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz embraced *The Last Stage*: he had been a political prisoner in Auschwitz himself, and along with Jakubowska supported the idea of propagating the version of history which stated that only the communists could liberate Auschwitz, and keep Poland safe from fascism.⁴⁵

By 1947 there was already a wealth of camp literature, and from the outset Polish postwar fiction was dominated by what Zofia Wóycicka describes as a ‘martyrological trend’, which suited the Polish romantic tradition of the Christ of Nations and with certain modifications also agreed with the policy of Polish communists.⁴⁶ Many of the novels from the period were written by those who had first-hand experience of the Nazi camps and the Holocaust, including Tadeusz Borowski, Zofia Nałkowska and Jerzy Andrzejewski.⁴⁷ The premiere of *The Last Stage* coincided with the publication of Borowski’s *Pożegnania z Marią (Farewell to Maria)*, but their visions of the camp were completely opposed.⁴⁸ Borowski was determined to scratch at unhealed wounds and show the reactions of a man who had been subjected to the pressures of the camp system and undergone gradual depravation. His semi-autobiographical characters had lost all sense of humanity as they struggled to survive at all costs, sometimes at the expense of their fellow prisoners. Jakubowska by contrast set herself a different goal than penetrating the psychological and moral truth of Auschwitz. Instead she took into account the state of the postwar world and gave a film that provided hope and faith in mankind, praising the nobility

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ Wóycicka, *Arrested Mourning*, p.118

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p.14

⁴⁸ The book is more commonly known in English as *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*.

and heroism of the women in Birkenau by showing how they worked together even in the most difficult of times. This goes against the accounts from other survivors, Borowski included, who argued that it was difficult for there to be widespread co-operation between the different nationalities in the camp, because of the language barrier that existed between them. *The Last Stage*, however, slotted into place with the huge canon of Holocaust literature that emerged in the first half decade after the Second World War.

The Last Stage was very well received by domestic audiences and was released in nearly fifty countries worldwide to huge success: tickets in Prague sold out and the film received an ovation at the premiere. It was quite clear from early on that *The Last Stage* was going to be the first Polish film to garner international recognition and put Polish cinema on the map. The greatest praise was reserved for the way in which Jakubowska portrayed Auschwitz-Birkenau: the powerful visions of the working of a German death camp, the immensity of the suffering and the enormity of crimes, the like of which had not been seen before. It had enormous social resonance: its directness and authenticity shocked people, picking at unhealed wounds and reminding audiences that they had been aware of what was going on in the camps during the war.⁴⁹ Several former prisoners applauded *The Last Stage* for being ‘a tribute to the dead and the murdered in the camp, precisely because the film does not expose passivity before death...but shows a noble attitude by celebrating struggle not martyrdom.’⁵⁰ There was some criticism levelled at *The Last Stage* at the time of its release but it was rare: Maria Dąbrowska claimed that it was anti-Polish, which was the most commonly expressed complaint, particularly from survivors.⁵¹ Many of the Polish characters were portrayed in a negative light: the brutal and primitive Kapos and the pharmacist’s wife who pretended to be a doctor. Unsurprisingly, *The Last Stage*’s political message was praised rather than censured in the

⁴⁹ Andrzej Dzięgielewski, ‘Ostatni etap’, *Dziennik Ludowy*, (17-18 February 1984)

⁵⁰ Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust*, p.41.

⁵¹ Maria Dąbrowska, *Dziennik powojenne, 1945-1965* (Warsaw, 1996), p.248

press at the time, but its very obvious propaganda elements are the biggest complaint that has been made about *The Last Stage* in the postcommunist era. Marek Haltof argues: ‘ideologically this was pro-Soviet kitsch, not about the tragedy of the Polish nation and not about Auschwitz’.⁵² This is largely true as *The Last Stage*’s overarching message is one of the triumph of communism over fascism, and the merits of international solidarity, rather than the enormity of the suffering felt by those incarcerated and murdered by the Nazis.⁵³

The creation of *The Last Stage* started the debate about whether it was appropriate to attempt a visual representation of the Holocaust, and if it was ever possible to present a true picture of life in the death camps. It was an issue that weighed heavily on the minds of European directors and provides some explanation as to why Jakubowska’s film was a rare example of the period. Before the release of *The Last Stage* survivors argued that it was impossible to show the living conditions and relationships that prevailed in Auschwitz onscreen and it would be difficult for viewers to comprehend the realities of the systematic mass murder.⁵⁴ In spite of this there was also a widespread view amongst those who experienced the camps that it was important to educate the world about the horrors of fascism, particularly people in countries that had not suffered under occupation. Jakubowska encountered some of the aesthetic problems that come with making a Holocaust film and the difficult balance between creating an authentic picture of the conditions and still making it commercially viable.⁵⁵ Despite its obvious Marxist bias *The Last Stage* remains an important film about Auschwitz, not just because it was the first attempt at portraying the Holocaust onscreen but because it became a prototype for future cinematic narratives. This was largely due to the personal experiences and testimonies that made. Jakubowska’s film almost documentary-like in its representation of life in the camp.

⁵² Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust*, p.36.

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ Madej, *Kino, władza, publiczność*, p.170

⁵⁵ Jakubowska, ‘Kilka wspomnień o powstaniu scenariusza’

The End of Our World

In 1963 Wanda Jakubowska returned to Auschwitz to film *The End of Our World*, adapted from Tadeusz Hołuj's novel. A lot had changed, both in the Polish political climate and in the memory of Auschwitz, since *The Last Stage* was released fifteen years earlier. *The End of Our World* in many ways offered a very similar projection of the camp to *The Last Stage*, but it was also a picture that reflected the time that had elapsed since the end of the war. Although Jakubowska's film won a Polish state award it was barely noticed by audiences and critics in Poland. It is virtually unknown in the West and is largely left out of discussions about Holocaust cinema. Despite this, Wanda Jakubowska considered *The End of our World* to be her greatest work, and it is arguably the most accomplished of all her camp films.

The End of Our World tells the main thrust of the story through flashbacks. The film opens with two tourists from America who are trying to arrange transport to the Auschwitz Museum. They meet a Polish man, Henryk, who agrees to drive them to the camp and embarks on his own journey as he remembers his time as a political prisoner at Auschwitz. Immediately one of the American tourists is shown to be insensitive and unaware of the real horrors that took place. The other visitor, Julia, turns out to have lost her father in the camp. Although Henryk is identified as being a communist, he was not deported for his political affiliations, but instead for an act of civic courage. He immediately becomes a *Muselmann* and is condemned to die, but is saved by some fellow prisoners who help him by exchanging his identity with someone who is already dead. Henryk's wife Maryjka is told he is dead, meanwhile Henryk becomes a guinea pig for the SS Doctor Wirth and somehow survives typhus. From this moment Henryk goes from a grotesque character to one who is beginning to regain his human integrity. Months later, Maryjka is also sent to Auschwitz. Henryk reluctantly becomes a Block Elder and uses

this position against criminal kapos, traitors and others who do not follow him. Maryjka does not want to help the resistance, so instead she helps to look after some Roma children and ultimately goes to the gas chambers with them. The Polish leaders of the resistance, including Henryk's friend Samek, a Jewish communist, teach the *Sonderkommando* how to fight and they all rise up against the camp guards. Samek dies and Henryk is confronted by Dr Wirth, who in the end does not kill Henryk, but himself. In the closing images the viewer sees Henryk at Auschwitz in the present. Julia runs back to ask Henryk about her father: she explains that he was reportedly killed during fighting at Auschwitz. Both the audience and Henryk are left with the knowledge that it was Samek.

The End of Our World was released at a very different time to *The Last Stage*. It was in the early 1960s that Auschwitz became widely known in the West as the site of the mass murder of the Jews. *The End of Our World* was made after the capture of Adolf Eichmann and his trial and execution in Jerusalem. The film also overlapped with the much-publicised Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial of twenty-two SS camp guards that went on from 1963 to 1965. For the rest of the world, the meaning of Auschwitz had changed. It was no longer simply an East-Central European emblem of Nazi atrocities that was hidden behind the Iron Curtain and used for propaganda purposes; instead Auschwitz garnered international recognition as the symbol of the Holocaust. Although Poland and West Germany had no official diplomatic relations, Polish authorities helped with the Frankfurt investigation: they allowed the German judge and other officials to inspect the site of the concentration camp at Auschwitz. Films like Konrad Wolf's *Sterne (Stars, 1958)* and Gille Pontecorvo's *Kapo (1960)* had developed cinematic strategies to turn the camps and deportations into romantic and melodramatic stories where they slightly blurred the lines between perpetrator and victim to discuss moral ambiguity and political concern. A decline in the censorship efficiency in other parts of East-Central Europe, particularly Czechoslovakia and Hungary meant films about the murder of Jews were useful

vehicles to express criticism of totalitarian systems.⁵⁶ In Poland, Munk's *The Passenger* was released in 1963, which also looked at life in Auschwitz through a series of flashbacks. Jakubowska's work was no longer unique as it had been in 1948.

The End of our World was adapted from the novel of the same name by Tadeusz Hołuj, who wrote the script with input from Jakubowska. As with *The Last Stage*, Jakubowska chose to work with fellow Auschwitz survivors. Hołuj was sent to Auschwitz on 4 September 1942 for his involvement in the Union of Armed Struggle (Związek Walki Zbrojnej, ZWZ). At the end of the war Hołuj joined the PPR, so he also shared Jakubowska's political beliefs.⁵⁷ Hołuj and Jakubowska met in the waiting room for the dentist in Auschwitz I to pass on some medication and assess the situation of resistance groups. When she told Hołuj that she wanted to film his story the meeting came back to him.⁵⁸ *The End of Our World* was one of Hołuj's several returns to his own experiences in Auschwitz. Jakubowska and Hołuj were not the only former Auschwitz inmates who worked on the project: the assistant to the camera operator Wiesław Kielar and costume designer Marian Kołodziej came to Auschwitz in 1940 with the first transport of Polish political prisoners and had the camp numbers 290 and 432 respectively. Kołodziej survived Auschwitz by assuming the name of a previously deceased prisoner, which may have had an influence on the story presented by Jakubowska.⁵⁹ Grouping together so many people with first-hand experience meant that once again Jakubowska and her team considered making an authentic picture their highest priority. She explicitly included photographs of the ramps and the birch wood close to the crematoria in Birkenau that were taken by the SS, and a few pictures taken by a Jewish member of the resistance in Birkenau. In the long sequence where the viewer sees the arrival of the Hungarian Jews, there is an SS

⁵⁶ Hanno Loewy, 'The mother of all Holocaust films? Wanda Jakubowska's Auschwitz trilogy', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, (24 February 2004), p.190.

⁵⁷ Hołuj, 'Jak powstawał *Koniec naszego świata*'

⁵⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁹ Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust*, p.52n.78

officer taking pictures from the tower and Samek is often seen with a hidden camera. We see what the SS photographed: Orthodox Jews, mothers and children at the ramp, the *Sonderkommando* burning bodies and blurred images of naked women on the way to the gas chambers. It would have been difficult for Jakubowska to film scenes showing these events in a way that was as authentic as the real photos, which was why Jakubowska chose to use them. Samek's story was partially based on that of David Szmulewski. Szmulewski fought in Spain, and in the 1960s, he was the person considered to be responsible for taking the *Sonderkommando* pictures that attempted to document the crimes at Auschwitz.⁶⁰

The End of Our World showed a director who had further developed her ideas and reflections on Auschwitz in the years since the end of the war and the release of *The Last Stage*. Being further removed in time from war meant that Jakubowska was able to show Auschwitz in a more brutal way than she had in *The Last Stage*. She shows regular beatings of the prisoners, random shootings, and a more detailed vision of the arrival of transports and mechanics of mass murder. The border between the criminal and political kapos is blurred, along with the distinction between Nazis and their victims. *The End of Our World* has a greater variety of characters that are less one-dimensional than those in *The Last Stage*. They are driven by more than just their political beliefs: once Henryk survives, he has a strong will to make it out of the camp and tell the world about the atrocities committed there, not unlike Jakubowska herself. The opening of *The End of Our World* is more reminiscent of Borowski's representation of Auschwitz. The arriving transports are even more disturbing and grotesque than they were in *The Last Stage* and the process of mass killing is shown in detail, as a daily routine. Many of Borowski's stories are told from the perspective of a kapo, someone who falls somewhere between a henchman and a victim. Henryk comes under a similar category, although his morality and ethics are never seriously questioned, even though Jakubowska shows Henryk

⁶⁰ Loewy, 'The Mother of all Holocaust films?', p.187

turning a blind eye to other political prisoners killing a fellow inmate, who tried to blackmail him.

Just like in *The Last Stage* the impact of *The End of Our World* is somewhat dulled by the obvious bias towards communist ideology, making it a very highly politicised film. Jakubowska's portrayal of the American protagonist, reducing him to an almost cartoon-like character, is reminiscent of anti-Western propaganda. As Ewa Mazierska states, 'he serves to expose western consumerism, selfishness and moral vacuity and contrast it with more serious and ascetic attitudes of Poles.'⁶¹ Jakubowska also turns the story of the *Sonderkommando* revolt on its head by suggesting it was the Polish political prisoners that instigated the uprising when, in fact, it was the Jewish *Sonderkommando* who urged for the revolt to destroy the killing capacity of the gas chambers through the summer of 1944. The 'heroic version' of the Auschwitz resistance was one that was strongly advocated by both Jakubowska and Hołuj for whom 'the camp had fought and won the battle: Auschwitz was not just about martyrdom, but the struggle as well.'⁶² Hołuj defended the way in which they represented the camp by claiming that the issue of the camp resistance was well exhibited in the film, faithfully sticking to the truth, although sometimes not always keeping in line with fixed ideas about the camp. He admitted that the *Sonderkommando* uprising was difficult to show because there were no witnesses, although documents from the rubble of the crematoria confirmed the process of preparing the revolt. Hołuj claimed that this framework was needed to link the first scene of Henryk helping a Polish mother with the scene where he assists those who 'fight alone.'⁶³ The symbolic image of a communist Pole helping Jewish insurgents in their suicidal fight was a

⁶¹ *ibid*

⁶² Hołuj, 'Jak powstawał *Koniec naszego świata*'

⁶³ *ibid*

distortion of the historical reality, but it was the image that both the filmmakers, and the authorities, wanted to preserve.

Putting aside the communist ideology that very obviously binds the two films together, there are other similarities between *The Last Stage* and *The End of Our World*. They each put a very clear emphasis on the main characters slowly becoming involved in the camp resistance and ultimately becoming an integral part. In both films it is the political prisoners who make up the largest group in the resistance. Both stories have elements of solidarity between the inmates and place the focus of the drama not on death, but on how people fought to survive. They also each demonstrate the truly international character of the inmates at Auschwitz, making it even more pronounced in *The End of Our World* where the absence of a translator shows how difficult it truly was for people of different nationalities to communicate. Stylistically the images in *The End of Our World* are very similar to those developed in *The Last Stage*: in both Jakubowska cuts from a scene showing the arrival of Jewish transports to a long shot of smoke over the crematoria. There is also a suggestion in both films that despite efforts to educate people about Auschwitz, it can never truly be understood unless someone has a personal connection to it. This is made particularly clear in *The End of Our World* by using the American tourist, who just cannot comprehend what took place, while Henryk and Julia share a bond that comes from their mutual understanding. The problem with *The End of Our World*, however, is that it does not advance our understanding of the Holocaust any further than *The Last Stage*, as they both shared the goal of portraying an accurate picture of life in Auschwitz, and made no real attempts to do anything more.

Piotr Zwierzchowski draws inevitable comparisons between *The End of Our World* and *The Passenger*, which were released within a year of one other and followed a similar format. Zwierzchowski argues that the two films are the antithesis of each other as they come to two very different conclusions about the nature of evil and its relationship to totalitarianism. Munk

steps away from what Zwierzchowski describes as ‘illustrative realism’ and presents the idea that the existence of evil is present in every man by looking at the relationship between victim and perpetrator.⁶⁴ Jakubowska, on the other hand, presents the officially sanctioned moral vision of the camp, that all the evil in the world was a result of the existence of fascism and it did not come from ordinary people. Consequently, *The End of Our World* has a primarily political and historical dimension, but not a moral one like *The Passenger*.⁶⁵ *The End of Our World* does, however, make one small foray into the psychological, with the character of the SS officer Dr Wirth. He is given some humanity as he is shown to be an ambivalent and fragile man who desperately clings to his racism and antisemitism, in order not to lose his mind in the reality of the camp. It is, however, a fairly weak attempt, as the rest of the Germans are the same one-dimensional figures as in *The Last Stage*.

The Film Assessment Commission meeting for *The End of Our World* was a very large affair, with thirty people in attendance, including the Minister of Culture Tadeusz Galiński and Vice Minister Tadeusz Zaorski, who chaired the gathering in his role as head of Polish cinematography. It is a very clear example of lukewarm enthusiasm towards a film, as there were a lot of platitudes about its historical importance and artistic merit, but also criticism about a number of matters, including concerns from Jerzy Stefan Stawiński about the whole structure of the film, as he claimed that the flashbacks made it difficult to follow the action. Stanisław Trepczyński, a member of the PZPR and later Deputy Foreign Minister, was concerned that everything in the film was only understandable to those who were in the camp and knew the reality of Auschwitz, a concern that was shared by Korotyński, who had also been a prisoner in the camp. Both Jerzy Bossak and J.A. Szczepański praised the authenticity of the film and

⁶⁴ Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.155.

⁶⁵ *ibid*

Jan Rybkowski commended the way in which Jakubowska avoided using stereotypes.⁶⁶ Aleksander Ford was a strong advocate of the film due to its subject matter, and claimed that this movie fulfilled a duty to history and the future, as a way of educating the youth who were becoming increasingly removed from the events of the Second World War. Ford also, however, raised the most commonly held complaint about *The End of Our World*: the portrayal of the American character. Ford argued that the unnamed American protagonist gave the impression that people were not able to comprehend what went on at Auschwitz and if the movie did its job then at the end of the film he should be convinced how important the issue of the camp was. Jakubowska defended her position by setting out how she interpreted the American's actions. She contended that the American simply misunderstands Auschwitz: his comments at the beginning of the film about the size of the camp are driven by the fact that the physical size does not compute with the number of people murdered there. He then, however, goes up the tower and finds the area so powerful that for a long time he says nothing. To conclude the meeting, Zaorski stated that the film was a complete image of that time and he had nothing to add to it, except his congratulations to all those involved.⁶⁷ In an article in *Film* magazine Zaorski further praised *The End of Our World* by testifying that the film played a very serious propaganda role. It was even displayed during the Frankfurt trial and became a kind of artistic propaganda witness.⁶⁸ It was Jan Rybkowski, however, who pointed out the real problem with *The End of Our World*: it did not have a chance of success with audiences even though it was an exceptional film.⁶⁹

It is perhaps unsurprising that *The End of Our World* did not elicit much excitement from the party apparatchiks present at the Film Assessment Meeting. By 1964 memory of the Holocaust

⁶⁶ FN, A-216 poz.13 'Protokół z kolaudacji film pt. 'Koniec naszego świata' reżyserii W.Jakubowskiej, zespół 'Start' w dniu 6 stycznia 1964 r.'

⁶⁷ *ibid*

⁶⁸ Tadeusz Zaorski, 'Film Polski 1964', *Film*, (20 December 1964)

⁶⁹ 'Protokół z kolaudacji film pt. Koniec naszego świata'.

was not discussed in the public sphere in the same way that it had around the release of *The Last Stage*, when, as previously discussed there had been competing narratives, due to the presence of a Jewish minority and a more relaxed political climate. The events of Polish October, combined with the lifting of the ban on Jewish emigration was enough to provoke a significant exodus, and between 1956 and 1960 40,000 Jews left Poland for Israel.⁷⁰ The sizeable Jewish minority that existed immediately after the war was now smaller, with few opportunities to voice their own story. The Polish witnesses who went to West Germany to give evidence at the Frankfurt Trials were almost exclusively political prisoners.⁷¹ The fate of the Jews and that of the Poles became blurred and the martyrdom of the Polish nation was stressed, implying that they had suffered the most.⁷² Michael.C.Steinlauf argues that ‘for Poles, in a world comprehended through the myth of their own eternal victimisation, the Holocaust would begin to feel like their ultimate victimisation by the Jews.’⁷³ That being said the Holocaust did not disappear completely. It was still on the school curriculum, as it had been since 1948, although then referred to as mass extermination, and Auschwitz-Birkenau was acknowledged as a site of the mass murder of Jews.⁷⁴ *The End of our World*, a film that depicted a key moment of Jewish resistance, directed by a committed member of the PZPR, and influential member of the film industry, was however, something of an anomaly. There is also no evidence that Jakubowska was discouraged from making the film, and no alterations were suggested during the Film Assessment Commission meeting.

Jan Rybkowski was correct in his assessment of *The End of Our World*: it did not have the same domestic and international success that *The Last Stage* did. Critics had a very similar

⁷⁰ Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, p.67

⁷¹ Szymon Pietrzykowski, ‘Legal Ramifications and Historical Impact of the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial (1963-1965)’, *Sensus Historiae*, Vol.XXIII (2016/2), p.43

⁷².Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, p.61

⁷³ *ibid*

⁷⁴ Henryk Sędziwy, *Historia dla klasa VII* (Warsaw, 1961), p.213

reaction to that of Rybkowski and recognised the film's merits, but understood that it might be unpopular. Zygmunt Kałużyński wrote in *Polityka* that the value of *The End of Our World* was in the versatility of its description, and the way in which it showed the horrific work of the *Sonderkommando*, which other films were not brave enough to do.⁷⁵ At the same time, he argued both the theme and the length of the film might discourage viewers. In *Świat*, Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz highlighted how difficult it was to make movies about concentration camps in the current climate, given that audiences wanted to see a more in-depth analysis, to gain insight into how Auschwitz was created and what mechanisms governed inside the camp walls.⁷⁶ Toeplitz concluded that the problem with *The End of Our World* was that it did not meet these criteria, but it did show the technology of death and the precision with which it operated.⁷⁷ Not everyone was critical of *The End of Our World*: there were a few voices that wholeheartedly praised Jakubowska's return to Auschwitz. Henryk Korotyński only had positive comments to make and argued that Jakubowska had avoided all the potential pitfalls and created a comprehensive film about Auschwitz, which showed without pathos or exaggeration the true horrors and the coldly planned and organised actions of the Nazi criminals.⁷⁸ While the party members who reviewed *The End of Our World* at the Film Assessment Commission were not overwhelmingly positive about it, there were those critics who felt it had merit, particularly as a reminder of the horrors of the Holocaust. This is a further reminder that censorship was not all encompassing, and diverging opinions were possible.

While *The Last Stage* was heralded by critics as a bold and accurate representation of the horrors of Auschwitz, *The End of Our World* opened old wounds that were best left alone. This

⁷⁵ Zygmunt Kałużyński, 'Podróż do świata koncentracyjnego', *Polityka* (4 April 1964)

⁷⁶ K.T.Toeplitz (1933-2010) was a leading literary figure in postwar Poland. He came from an assimilated Jewish family, and his uncle, Jerzy Toeplitz, was the founder, and long-time rector of the Łódź Film School. Between 1955 and 1958 Toeplitz was the literary director of the Kadr film unit. He was editor of *Po prostu* and *Nowa Kultura*, and worked with a number of magazines, specialising in popular culture, film and mass media. As well as his journalism, Toeplitz also wrote a number of books, and film scripts.

⁷⁷ K.T.Toeplitz, 'Koniec naszego świata', *Świat*, (12 April 1964)

⁷⁸ Henryk Korotyński, 'Kawał prawdy o Oświęcimiu', *Życie Warszawy*, (16 March 1964)

explains why the authorities and critics had such an ambivalent reaction towards it, Jakubowska had made the type of film that they were trying to steer directors away from. What is interesting to note, however, is that Jakubowska did not meet any obstacles when it came to making *The End of Our World*, unlike with *The Last Stage*, when she had to take her case to Moscow. Where Jakubowska fell down with *The End of Our World*, is that aside from highlighting the horrific work of the *Sonderkommando* and their ill-fated uprising, which had not been done before, she did not say anything revealing about the Holocaust. What she did was once again use her vast experience of the camp, along with that of Hołuj, to put together a piece that gave an authentic picture of life in Auschwitz. Both *The End of Our World* and *The Last Stage* highlighted the fact that Jakubowska had two very clear aims when it came to her films about Auschwitz: firstly she wanted to promote the Socialist message and emphasise the role of left-wing prisoners in camp resistance movements; and secondly she wanted to show, as best she could, the truth about Auschwitz, acting as a witness and reminding future generations of how much people suffered from being a part of the camp system. As J.A. Szczepański stated in his review of *The End of Our World*, regardless of their filmic value, the Auschwitz films by Jakubowska would serve as a point of reference for other camp films.⁷⁹

Aleksander Ford

Aleksander Ford was, in the initial postwar years, the most important figure in the Polish film industry. He was the first head of Film Polski and held an enormous amount of power. As Roman Polański wrote, ‘the real power broker during the immediate postwar period was Ford himself, who established a small film empire of his own’.⁸⁰ Along with some of his prewar colleagues Ford was responsible for regenerating film production in Poland. His 1960 film *Krzyżacy (Knights of the Teutonic Order)*, based on Henryk Sienkiewicz’s novel, was released

⁷⁹ J.A.Szczepański, ‘Koniec naszego świata’, *Film*, (5 April 1964)

⁸⁰ Roman Polański, *Roman* (New York, 1984), p.104

on 15 July to coincide with the 550th anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald and was exported to forty-six countries worldwide; it was particularly popular in the Soviet Union. *Knights of the Teutonic Order* was Poland's submission to the 33rd Academy Awards. It is one of the most-attended Polish films of all time with thirty-three million viewers.

Biography

Aleksander Ford was born on 27 November 1907, not in Łódź or Warsaw, both locations that have been published as his birthplace, but in Kiev.⁸¹ He came from a Jewish family and his given name was Mosze Lifszyc. When he was five years old, he moved to Łódź. Ford studied art history in Warsaw and, for a short time, in Paris. He made his first feature film *Mascotte* (*Mascot*) in 1930 after a year of creating short, silent films that focused on social issues. His first piece using sound was *Legion ulicy* (*The Legion of the Streets*) produced in 1932, which won him the *Kino* magazine prize for best film. Ford was a prewar member of the KPP and was one of the co-founders of START. When war broke out Ford actively participated in the September campaign and defended Warsaw against the invading German troops.⁸² He then moved to Białystok where he offered his services to the Soviet film authorities and worked on Soviet propaganda films.⁸³ After Operation Barbarossa, Ford and his studio moved to Tashkent and remained there. He refused enlistment under General Anders and in the spring of 1943 travelled to the camp of the First Infantry Division, which had a film crew embedded with them. Ford joined the Polish division of the Red Army, and became head of the newly created Film Unit, responsible for making documentaries on Soviet-Polish joint military successes.⁸⁴

It was as a member of the Film Unit that Ford re-entered Poland where he made his first documentary *Przysięgamy ziemi polskiej* (*We Swear on the Ground of Poland*, 1943). His road

⁸¹ Michał Danielewicz, *Ford. Reżyser* (Warsaw, 2019), p.18

⁸² Jolanta Lemann-Zajček, *Kino i polityka. Polski film dokumentalny 1945-1949* (Łódź, 2003), p.16

⁸³ *ibid*

⁸⁴ Danielewicz, *Ford. Reżyser*, p.119

into Poland was through Lenino where the unit immortalised the battle on film. In 1944 the unit made its most famous piece, directed by Ford himself, *Majdanek – cmentarzysko Europy* (*Majdanek – Europe's Graveyard*) where Ford saw first-hand the fate that had befallen the Jews of Poland. On September 27 1944, in the framework of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, the first film administrators were appointed. Within the Ministry of Information and Propaganda a film division was created, and Ford was made its head.⁸⁵

Ford's filmmaking experience in the interwar years undoubtedly helped to solidify his position after the war. From the earliest stages of the PRL, Ford was involved with the fledgling film industry and the merging of military and civilian structures. He struggled, however, as head of Film Polski due to his antagonizing behaviour and difficult character. He wanted full control, but as a result made ideological mistakes and thus was accused of not doing enough to promote socialism. In 1947 he was dismissed for his poor co-operation with Party officials, and was replaced by Stanisław Albrecht, an architect by training, who was an outsider in the industry. Ford subsequently took up the position of professor at the Film School in Łódź, where his students included Wajda and Roman Polański. He was largely responsible for launching Wajda's career by giving him the opportunity to make his first film, but he also tried wherever possible to prevent Wajda from completing further movies.⁸⁶ Ford's most significant contribution to Polish cinema came in 1960, when he adapted *Knights of the Teutonic Order* for the big screen.

From the earliest days of his career Ford showed an interest in Jewish issues. He made two films in Yiddish about Jewish life: *Sabra* (1933), and *Droga młodych* (*The Way of Youth*, 1936) which was about the cruel fate of Jews in Palestine. *The Way of Youth* was not approved by the censors and never made it onto Polish screens. Ford's 1944 documentary *Majdanek –*

⁸⁵ Zajiček, 'Aleksander Ford – organizator kinematografii'

⁸⁶ 'Reżyser Krzyżaków', *Gazety Olsztyńska*, (10-12 February 1995)

Europe's Cemetery was the first film documentation of Nazi crimes, made a number of months before the British army liberated the Bergen-Belsen camp in 1945 and the realities of the concentration camp system were exposed to the world. What is noticeable, however, is that throughout the whole documentary the word 'Jew' is not uttered once. One of the members of the commission of experts, whose conclusions are filmed, stated that the Germans murdered two million innocent 'people'.⁸⁷ While it is likely that there were no Jews left in Majdanek by the time the Soviet and Polish armies reached it, their absence from the film is significant as it was an early indicator of how both the Soviet Union and Poland would downplay the Jews as the true victims of the death camps. It was also the first time that Ford's ideology and ethnicity would come into conflict. His first postwar film was predominantly about the fate of the Jews during the war and he would return to the subject one more time with the biographical film *Sie sind frei, Doktor Korczak* (*You Are Free, Doctor Korczak*, 1974). Ford had no direct experience of the Holocaust, as he escaped to the Soviet Union, so the fate of those less fortunate was important to him. In many ways, Ford was repaying a debt for his salvation, as most of his family were killed in the Holocaust.⁸⁸

Border Street

Aleksander Ford's first war film, *Border Street*, was released on 23 June 1949 and has the important distinction, however, of being the first film to look at the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Although Ford takes a rather simplistic view of the relationships between a number of families living on the same Warsaw street, he raises some important issues, most notably Polish-Jewish relations. Ford places a particular focus on the fate of the Jewish characters. Ford described *Border Street* as 'a film about young people set against the background of a great age.'⁸⁹ It

⁸⁷ Aleksander Ford, *Majdanek – cmentarzysko Europy*, dir. Aleksander Ford (Film, 1944), 12.02 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7cbd6w3nLQ&has_verified=1 (25 February 2013)

⁸⁸ Danielewicz, *Ford. Reżyser*, p.821

⁸⁹ Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust*, p.59.

won a Gold Medal at the Venice Film Festival in 1948 and had more than eight million viewers in Poland, a significant number for the time. For several reasons *Border Street* was a contentious film. The subject matter was problematic, and institutional changes within Film Polski meant Ford lost the safety that came from being its head. As with Jakubowska and *The Last Stage*, Ford had to fight to get *Border Street* made, because of his desire to make a movie that highlighted the plight of the Jews, above everything else. The debate surrounding *Border Street* showed the complicated position in which Polish communists, particularly those of a Jewish background, found themselves after the war, as they tried to implement their own vision, while mediating between increasingly orthodox Soviet officials and various sectors of Polish society.⁹⁰

Border Street takes place on an ordinary street in Warsaw that becomes the border between the ghetto and the ‘Aryan side’ during the occupation. It centres around five children who each represent a different sector of interwar Polish society. Bronek is the son of a taxi driver, a good working boy. Jadzia is the daughter of a doctor who it turns out has Jewish heritage. Fredek’s father, Kuśmirak, owns a restaurant and immediately signs the *Volksliste*, while Władek’s father is a bank clerk who joins the Polish Army after the outbreak of war. Arguably the principal character is Dawidek, a young Jewish boy whose father is an electrician and grandfather owns a tailor shop. As soon as war breaks out, Władek and Dawidek’s fathers head to the front; Kuśmirak welcomes the German invaders into his restaurant; and Jadzia’s father tries to hide all evidence of his Jewish heritage. He is discovered by Kuśmirak, who denounces him to take over his apartment. Władek’s father Wojtan initially shows hostility towards the Jews, but when he is saved by Dawidek’s grandfather Lieberman he changes his mind and that of his son. Wojtan has to go into hiding as he has escaped from a prisoner of war camp and then joins the underground resistance. Jadzia’s father Dr Białek, Dawidek, and

⁹⁰ Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power*, p.128

his family, are all transferred to the ghetto, although Jadzia is unaware of the truth about her father. Dawidek often sneaks through to the Aryan side and takes food back to his family with the help of Bronek. Jadzia, still unaware of her father's fate is told by Fredek when she returns to her former apartment. Fredek attempts to report her as a Jew, but is instead mistaken for one himself and so is shot by the Germans. When the Ghetto Uprising breaks out, Dawidek's uncle Natan goes off to fight, but Lieberman refuses to fight or leave his apartment. Dawidek is able to escape and is helped by Jadzia, Władek and Bronek as he heads to the Aryan side through the sewers, but before he reaches freedom, he realises that he does not want to live without his family, so he turns back towards the light and almost certain death. The film ends with the narrator stating that there are no borders, that all people are equal.

Border Street was carefully planned as Ford's first postwar film. This is unsurprising: *Border Street* followed many of the themes of Ford's prewar work: Jewish issues and the lives of children. Patryk Babiracki argues that Ford and other communists' own experiences of racism, and genuine concerns with social equality between Poles and Jews, may have sustained their personal interest in *Border Street*.⁹¹ Babiracki also suggests that as former members of the Czołówka Film Unit were among the first to visit the liberated camps, this may have inspired the film.⁹² Ford's investment in the movie made sure that it came to fruition, but it was not an easy road. The first version of the script, written by Ludwik Starski, Jean Forge and Ford himself, was completed in 1946, but there were multiple versions before *Border Street* went into production. In every incarnation, however, the heart of the story was the relationship between Polish and Jewish families living on the street that became the border between Aryan and Jewish Warsaw. While Ford made some revisions to his script, he largely resisted close supervision, which Babiracki argues is one of the reasons he was replaced as head of Film

⁹¹ Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power*, p.128

⁹² *ibid*

Polski.⁹³ Ford was shooting at Barrandov studios in Prague when this change took place. Since Ford never sought advice from the proper authorities, Poland's chief ideologue Jakub Berman sent Albrecht, Ford's replacement as head of Film Polski, to Barrandov to check on progress. According to Albrecht, Berman was concerned that Ford was making a quasi-religious film.⁹⁴ After seeing some early footage Albrecht filed a short, critical report, pointing out some of the movie's weaknesses which Albrecht saw as political ones, in particular, a lack of characters who were attempting to implement new communist ideas in line with Marxist ideology.⁹⁵ *Border Street* was eventually released in 1949, largely due to the fear that gossip surrounding the movie would do more harm than the film itself. Viewings only took place after the media was instructed to read *Border Street* as a universal story about racism.⁹⁶

One of Ford's main intentions with *Border Street* was to explore Polish antisemitism, but he was stifled by criticism. In other versions of the script, the number of antisemitic characters grows and shrinks. In one, Władek is a Judeophobe, who tells Dawidek that 'Jews don't play football', but in the final film he is Jadzia's friend and ally.⁹⁷ Maria Dąbrowska commented on the first draft of the script in her diaries and called it a 'scandal' and 'veiled anti-Polish propaganda.' She was much more content with the final draft.⁹⁸ Consequently, Ford only made a limited exploration of Polish antisemitism. In early scenes, as Dawidek is picked on by other children, Ford suggests that anti-Jewish sentiment was widespread in Poland during the inter-war years, amongst all parts of society. During the war, however, Ford shows a very different situation and intimates that there was a great deal of solidarity between the Jews and the Poles, in the face of the invasion of Poland, and the increasing persecution of both groups.

⁹³ *ibid.* p.130

⁹⁴ Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust*, p.55.

⁹⁵ PPR/295/XVII-7/19 'Stanisław Albrecht, Ocena filmu Ulica graniczna (na podstawie niezmontowanego materiału)'

⁹⁶ *ibid*

⁹⁷ Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power*, p.130

⁹⁸ Dąbrowska, *Dziennik powojenne*, p.442

The children work together and help each other, as they are each largely abandoned by their parents. Ford does, however, show antisemitism during the war, and, in particular, highlights the controversial issue of Poles denouncing their neighbours for material gain. The majority of the anti-Jewish sentiment was restricted to one family, who consider themselves to be ethnic Germans, so Ford gives the impression that only those who signed the *Volkliste* and those of the bourgeoisie were antisemitic. All of the Poles in *Border Street* see the error of their ways when war breaks out, and support their Jewish neighbours.

Along with an effort to expose Polish antisemitism, Ford also attempted to break down Jewish stereotypes. Ford's Jewish characters are all poor working-class people and live in one house, belying the idea that all Jews were wealthy. Natan fights for both the Polish Army and the resistance in the ghetto; he also acknowledges that while the Jews were likely to be separated from the Poles, both groups would be exterminated. The character of Natan, therefore, served two purposes. Firstly, he negated the theory that all Jews marched passively to their deaths, and secondly, he showed solidarity between Jews and Poles. Natan, Liberman and Dawidek represent different philosophical and political orientations. As a result, the Jews of the film are not a faceless mass, but individuals with distinct views and actions. Liberman only believes in divine destiny and remains passive until the end, even in the face of the destruction of his people. Natan takes an active part in the Uprising, preferring to die on the barricades with a gun in his hand than accept his condemnation to death. Dawidek does not understand the cruelties of the world that surrounds him and is torn between helping the insurgents and staying with his grandfather. Even though he can escape to freedom, he decides to remain with his family, even if that means taking an active part in the fight against the Germans.

Using children as central characters was not common in Polish war cinema, and was not done again until Stanisław Różewicz's *Świadectwo urodzenia* (*Birth Certificate*, 1961). Ford on the other hand, had used stories about young people in his prewar work. Far from making his

children innocent victims, however, Ford gives them agency, as they take charge of their own lives in the absence of parental supervision. It is Dawidek who makes the decision to return to the ghetto; no-one puts any pressure on him. Ford's child protagonists are forced to grow up quickly and take on responsibilities that require a maturity beyond their years, such as Dawidek sneaking food into the ghetto. Their stories were used to highlight the fate of many children during the war. Young people, however, also represent hope for the future, in this case particularly Jadzia, Bronek and Władek. They turn away from Dawidek, back to the Aryan side, where there will be a new, inclusive Poland, in which everyone lives together harmoniously. This was a trope that was used frequently in Italian neo-realist films, most notably *Rome, Open City*. Ford, however, did not intend to have quite such an optimistic ending, and in earlier scripts there was a far greater overall sense of tragedy than in the final feature. Originally Jadzia was killed by Fredek who, subsequently, died in the ruins while being chased by Bronek and Władek. Dawidek was killed escaping the ghetto.⁹⁹ That being said, Ford always had Polish children surviving the movie, representing optimism for the future of Poland.

Due to Ford spending the majority of the war in the Soviet Union he had no first-hand knowledge of life in the ghetto. He was, however, committed to presenting an accurate account of Jewish suffering and resistance. Ford incorporated fragments of documentary newsreels to help enhance realism and hired a psychologist and writer to capture the atmosphere. Rachela Auerbach was credited as the film's consultant: she lived in the ghetto during the war where she worked with Emanuel Ringelblum.¹⁰⁰ She later escaped to the Aryan side and was active

⁹⁹ Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust*, p.62.

¹⁰⁰ Emanuel Ringelblum (21 November 1900–7 March 1944) was a Polish-Jewish historian and social worker, who extensively documented life in the Warsaw Ghetto. He and his team, known by the code name *Oyneg Shabbos*, collected copies of underground newspapers, diaries, public notices from the Judenrat, and other materials, and wrote a narrative of deportations from the ghetto which provided a valuable insight into the suffering of the Jews in Warsaw. This collection is known as the Ringelblum Archives. Just before the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Ringelblum and his family escaped the ghetto and found refuge on the 'Aryan' side. Their hiding

in Żegota.¹⁰¹ After the war Auerbach documented the Holocaust in several publications. Ford's film, however, is largely told from a Polish perspective. *Border Street* does not spend a lot of time in the ghetto, and when it does the scenes are generic and universalising. In the end, Ford presented a sanitised image of life in the ghetto, avoiding showing violence and starvation and avoiding portraying deportations to Treblinka. In official publications, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was described as a heroic action, which fuelled the desire for resistance among all Poles. That Ghetto Uprising narrative was also used to exaggerate assistance given to Jewish fighters by the left-wing People's Guard (Gwardia Ludowa, GL).¹⁰² Ford very noticeably does not include this in *Border Street*; in fact, he makes no reference to support from Polish resistance groups. Marian Warszawałowicz complained that Ford also neglected to depict the unity between Polish and Jewish underground workers and their common goals.¹⁰³ Ford very emphatically shows in *Border Street* that the Ghetto Uprising was an act of Jewish heroism alone, and clearly made a conscious choice to focus purely on the Jewish resistance.

The memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was complex in 1948 and made it a contentious issue between Poles and Jews. It was commemorated with a memorial forty years before the 1944 Polish Uprising and nearly ten years earlier in cinema. Nathan Rapoport's monument, and the square in front of it, quickly became the preeminent site for all Polish commemorations of the Holocaust. It stood alone in a vast field of rubble, as a symbol of Jewish heroism.

place, however, was discovered and they were executed along with those who had hidden them. The Ringelblum Archive was partially recovered after the war.

¹⁰¹ Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust*, p.67. Żegota, The Council for Aid to Jews, started in Warsaw in 1942. It was the only government funded organisation in Europe specifically set up to help Jews and was a special branch of the AK. Żegota was primarily concerned with providing social welfare, not military aid. They did not assist Jews in escaping the ghetto or transports; their help was reserved purely for those Jews who were already in hiding. As members of Żegota already had contacts with Jewish activists and were part of the Polish underground they used secret transmissions to send news of the atrocities being committed against the Jews and their couriers relayed information to leaders in England and the United States.

¹⁰² R Kornecki et al, *Nauka o Polsce i świecie współczesnym*, (Warsaw, 1950), p.71

¹⁰³ Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust*, p.65

Rapoport explained his choice of representing the fighting Jews: ‘Could I have made a stone with a hole in it and said, ‘Voila’! The heroism of the Jews’? No, I needed to show the heroism, to illustrate it literally in figures that everyone, not just artists, would respond to’.¹⁰⁴ The fact that the Ghetto Uprising was formally memorialised so early caused resentment. Omar Bartov argues: ‘The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 served as an ersatz depiction of what most Poles experience as a far more traumatic, but equally heroic event, the Polish Warsaw Uprising 1944’.¹⁰⁵ While the Polish Uprising was a difficult incident for the fledgling regime, the Ghetto Uprising offered an opportunity for the communists to legitimise themselves, by ostensibly breaking with the legacy of antisemitism. Whether intentionally or not, *Border Street* contributed to this. On the whole, however, these efforts by the PPR misfired, as all this reaffirmed what many Poles already felt they knew: Jews were the government and the government was Jewish.¹⁰⁶ Internationally, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was initially the central symbol of the genocide of the Jews. In 1954 Isaac Schwartzbart explained to the World Zionist Congress why the Ghetto Uprising became the symbol of the Holocaust: ‘The imagination and hearts of people cling to deeds of courage, sacrifice, heroism, shining examples of self-defence, strength and pride, rather than to mourning over general calamities, passive defeatism and destruction.’¹⁰⁷ *Border Street* contributed to this.

Despite *Border Street*’s potential use to the PPR, they were concerned about running a film which explored Polish antisemitism, as it was potentially risky. *Border Street* had to be good enough to win over Polish audiences to a more critical view of their past, but what was more likely is that it would offend them. The likelihood of this was increased by the fact that, as

¹⁰⁴ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, 1993), p.168

¹⁰⁵ Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power*, p.129

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*

¹⁰⁷ Isaac A. Schwartzbart, *The Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: Its Meaning and Message* (New York, 1953), p.2

previously discussed, *Border Street* finished without any reference to the 1944 Uprising. Consequently, the authorities tried to persuade Ford to make significant changes; the Vice Minister of Culture Włodzimierz Sokorski threatened him with a ‘serious affair’ if he did not acquiesce, but Ford refused to make overarching cuts, as he intended to begin a dialogue with viewers.¹⁰⁸ The Qualification Committee meeting held in June 1948 very clearly shows how Ford’s film was seen by the authorities. It was chaired by Albrecht and those present had no problem with the purely cinematic aspects of the film: they praised its artistic and technical elements. The real discussion was over the ‘social usefulness’ of *Border Street*. There were several voices that objected to Ford’s portrayal of antisemitic Poles, claiming that it was not representative of the historical reality. Bolesław W. Lewicki, who was then artistic director of Film Polski, pointed out that *Border Street* was considered by many to be anti-Polish, and added that ‘reminders of the sins from the occupation irritate the viewers’.¹⁰⁹ Lewicki felt that certain ‘sensitive’ topics should be covered with silence and should only be put to film when more time had passed. Tadeusz Kański, then deputy director of Film Polski, observed that Wojtan was shown as a coward who endangers a Jew. For Albrecht, *Border Street* lacked a Marxist perspective and was devoid of the ‘patriotism that is built on class consciousness’. Albrecht did, however, feel that *Border Street* played a useful role outside of Poland.¹¹⁰ In a further document issued at the end of 1948, Albrecht slightly changed his opinion and explicitly stated that the author was not an eyewitness of the events presented in his film and did not tackle appropriately the problem of the fight for freedom among Jews and Poles during the Ghetto Uprising.¹¹¹ This is significant because both Albrecht and Lewicki were also Jewish; in

¹⁰⁸ Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power*, p.130

¹⁰⁹ FN, A-329 Poz. 1 ‘Ulica Graniczna Protokół z posiedzenia Komisji Kwalifikacyjnej w dniach 12 czerwca 1948 roku’

¹¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹¹ ‘Stanisław Albrecht Ocena filmu Ulica graniczna (na podstawie niezmontowanego materiału)’

fact, Lewicki spent the entire war in concentration camps, including Auschwitz.¹¹² Their responses to *Border Street* further show the dilemmas faced by Polish communists of Jewish origin after the war, and the conflict between their political views and their ethnicity.

Maria Dąbrowska, who had so strongly objected to an early version, felt her objections to what she considered to be a 'strikingly distorted way the Poles were depicted' had been taken into account and helped to make it less anti-Polish.¹¹³ There is no doubt that Ford's film was changed under pressure from the authorities, and that Polish antisemitism was cut back. Given the controversy surrounding *Border Street*, and the fact that Ford had been deposed as head of Film Polski, it would have been possible for the authorities to shelve the film, but they did not. While the exploration of antisemitism was not as deep as Ford had intended, he still showed some of the more unpleasant elements of the wartime conduct of some Poles. Ford, therefore, was able to resist a complete change to the film. While it may not have been obvious at the time, Ford's ability to withstand a great deal of criticism, and the decision to release *Border Street*, despite reservations, was a harbinger of things to come.

As previously stated, the press had been instructed on how to interpret *Border Street*, which makes analysing newspaper articles written about *Border Street* very problematic: for the most part they are a testimony to how the Communist Party felt about *Border Street*. Most authors were complimentary about the film, in particular its artistic value, but there is a common thread that runs through the reviews: that *Border Street* did not adequately show the contributing of the working classes in Warsaw to the fight in the ghetto. *Trybuna Ludu* printed that *Border Street* did not accurately portray the relationship of the Aryan society to those on the other side of the wall,¹¹⁴ while Stanisław Grzelecki in *Życie Warszawy* wrote that the creators of *Border*

¹¹² 'Bolesław Lewicki Biography' <http://www.filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?osoba=1198095> (6 December 2017)

¹¹³ Dąbrowska, *Dziennik wojenne*, p.444

¹¹⁴ 'Ulica graniczna', *Trybuna Ludu*, (24 June 1949)

Street can be faulted for not taking into account enough the decisive participation of the working class in the Polish Jewish struggle against the occupier.¹¹⁵ Both of these reviews regurgitated the historical distortion propagated by the regime that Poles as a whole helped the Jews and were certainly not involved in helping the Nazis to murder them. Some articles felt that the ending, which had already been made more positive by the authorities, did not go far enough, as it was clear that Dawidek heads back to his death in the ghetto.¹¹⁶ Michał Łucki in *Rzeczpospolita* criticised the way in which Liberman fatalistically accepts the Nazi violence as a divine punishment, the tragic victim of a terrible crime. The article argued that this meant Liberman's death was far more moving for the audience than that of the Jews who died fighting, like Natan. The same article in *Rzeczpospolita*, however, praised the way in which Ford shows life on the border street thorough the eyes of children.¹¹⁷ Thanks to this there are sharp boundaries in the film between good and bad, truth and falsehood. There were some voices, like Leon Bukowiecki, who referred to Polish antisemitism and praised Ford for tackling the problem with the help of 'simple, truthful images'.¹¹⁸ The problem was that there was very little counter argument to these officially sanctioned views because between 1946 and 1949 more than two thirds of the surviving Jews in Poland had left the country. As Alina Madej observes, *Border Street* did not have a target audience who could watch the film through the prism of their own tragic experiences.¹¹⁹

Despite Ford's political views, it is clear that with *Border Street* he had a very particular agenda which did not focus on advancing the socialist cause. He wanted to show the tragic fate of the Jews during the Second World War and the hostile attitude they faced from their Polish

¹¹⁵ Stanisław Grzelecki, 'Ulica graniczna', *Życie Warszawy*, (26 June 1949)

¹¹⁶ Anna Jakubiszyn, 'Ulica graniczna', *Polska Zbrojna*, (23 June 1949)

¹¹⁷ Michał Łucki, 'Ulica graniczna', *Rzeczpospolita*, (24 June 1949)

¹¹⁸ Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust*, p.65

¹¹⁹ Alina Madej, *Kino, władza, publiczność. Kinematografia polska w latach 1944-1949* (Bielsko-Biała, 2002), p.185

neighbours. With *Border Street*, Ford was not interested in providing an uplifting message but instead to show an accurate picture of the war and its aftermath. Due to his apparent lack of Marxist content, and the fact Ford had somewhat fallen from grace, he was subjected to far more intervention from the authorities than Jakubowska was when making *The Last Stage*. *Border Street* highlights the important issue of Polish antisemitism, but its impact was greatly reduced by the Party. *Border Street* still retains an important place in the history of Polish cinema as one of the only films to tell the story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and to present the idea that not all Jews marched passively towards death. There are some kitsch moments, such as when an SS dog changes its allegiance after the Polish children show it affection, but *Border Street* still has an impact even when viewed today.

Conclusion

In 1949 there was a congress of filmmakers in the spa town of Wisła to enforce the doctrine of socialist realism. The Wisła Conference condemned cosmopolitan and bourgeois tendencies supposedly present in Polish cinema, and claimed that films made thus far showed a lack of 'revolutionary spirit'.¹²⁰ Following the meeting socialist realism was enforced with an increased vigour, which almost completely stalled war film production. It is clear, however, that both Ford and Jakubowska were more than happy to include communist ideology in their work, although to different degree. Their political beliefs, however, often came into conflict with their experiences and filmmaking goals. Ford and Jakubowska had more than just the socialist cause on their minds when making their first postwar movies.

Although Jakubowska and Ford were working at an unusual time in the cultural history of Poland, their experiences making their early films were, in many ways, an example of things to come, with regard to the way they had to navigate choppy political waters. Despite both

¹²⁰ Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, p.52

Ford and Jakubowska being committed to the new regime, they still had to overcome a number of hurdles. While they had to make some concessions, they were able to successfully defend the majority of their choices. Jakubowska turned to powerful allies to help advance her case, and Ford still held a significant enough position that he could hold his ground against pressure from his party colleagues. These tactics became a common feature when it came to war cinema. This has parallels with John Connelly's observations about how professors used social networks to protect each other, and will be discussed further in the chapter on Andrzej Wajda.¹²¹

In 1967, internal struggles within the PZPR kick started a state-sponsored antisemitic campaign. Mieczysław Moczar, the Minister of the Interior, and head of the veterans' union ZBoWiD, who had built a powerful 'Partisans' faction, pitted himself against Gomułka, and reform minded factions, many of whom were Poles of Jewish origin.¹²² Two major factors brought this struggle between Gomułka and Moczar out into the open: The Six Day War of June 1967, and the student protests of March 1968. Anti-Zionist slogans used publicly after the outbreak of the war in the Middle East, revealed ill-concealed antisemitism. Gomułka was the first to compare Israel's attack on Arab countries to the war of 1939, calling Polish Jews who had solidarity with Israel a 'fifth column'.¹²³ A group of Polish officials and Army officers reacted to the Israeli victory by celebrating the triumph of 'our Jews over their Arabs', which forged a link between political dissidence and anti-Soviet sympathies.¹²⁴ This was seized upon by Moczar, who saw the prospect of denouncing his rivals as 'Zionists'. In 1968 students protested when the Soviet ambassador successfully shut down a production of Mickiewicz's

¹²¹ John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956*, (London, 2000), p.166

¹²² Jerzy Eisler, *Polski Rok 1968*, (Warsaw, 2006), p.25

¹²³ Antony Polonsky and Leszek W. Głuchowski, 'Introduction', in Antony Polonsky and Leszek W Głuchowski (eds), *Polin: 1968 Forty Years After*, (Oxford, 2008), p.7

¹²⁴ Dariusz Stola, *Kampania Antysyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967-1968*, (Warsaw, 2000), p.34

Dziady in Warsaw, and there was an open clash, when Moczar's militia went into action, to fan the flames. The press called on workers to take action against Zionist traitors.¹²⁵

This campaign was unprecedented in Polish history. It was directed not just at Zionist student rebels, but Jews in general. Purges spread throughout the country, and resulted in fifteen thousand Poles of Jewish origin considered to be Zionists, losing their jobs, and as a result emigrating, effectively ending Jewish life in Poland for the best part of a decade.¹²⁶ It should be noted the term 'Zionist' was used to remove people who were not Jewish at all, but it acted as a useful smear. As previously referred to, this crusade had an impact on the film units, but it also led to a number of professionals leaving Poland. Ford was accused of anti-socialist activity and expelled from the Party. Consequently, he emigrated and was subsequently blacklisted by the communist government and labelled a political defector.¹²⁷ He would only complete two further films before his suicide in 1980. Another significant casualty of the purges was Jerzy Lipman, the cinematographer on *Generation*, *Kanal*, *Lotna*, *Bad Luck*, and countless other significant films. Some experienced production managers also went, including Ludwik Hager, who had been involved in the Kadr film unit.

The anti-Zionist campaign also had an effect on the memory and representation of the Holocaust. This is best exemplified by the campaign against the so-called 'Encyclopaedists'. The issue was an article about Nazi camps in the 8th volume of *Wielka Encyklopedia Powszechna*, which was accused of making an unjustified distinction between death and concentration camps. Critics claimed it was wrong in suggesting 99% of all Jews and Roma were killed and not providing any information about Poles. This suggested only Jews were killed in the camps. Press attacks and demonstrations began, and by March 1968 the

¹²⁵ *ibid.* p. 40

¹²⁶ Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, p.76

¹²⁷ Danielewicz, *Ford. Reżyser*, p.300

encyclopaedia as a whole was under review. The new article denounced the idea of any distinction between Nazi camps, and affirmed that they were all intended to exterminate anyone who passed through their gates, Poles or Jews.¹²⁸

After the first wave of graduates from the Łódź Film School began making films, directors like Ford and Jakubowska became largely obsolete. While Jakubowska continued making movies into the 1980s, she never recreated the success she had with *The Last Stage*. The new generation of directors had no desire to emulate their Polish predecessors, and instead looked to foreign filmmakers for inspiration. This was despite the fact that Jakubowska and Ford, and other leading communist filmmakers, were teachers at the Film School. There was one way, however, that Jakubowska and Ford influenced their younger colleagues. Their choice to avoid showing too much explicit violence, out of respect for the trauma suffered by the audience, was also one that was taken by later filmmakers. At the same time as a new group of directors was emerging, the political climate was also changing, creating the perfect atmosphere for one of the most creative periods in Polish cinema, in which some of the greatest war films were produced.

¹²⁸ Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, p.81

Chapter 3: The Polish School Part One: Andrzej Munk and Kazimierz Kutz

The Second World War was a key theme of the Polish School: as such it would be impossible to refer to all its members in this chapter. Instead it will focus on two of its leading figures, Kazimierz Kutz and Andrzej Munk, who each represent an artistic trend within the School. Due to the sheer volume of Andrzej Wajda's work, and the key role he played in Polish cinema, he will be discussed separately in the next chapter. Some of Kutz and Munk's films are examples of those well received by the PZPR, while others show the discussions that arose around movies that were considered to be potentially subversive, thus providing evidence of what topics were deemed to be acceptable by the communist authorities, and those which were less desirable. Looking at Kutz and Munk's films also gives insight into the way in which some directors fought for their work to remain unchanged, often with the support of their Film Units. Of all the filmmakers of the Polish School, Munk, Kutz and Wajda provide the most comprehensive picture of the relationship between the state and the movement, and how successfully they created an image of the Second World War, so much so that the KC PZPR had to address this issue in 1960.

Introduction

The end of Stalinism and the cultural thaw that followed resulted in significant changes within the Polish arts, including the film industry. The dramatic political events of 1956, the workers' uprisings in Poznań and Gomułka's return to power created a stimulating environment for young filmmakers: directors such as Wajda, Munk and Kutz. They had much in common: they were amongst the first to graduate from the new film school in Łódź; were born in the 1920s and were from the generation that Maria Janion¹ claimed 'were marked by the trauma of war

¹ Marian Janion (1926-2020) was an extremely influential literary historian and critic. She was an activist in the underground Polish Scouting Organisation during the Second World War. Her academic work challenged popular

and death born under the unhappy, perhaps cursed star'.² They were united by circumstance, but also an overarching desire to throw off the socialist realism and simplistic aesthetic of their older colleagues. Rather than looking to their predecessors for inspiration, they drew on foreign influences, in particular Italian neo-realism. Students at the Film School had access to these films through closed screenings. The new directors were eager to confront issues that had previously been taboo, and like Ford and Jakubowska had done before, build films that were influenced by their own experiences. Under this more agreeable creative climate, in particular the creation of the film units, the Polish School phenomenon was able to flourish, providing a significant contribution to the debates on war-related topics and successfully creating an alternative to the communist narrative.

The term Polish School was first used as early as 1954 by the film critic and scholar Aleksander Jackiewicz.³ He expressed a desire to see a Polish school of filmmaking that was worthy of the fine tradition of Polish art: he wanted to see movies that confronted local history and addressed moral and social problems.⁴ Antoni Bohdziewicz, a filmmaker and influential professor at the Łódź Film School, later used the term when referring to Wajda's debut film *Pokolenie (A Generation, 1955)*. Stanisław Ozimek, who wrote widely on the Polish School, proposed the following periods to describe the phenomenon: the initial period of 1955-1956, during which time the new tendencies were hidden under socialist realism; the proper period 1957-1959, during which time directors focused heavily on the Second World War and situated their work within the context of the Polish romantic tradition; the phases of crisis 1960-1961, which saw the rise in importance of the plebeian protagonist; and then the final stage 1962-1965, which was distinguished by superficial references to the school's earlier themes,

narratives and concepts of the place of Romanticism in Polish identity. She argued, above all, that Romanticism was above all an affirmation of freedom and liberty in even dimension.

² Marion Janion, 'Jeruzalem Słoneczna i Zakłęty Krąg', *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, (vol.17, 1997), p.5.

³ Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, p.73

⁴ *ibid*

particularly war.⁵ There is much debate over the end date, which is far harder to pinpoint, and many scholars such as Tadeusz Lubelski and Bolesław Michałek, disagree with Ozimek's date of 1965. Lubelski puts it as early as 1961; however, this would leave Wojciech Has' *Jak być kochaną* (*How to be Loved*, 1963) out of the formation. After the Resolution of the Central Committee in June 1960 the School largely petered out, although a few films, such as Tadeusz Konwicki's *Zaduszki* (*All Souls Day*, 1961), following similar themes and preoccupations were released in the early 1960s. The symbolic end can be seen as Andrzej Munk's death in 1961. There is no doubt, however, that the School's high point was between 1957 and 1959.

Finding a definition of the Polish School is almost impossible; scholars even disagree on which directors are considered to be members. Ozimek states that it was 'the first discernible ideological and artistic formation in the history of national cinema' although its members were by no means a formal group.⁶ Paul Coates agrees, arguing that although the term Polish School implies a movement with shared goals, attempts to find a common denominator have foundered. Rather than being characterised by similar styles and thematic approaches, the Polish School represents a multiplicity of attitudes and a number of authorial expressions.⁷ Whether or not a director is considered part of the Polish School is also a question of self-definition. Although Stanisław Różewicz's work is often discussed as part of the current, he never considered himself a part of it.⁸ One of the key unifying factors of the group, however, was a preoccupation with history, in particular the events of the Second World War, and this was particularly obvious between 1957 and 1959.

The Polish School provided a wide-ranging selection of themes and topics relating to the Second World War, with almost everything covered in some way. For the first time events

⁵ Ozimek, 'Spojrzenie na szkołę polską', p.201.

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Paul Coates, *The Red & The White*, p.17.

⁸ L. Kosycarz, Nieodzowne powroty, *Głos Wybrzeża* (29-30 November 1975)

such as the Warsaw Uprising were portrayed onscreen and films provided a very important voice in discussions on a wide range of subjects, most notably the nature of heroism. Movies from the Polish School opened up real debates on themes that had previously been untouched, and while some films, such as *Eroica*, were ahead of their time, they still found a somewhat receptive audience. Although there was by no means an even divide, Polish School films placed a spotlight on a broad range of military units: Wajda focused on the communist underground in *Generation*; Munk, Wajda and Jerzy Passendorfer choosing to look at the Home Army in *Kanal* and *The Assassination*; and finally Witold Lesiewicz and Kazimierz Kutz placing the Polish Army formed in the Soviet Union at the centre of *April*, and *Krzyż Walecznych* (*Cross of Valour*, 1959). Polish School filmmakers provide a polyphonic realm that often differs from, or counters the official discourse on the Second World War. Similar themes, however, are discernible amongst the films, in particular a focus on individuals, the impact of heroic mythology and the psychological effects of war. They attempt to question and challenge the audience's perceptions of the Second World War.

The Polish School was tailored to a very particular audience. Directors like Munk, Wajda and Kutz catered to their own: the intelligentsia and the generation whose early adult years were defined by brutality, fear and death. These Poles lived through the invasion of 1939, the occupation and for some the Holocaust, and were left traumatised by their experiences. Many young people lost family members and had to navigate their way through the political changes of 1945, often finding themselves enemies of the communist state as a result of their wartime affiliations. The films of the Polish School, in some ways, had a therapeutic effect, attempting to ease the suffering felt by so many, by portraying their stories onscreen for the first time. Munk's films, in particular, provided some much-needed humour, following the old adage that laughter is the best medicine.

Political and cultural change

De-Stalinisation in Poland happened very quickly. There are a number of reasons for this, for example, the contents of Khrushchev's Secret Speech being widely distributed; the death of Bierut and the outbreak of the workers' strike in Poznań. Culturally the key reason that the thaw appeared so sudden, is because the break from the Party offensive on culture began, according to Sokorski, the Minister of Culture at the time, perhaps as early as December 1952: this was when the first doubts arose in creative circles about the impact of the PZPR cultural policy.⁹ 1953, however, is perhaps more noticeable as the beginnings of real change, with the printed press undergoing an unmistakable renaissance, becoming more visible after almost four years. This also had an impact on cinema as discussions in the media about film began showing more diversity. In literature 1955 was known as the year of 'cracking the ice', full of spectacular events in a year of great ferment.¹⁰ For cinema 1955 was also very significant, with the creation of the film units, but the changes began in 1954, with a number of discussions within the KC PZPR about how to improve film output and creativity.¹¹ As a result of all these changes, by 1956, a year of tremendous political upheaval, Polish culture was ready for significant transformation.

Joanna Wawrzyniak argues that in 1956 there was a 'collective memory explosion' in Poland, in which the Stalinist narrative of history was being challenged at the highest party level.¹² This was particularly noticeable when it came to commemoration of the Second World War. In early spring, during a PZPR discussion over the content of Khrushchev's secret speech, a number of issues were discussed, such as the annexation of Poland's prewar eastern provinces

⁹ Fijałkowska, *Polityka i twórcy*, p. 258

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.237

¹¹ *ibid.* p.387

¹² Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD*, p.172

by the USSR, the deportations to the Gulags, the Katyń massacre and the Warsaw Uprising.¹³ This was a clear break from the period 1949 to 1956, in which those who served as unwanted reminders of the nationalist resistance movement loyal to the Government in Exile, or tried to steer national memory in a direction forbidden by the Communist Party were arrested.¹⁴ Prior to 1956 the war did not disappear from the public sphere; instead official and public memory was controlled by carefully choosing which events were remembered and glorified. Triumphs of the Polish Army in the West were replaced by those of the Polish First and Second Armies commanded by the Soviets; the Battle of Lenino was celebrated rather than Monte Cassino; the People's Guard, not the Home Army, was honoured and communist generals were praised, rather than those who had served with the Western allies.¹⁵ The political thaw led to some changes in the way the Second World War was discussed in public, with the PZPR adjusting their attitude towards the conflict, and also allowing for more diverse stories.

Andrzej Munk: a sceptic

Andrzej Munk's life was tragically cut short at the age of just 40, when he was killed in a car accident in 1961, on location for *The Passenger*. During his brief career he was a leading light in the Polish School, and made a significant contribution to war cinema. His films were never without controversy, as he consistently challenged traditional views and asked questions of the established narrative of key events, most notably the Warsaw Uprising. Munk is described by Mazierska and Haltof as rationalist, taking a critical look at national martyrdom, choosing to focus on characters who had dubious morals, involving themselves in the war to their own ends.¹⁶ That being said, Munk's protagonists were anything but rational. Some of Munk's

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ Orla Bukowska, 'New Threads in an Old Loom', p.187

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, p.74.

most interesting insights came in films that were based on events that he had personal experience of.

Biography

Munk was born on 16 October 1921 in Kraków to a Jewish family; his father was an engineer. When war broke out in 1939, he had just finished secondary school, but was unable to enter higher education as the German invasion forced him into hiding after participating in the September campaign. He moved to Warsaw in 1940, under the false surname of Wnuk and worked in a construction company, at the same time becoming involved in a section of the Polish Socialist Party's armed units. In June 1944 he was stationed in Żoliborz as a rifleman under the banner of the Home Army and would ultimately take part in the Warsaw Uprising. After its failure he was imprisoned by the Germans, but was able to escape and spent the rest of the war working as a labourer.¹⁷ In 1946 he enrolled in law school at the University of Warsaw and became the general secretary of the student socialist organisation. When it became clear that he was not suited to either law or politics, and he had to take a break after contracting tuberculosis, he enrolled at the Film School in Łódź as part of the second class to be admitted. He graduated in 1951, but from 1957 to 1961 he returned as a lecturer. In between his years of study he became politically active, becoming firstly a member of the PPS then the PZPR, until he was removed by disciplinary action for 'reprehensible behaviour' in 1952.¹⁸ Like many of his filmmaking colleagues, Munk had no interest in engaging with the PZPR after his expulsion, and was not willing to contribute to their nationalist, narrative.

As with others of his generation, Munk began his career under socialist realism, making documentary films and newsreels. He struggled to put his own stamp on his work, under the

¹⁷ 'Powstańcze Biogramy' <http://www.1944.pl/powstancze-biogramy/andrzej-munk.55122.html> (20 June 2017).

¹⁸ Piotr Zwierzchowski, *Zezowate szczęście*, (Poznań, 2006), p.16

constraints of the system, but a feature of his movies is that they were professional and well-executed. Munk gained a particular reputation for his documentaries, and while some were very obviously socialist realist, and could be considered propaganda, he was able to make some that opposed the doctrine. Munk claimed that his films were ‘a response to the official tone of documentaries at the time, to their laconic, over optimistic tone.’¹⁹ Instead he attempted to show the hardship, sacrifice, heroism and beauty of everyday work.²⁰ This was an expression of Munk’s own socialist beliefs. Eventually Munk transitioned into feature films. At first, he fictionalised his documentaries, using authentic machines and people, but staging certain scenes. His first full-length work, *Błękitny krzyż* (*The Men of the Blue Cross*), was released in 1955 and the leap from this to his next two movies, *Człowiek na torze* (*Man on the Tracks*) and *Eroica*, would be inexplicable without the political and cultural changes that came to a head in October 1956. They would become two of the most important films of the 1950s, being considered some of the early works of the Polish School.

Eroica

Eroica premiered on 1 April 1958, the second film on the Warsaw Uprising to be released within the space of a year. It shared a writer, cinematographer and production unit with Wajda’s *Kanal*, which will be discussed in the next chapter, and yet provided a seemingly opposing view of events. While the political thaw had allowed the Rising to be discussed within popular culture for the first time, the reaction of the public to *Kanal* twelve months earlier suggested that people were not yet ready for critical depictions of it. The responses to *Eroica* were even stronger, particularly as it did not gain the support of the jury at the Cannes Film Festival or international audiences which helped to mute the condemnation of *Kanal*. Despite this, Polish film critics awarded it their traditional prize for best film of the year in

¹⁹ Ewa Nawój, ‘Andrzej Munk’, culture.pl (2005) <http://culture.pl/en/artist/andrzej-munk> (20 June 2017)

²⁰ *ibid*

1958, a recognition even then, of the high artistic value it represents.²¹ Today *Eroica* is seen as one of the seminal works of the Polish School, and a crucial voice in the debates on Polish heroism. The theme of *Eroica* is conveyed in the title of the film, and its subheading *Symfonia bohaterska w dwóch częściach* (*A heroic symphony in two movements*), was borrowed from Beethoven's *The Third Symphony*.²²

Eroica is split into two parts, each based on Stawiński's stories. Initially, there were three stories. The third *Con Bravura*, was filmed, but Munk decided to leave it out, as he felt it distorted the film's message. The first, entitled *Scherzo alla polacca* and based on *The Hungarians*, follows Dzikus Górkiewicz, a Warsaw fixer who supported himself during the war by trading on the black market. During the Uprising he enlists in a Home Army unit only to desert it, but ends up as a messenger between the AK and a Hungarian regiment stationed outside the city. The Hungarians are willing to supply weapons in exchange for protection from the Soviets. The musical term 'scherzo' means joke in Italian and is an indication of the humorous nature of the first section of the film. This is in direct contrast to the 'lugubre' in the title of the second portion, *Ostinato lugubre*, based on *Escape*, which translates as dispirited. The mood immediately becomes more sombre: any comedy that can be found is black. The focus moves to inmates in a POW camp, who are living a relatively peaceful existence somewhere in the Alps. In late 1944 a new group of prisoners arrive, all veterans of the Warsaw Uprising. These AK soldiers clash with the old inmates, who have been there since the September Campaign. For them time stopped in 1939 and they are shaped by interwar moral values, which seem outdated in 1944. The most important issue is that of an officer's code of honour, which calls for acts of extraordinary bravery, such as a successful escape. According to the stories told by the inmates this had been done just once, by Lieutenant

²¹ Janusz Kołodziej, 'Eroica', *Ekran*, (11 June 1987)

²² Ewa Mazierska, 'Eroica', in Peter Hames (ed), *The Cinema of Central Europe*, (London, 2004), p.56

Zawistowski: he serves as both an inspiration and an impossible act to follow. The story, however, is untrue and is being maintained by his friend Turek who helps keep the legend intact while Zawistowski hides in the roof. The story comes to a tragic end when Turek is killed trying to escape, and Zawistowski commits suicide due to the guilt he feels over his friend's death.

Poland's postwar communist rulers had a serious problem confronting the legend of the Warsaw Uprising: they recognised that the Home Army had been hostile towards their regime. Prior to 1956, there was a clear split between the public and private memory of the Warsaw Uprising. In public, until 1953, the Uprising was a catastrophic failure, that resulted in the death and displacement of thousands, and the destruction of the capital.²³ The collapse of the rising was attributed to incompetent AK leaders, who were accused of collaborating with the Nazis and refusing to co-operate with the Soviet Army. The role of the AL in the Uprising was also exaggerated.²⁴ It was only in private that the heroism and sacrifice of the Home Army soldiers could be remembered.²⁵ In 1956, however, the government's policy towards the AK changed. A resolution of the Seventh Plenum of the PZPR Central Committee in February 1956 pledged changes in the party's attitudes towards former Home Army soldiers and the Polish Armed Forces in the West.²⁶ The leaders of the Uprising were still criticised, but the difference between the rank and file soldiers and military and political leadership was stressed. Although the Home Army was treated as a hostile organisation, servicemen were granted veteran status and were allowed to take part in Uprising commemorations. In official announcements, however, the AK always stood behind the AL.²⁷ Along with the change in official policy, censorship surrounding the Home Army and the Warsaw Uprising abated, and

²³ Kornacki et al., *Nauka o Polsce*, pp 92-3

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Wańkiewicz, 'The Polish Home Army and the Politics of Memory', p.45

²⁶ Joanna Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD*, p. 137

²⁷ *ibid*

articles about them became more common, such as ‘Na spotkanie ludziom z AK’ in *Po prostu* and ‘My z AK’ in *Nowa Kultura*.²⁸ The stories of soldiers’ actions that had been suppressed during the Stalinist period were able to flourish for the first time. Munk firmly distanced himself from the PZPR’s view of the Rising. There is no suggestion in *Eroica* that the probable failure of the insurrection had anything to do with poor leadership, or self-serving generals, and he makes no reference to the AL. Munk was also able to show some of the real reasons why the Uprising was doomed to fail as two of his characters discuss the lack of communication with the Soviet Union, eventually reaching the conclusion that the problem was that the Soviets did not recognise the Home Army. One of them claims: ‘it will be the Red Army that finally pushes the Germans out of Warsaw’.²⁹ Munk’s intention was to provide an alternative narrative, one that was more faithful to the true course of the Uprising.

The thaw also created a space for the legend of the Uprising to be discussed not just by the Communist Party and artists, but also the population at large. Polish society has been split into two categories by scholars: those who admired all patriotic heroism and those who saw the Rising as an irrational gesture of valour, devoid of any sense.³⁰ This divided view of doomed Polish military action dated back to various strands of Polish nationalist thought in the 19th century. The Romantics, such as Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński, glorified national insurrections, and those who died, turning them into martyrs and saints.³¹ Romantic poetry written after the January Uprising suggested it was a citizen’s duty to die for the fatherland.³² The Positivists, such as Henryk Sienkiewicz, on the other hand, were disillusioned by unsuccessful uprisings and resented the national inclination for reckless

²⁸ *ibid.* p.138

²⁹ *Eroica*, dir. Andrzej Munk (Film, 1957, DVD, 2005), 15.30

³⁰ Mazierska, ‘*Eroica*’, p.62

³¹ Eile, *Literature and Nationalism*, p.81

³² *ibid*

deeds.³³ Munk seemed to put himself somewhere in the middle. Showing the action of the Uprising through the cynical eyes of Dzidzius, showing his company that is so devoted to drills that they miss an aerial attack and have to be saved by Dzidzius, appears to place Munk amongst the critics of the Uprising. Dzidzius' fate in the film also confirms this as he heads back to Warsaw to rejoin the Rising, as duty pulls him in. In *Ostinato lugubre*, amongst the newcomers in the camp, we see the major with whom Dzidzius returned to the city, which leads the audience to believe that Dzidzius' absence means he died. This is particularly poignant, given that he gave up the chance to survive. On the other hand, Munk is very careful to avoid criticism of the insurgents and has the utmost respect for them, unsurprising given that he participated in the Uprising himself. While Munk certainly suggests that the Warsaw Uprising was doomed to end in failure, he is careful not to imply that it should not have taken place at all. In *Eroica*, Munk challenges both the public narrative of the Communist Party, and the legend of the Uprising that had developed since 1944.

Munk seeks to highlight how destructive legends and tales of heroism can be. Munk criticised what he saw to be deep faults in the Polish national character, leading to foolish actions driven by heroism for heroism's sake. In the second part of *Eroica* Munk uses the fate of the two lieutenants in the prison camp to show how the burden of expectation can be impossible to carry. It would be expected that memorable tales of Zawistowski's escape would help boost morale, but instead his story made the other prisoners feel inadequate and that he was an impossible example to live up to. The fact that Zawistowski never actually broke out undermines the heroic rhetoric that surrounds the myth of his persona. Munk goes further, suggesting that all legendary stories of daring deeds are simply constructs, designed to help boost the optimism of others. In *Ostinato lugubre*, Munk avoided having a 'hero' by not focusing on one central character, preventing the audience from identifying with any

³³ *ibid.* p.130

individual. Munk's thesis is that the weight of Polish history is destructive, and leads to irrational behaviour that ultimately is damaging to the national interest, as it leads to the death of many of Poland's brightest. Munk was one of the first directors to challenge the myth that it was a Pole's fate to die tragically, and to try to look at the Uprising through a more rational lens.

A feature of Munk's films was the way in which he grounded his comedy in reality. *Eroica* drew on experiences that both Munk, and Stawiński who wrote the script, were familiar with. This infused the movie with a strong sense of realism and astute observations on the human condition, which came from an understanding of the situations the characters find themselves in. It means that Munk's protagonists, while humorous, avoid being a pastiche, and so their circumstances feel believable. *Dzidziuś*, in fact, represents a large number of Poles, who were just trying to survive the war by any means necessary, so although he is supposedly an 'anti-hero', he is still relatable. While Munk is seen as the rationalist, his characters often behave in irrational ways, which make them all the more human. Munk was one of the first directors to look at the war through the lens of humour, both in Poland and internationally, and his decision raised questions about using comedy to portray such a sensitive subject, and whether it would simply come across as mockery. Munk and Stawiński, however, set the tone for later comedies, with their more light-hearted take coming from a place of respect. He does not make fun of individuals, but instead focuses on the absurdity of the situation.

Munk's films are almost always discussed in the context of their relationship to the works of Wajda. In Polish popular consciousness *Eroica* functions as a kind of antidote to the 'romantic expressionist paradigm' characterised by Wajda's films, with Munk's rationalist take on the war and flawed characters who make understandable choices.³⁴ Munk's characters, however,

³⁴ Mazierska, 'Eroica', p.58

do not always make rational choices: after all Dzikowski returns to the Uprising and Zawistowski choose to go in to hiding, rather than tell the truth. The overlap of content between *Eroica* and *Kanal*, and their shared author of scripts and production unit inevitably leads to discussions about the incompatibility of their two approaches. There are, however, far more similarities than differences. Both films are critical of the idea that it is Poland's holy duty to be heroic, to be martyrs. Wajda's characters may not question the actions they must take, but the fate they suffer at the end of the film leaves the audience debating whether or not their sacrifice was ultimately worth it. Neither director unconditionally praises the Warsaw Uprising, while never condemning those who took part, and exhibiting sympathy for their doomed characters. Dzikowski may be the archetypal 'antihero', with no interest in fighting or brave antics, but Wajda's platoon also does not consist of characters that are beyond reproach.

Eroica divided audiences. Viewers fell into two categories. The first group were those delighted by it, finding it a profound experience showing, at last, the truth about Polish heroism, without pomp and artificial pathos. The second were people who were outraged by it, who recognised the picture he presented but did not want to see it.³⁵ Some observers argued that it tarnished the holiness of the hopelessly tragic Warsaw Uprising; they stated that nothing about the Uprising could be seen as funny and as a consequence the film was seen as blasphemy.³⁶ An article in *Stolica* summed up the attitudes of *Eroica*'s critics very well: it claimed that it was a mocking, cynical film, nothing to do with the truth of the Uprising. Czesław Michalski predicted that there would be those who would find it hard to reconcile themselves with Munk's philosophy on heroism, because worshipping Uprising fighters and legends surrounding their actions was too engrained in Polish culture.³⁷ Michalski, however, was in the minority with his views. The collection of reviews in the National Film Archives shows an almost

³⁵ 'Rozmowa o Eroice', *Kobieta i Życie*, (10 July 1959)

³⁶ Zofia Drózd-Satanowska, 'Eroica po polsku', *Dziennik Ludowy*, (18-19 January 1958)

³⁷ Czesław Michalski, 'Polska Symfonia Bohaterska', *7 Dni w Polsce*, (26 January 1958)

exclusively positive assessment in both hard-line publications and film magazines. They suggest that critics reacted favourably to the refreshing picture that Munk presented and the way in which he questioned previously accepted mythology. Jan Budkiewicz in *Głos Pracy* argued that *Eroica* was a ‘brave new film’ that breaks with the tradition of occupation being shown in the form of stylised, tragic epics. He suggested that it was a work of great measure [unclear], incomparable with other Polish films.³⁸ Reviewers recognised the importance of offering an alternative voice in the discussions surrounding the Uprising, focusing on ordinary and unremarkable people, questioning Engels’ suggestion that ‘the historic role of Poles is heroic nonsense.’³⁹ Stanisław Grzelecki provided perhaps the most insightful review of Munk’s work, pointing out that there is no trace of contempt in their film: instead it is simply trying to give witness to the truth, exposing the everyday contradictions of life. Neither Munk nor Stawiński shied away from firmly stating their position that the cult of heroes brings harm rather than giving moral force.⁴⁰ There is one point, however, that almost all critics were in agreement on: that *Eroica* was one of the greatest artistic works in the short history of postwar Polish cinema and that it highlighted the large amount of talent there was amongst the new generation of filmmakers. Given that audiences were not overwhelmingly enthusiastic about *Eroica*, it would have been easy for the communist authorities to exploit this and further compound the criticism in the media. In this respect, *Eroica* almost certainly benefitted from the political and cultural thaw, but diverse opinions in the media also became a feature of reporting on cinema post 1956, suggesting that the communist regime were willing to tolerate some level of dissenting opinion.

Bożena Janica argued that perhaps the attacks on Munk and *Eroica* were a sign that Polish audiences and critics needed more films that acknowledged the bravery of the fighters, without

³⁸ Jan Budkiewicz, ‘Eroica – artystyczne wydarzenie’, *Głos Pracy*, (8 January 1958)

³⁹ ‘Eroica nie bohaterstka’, *Trybuna Robotnicza*, (28-29 December 1957)

⁴⁰ Stanisław Grzelecki, ‘Po premierze film Eroica sprawy Polaków’, *Życie Warszawy*, (7 January 1958)

any criticism of them, or the Uprising as a whole.⁴¹ It is certainly true that due to the lack of previous critical discussion about the Warsaw Uprising it was still a very raw subject when both *Kanal* and *Eroica* were released, and it was difficult for audiences to view the events in a negative light. It appeared that the public expectation was for a film that glorified the insurgents and their actions, remembering their noble sacrifice for a doomed cause. *Eroica* certainly appeared on Polish screens too early, before there had been a chance for extensive self-examination both in the public and private spheres or discussion of the Uprising with any perspective. Munk was one of the first directors to provide this opportunity. It was not until the postcommunist era that *Eroica* was fully recognised as an important voice in the debates about the rationality of Polish actions during the Second World War and the critical discussion of myths of heroism. Today, along with *Ashes and Diamonds*, it is the most widely viewed film from the Polish School period.⁴²

Bad Luck

Bad Luck was released in 1960. It was once again written by Stawiński and picked up on many of the themes that had been introduced in *Eroica*. Although the film covered the interwar period, the Second World War and the early years of communism in Poland, the war takes up the largest portion of the action. *Bad Luck* cemented Andrzej Munk's position as one of the masters of the new generation of Polish filmmakers, showing his ability to master both tragedy and comedy. It told the story of a hapless opportunist clashing with political and historical circumstances that he did not understand. This model had an impact on other movies, in particular Péter Bacsó's *A tanú* (*The Witness*) a Hungarian film set during the Stalinist years that followed a similar premise to *Bad Luck*.⁴³ It followed many of the themes of the Second

⁴¹ Bożena Janicka, 'Eroica', *Film*, (13 May 1984)

⁴² Mazierska, 'Eroica', p.63

⁴³ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, p.86

World War raised in *Eroica*, and took a critical look at the nationalism of interwar Poland; Polish heroism and what that really was and the chaos the war caused.

Bad Luck follows the story of Jan Piszczek, a Polish 'everyman' who desperately wants to play a role in important events, but consistently finds himself with no luck on his side, and thus becomes another victim of history. From his childhood years Piszczek considers himself to be a victim: he is bullied at school and in the scouts; he sees himself as not allowed to succeed. Piszczek's father is antisemitic and Piszczek himself gets caught up in interwar Polish nationalism and antisemitism, which he has no real interest in. In an ironic twist Piszczek is mistaken for a Jew. When war breaks out Piszczek is called up too late and when he arrives at the cadet training school, after evacuating Warsaw and being shot at by enemy planes, the school is empty. He finally puts on his uniform, which he has dreamed of doing, at just the wrong moment: he is captured by German soldiers who do not believe his story as it is so ridiculous. In the POW camp Piszczek makes up stories of his own heroism, talking of escaping through a tunnel; but he is ultimately found out and shunned by his fellow inmates. On his return to Warsaw, he is caught with illegal pamphlets and so decides to live out the rest of the war in the countryside, away from any action. Everyone takes the war more seriously than Piszczek.

Bad Luck contains elements of the surreal and the farcical; the opening scenes are reminiscent of a Charlie Chaplin film. Piszczek comically running through a cabbage patch while being shot at by the planes he had waved at some thirty seconds earlier highlights his naivety when it comes to war, yet underneath it shows the chaos of September 1939. Notwithstanding its humour, *Bad Luck* also has a serious message about the war, although it is much more subtle and put across using images rather than words. Along with showing the confusion and devastation that came with the September campaign, Munk also shows the destruction of Warsaw, as Piszczek climbs through the rubble when he returns after liberation. When

Piszczyk meets his friend in the ruins, behind him is a note written on a piece of scrap metal: 'I am in Kraków. A.Wasik', reminding viewers that family and friends were split up by the conflict, often not knowing how or where to find them once the conflict was over.⁴⁴ Amongst the farce and slapstick, one of Munk's key messages still remains: no matter who you are, and how much you might try to avoid the effects of the war, it touched everyone and destroyed countless lives.

Even more so than Dzidzius, Piszczyk is an 'antihero', a character who tries to look the part, but consistently finds himself falling short. Piszczyk wants to be a hero, but does not know how to go about it and his efforts land him in trouble. He could not be further from the other central characters of the Polish School: Piszczyk has no sense of duty or honour, only a childish fantasy. He aspires to wear an army uniform, but this gets him arrested, and he finds himself out of place in the POW camp with others who have seen combat and has to fabricate a story to fit in. It is a story that is reminiscent of the legend of Zawistowski in *Eroica*, as both are manufacturing fictional tales that they think people want to hear and to make up for their own inadequacies. Piszczyk's concern, however, is for his reputation, and for his ease of living, not being helpful to the Polish war effort.

Although there was not much room for comedy in Polish war films, particularly in the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was some, and Munk felt very strongly that inducing laughter was an important part of the portrayal of the Second World War. Munk stated that 'there is no drama or deep experience without laughter'; and when talking about *Bad Luck* specifically he claimed: 'I wanted to induce personal embarrassment so we can laugh when dealing with a very tragic phenomenon.'⁴⁵ Munk first used this technique in *Eroica*, to a lesser degree, but it really came into its own in *Bad Luck*. The absurd and slightly grotesque portrayal of a man

⁴⁴ *Bad Luck*, dir. Andrzej Munk (Film, 1961, DVD, 2008), 31.46

⁴⁵ Piotr Zwierzchowski, *Zezowate szczęście*, p.117.

who stumbled through a series of disasters invokes laughter, without it being at anyone but Piszczyk's expense. Just as in *Eroica*, Munk avoids making fun of individuals and instead makes a mockery of war and the recent past in an effort to provide a form of therapy. *Bad Luck* was an early prototype of a wartime comedy. Later attempts such as Stanisław Lenartowicz's *Giuseppe w Warszawie* (*Giuseppe in Warsaw*, 1964) and Tadeusz Chmielewski's *Jak rozpetalem drugą wojnę światową* (*How I Started the Second World War*, 1969), had some strong similarities to *Bad Luck*. *Giuseppe in Warsaw* showed the war as an absurd event with tragic consequences, while the central character of *How I Started the Second World War*, Franek Dolas, although far more likeable than Piszczyk, also finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time on multiple occasions in a similar cruel twist of fate.

Munk took the interwar antisemitism that Ford touched on in *Border Street* and made it more explicit. Unlike Ford, Munk provided no excuses, and did not try to provide the simple explanation that it was confined to those who considered themselves to be ethnic Germans, or that people abandoned their beliefs once they came into contact with benevolent Jews. Munk shows the brutal way in which some Jews were treated by their fellow Poles in the interwar period that then carried on into the war. In the interwar period *Bad Luck* presents Jews being separated from others at university and having to sit on the opposite side of the auditorium. Piszczyk states that although his physical characteristics meant he was mistaken for a Jew, his father hated them. Shouts of 'Send the Jews to Madagascar', 'Down with the Communist Jews', and smashing up Jewish shops echo the behaviour and language in Germany at the same time.⁴⁶ This portrayal went against the public, PZPR narrative, in which Polish antisemitism was not mentioned at all, either in the interwar period, or during the war, and what was

⁴⁶ *Bad Luck*, 21.32

emphasised was instances in which Poles helped the Jews. Just as he had done in *Eroica*, Munk highlighted an uncomfortable issue, and forced the audience to ask questions.

Bad Luck did not have an easy journey to production and release. The Script Assessment Meeting was a lively affair. There was a long debate about the character of Piszczyk, and what his story symbolised. Some at the meeting, such as Jerzy Toeplitz, were worried that the script mocked Poland. Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski and Tadeusz Konwicki, however, argued that Piszczyk's situation could not be a satire for the fate of Poland, because the filmmakers would not be cruel enough to laugh at a nation that was still going through so much change and transition. Munk and Stawiński were passionate and defiant in the defence of their screenplay. Stawiński's voice carried extra weight, as he was literary director of the Kamera film unit that produced *Bad Luck*. Munk in particular stated that Piszczyk was difficult to show on paper, but he would be clearer on screen. Tadeusz Karpowski backed up Munk, and stated that the unit had expected there would be some misunderstandings, as a number of moments, particularly those relating to the hero, were difficult to cast in text. Ścibor-Rylski, Konwicki and Stawiński were all literary directors of units at the time, showing how those in the film industry supported each other. Munk claimed that Piszczyk was unaware of his actions and did not understand history, in fact he does not comprehend anything at all, and this is why he is convinced that bad luck followed him. For that reason, Munk asserted, one could not consider the film to be making a mockery of Polish history. Munk had carefully crafted the concept for the whole film, but he considered the script to simply be the starting point.⁴⁷

Despite a lively debate which split those present at the meeting, the Commission had no doubts and recommended that *Bad Luck* be put into production. The chair, Tadeusz Zaorski, in his end speech stated that the authors should make a few amendments, but admitted it was a very

⁴⁷ FN A-214 poz.121 'Protokół z Komisji Ocen Scenariuszy w dniu 13 lutego 1959 r.'

promising screenplay.⁴⁸ Munk did make a number of changes, although not necessarily those that the Commission suggested, Munk altered the tone of the script, making it more serious and placing greater emphasis on certain scenes.⁴⁹ *Bad Luck* was ready at the end of 1959 but the Final Assessment Commission was constantly put back; nobody wanted to make the decision to release the film for distribution. According to Stawiński, copies were finally seized by a government committee chaired by the First Secretary of the Communist Party and the Prime Minister, who finally approved the release of *Bad Luck*.⁵⁰ After some time Munk was called to the Ministry of Culture and told to change the ending or *Bad Luck* would not be released. Munk and Stawiński reluctantly did so, in order for the film to be seen by audiences.⁵¹ All of the concerns about *Bad Luck* related to the last portion of the movie, set in the present. There were no objections to the section that covered the Second World War.

Reviewers rated *Bad Luck* very well, although there were those who were critical. Aleksander Jackiewicz stated that *Bad Luck* was one of the most ambitious projects of the Polish School since *Ashes and Diamonds*; he drew attention to Piszczyk's many dimensions, and those of the supporting characters.⁵² Agnieszka Osiecka⁵³ wrote that *Bad Luck* could be compared to the literature of Molière and that *Bad Luck* was not only a rare specimen of an intellectual film, but also a great example of good work.⁵⁴ The problem came when *Bad Luck* was sent as the Polish entry to the Cannes Film Festival and failed to win any prizes. This allowed the very well-respected critic Zygmunt Kałużyński to attack both *Bad Luck* and its creators. Kałużyński erroneously claimed that viewers were not interested in *Bad Luck* and that it was a failure of a

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ Jerzy Stefan Stawiński, *Notatki Scenarzysty* (2 vols, Warsaw, 1983), ii, p.25

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ Zwierzchowski, *Zezowate szczęście*, p.29

⁵² Aleksander Jackiewicz, 'Polska Chaplinada', *Film*, (10 April 1960)

⁵³ Agnieszka Osiecka (1936-1997), was a poet, prose writer and journalist, who wrote for *Głos Wybrzeża*, *Nowa Kultura* and *Sztandar Młodych*, among others, and a member of the Polish Writers Association. She was most notable, however, for her song writing.

⁵⁴ Agnieszka Osiecka, 'Zezowate szczęście', *Młodzież Świata*, (March 1960)

film, indicative of a problem that went beyond film itself. In perhaps a concession, Kałużyński argued that *Bad Luck* was no better or worse than other Polish School movies.⁵⁵ Kałużyński, however, was in the minority and most critics recognised the way in which Munk was able to entertain, but also encourage those watching to stop and think. Despite the concerns about *Bad Luck* expressed by the Ministry of Culture, these were not reflected in the press, which is a further indication that censorship over cinema was not all encompassing.

Piotr Zwierzchowski argues that sometimes *Bad Luck* is perceived too superficially, simply as a funny story about a man who does nothing.⁵⁶ It is common for people not to appreciate the overarching message of a film, or pick up on the subtleties and subtext. *Bad Luck* proved to be one of the most universally popular films of the Polish School, which can largely be attributed to its humorous tone and on the surface more light-hearted approach to dark moments in Polish history. It was one of the last films made under the relative freedoms that came as a result of 'Polish October' and it was very much representative of that time. Munk branched out, incorporating elements of farce and surrealism into *Bad Luck*, but it was also a logical progression from *Eroica*. *Bad Luck* confirmed Munk as a critical director, one who challenged traditional Polish views and exposed some of the irrationality of people's behaviour. He managed to do this without ridiculing or belittling anyone, and was particularly careful not to reduce the significance of the sacrifice made by a number of Poles.

The Passenger

The Passenger remains one of the most intriguing works of the Polish School, due to the fact that Munk died in the process of making it. It premiered on 20 September 1963, the second anniversary of his death and was presented as an unfinished statement with Munk's material,

⁵⁵ Zygmunt Kałużyński, 'Dwa Słowa', *Film*, (3 July 1960)

⁵⁶ Zwierzchowski, *Zezowate szczęście*, p.86

combined with a commentary on the making of the film. At the time of his death Munk had only filmed a small portion of the movie, just the contemporary scenes set on the ocean liner and part of the retrospective, which was set in Auschwitz. He still needed to record in the studio and reshoot the scenes on the ship because he was unhappy with them, so his colleagues felt there was not enough to be able to complete the work themselves. Munk's friend and fellow director, Witold Lesiewicz, was asked by Jerzy Bossak, head of the Kamera film unit that produced the project, not to finish the film, but instead to link the shot footage with stills and his own narrative, acting in an editorial capacity.⁵⁷ When it came to maintaining loyalty to his deceased associate, he felt unable to come up with anything better to show off his last masterpiece. Lesiewicz argued that there was enough of Munk's own work available for audiences to be able to get a sense of what he was trying to accomplish, although the question remains, given all the interventions in the film, whether the final product can truly be attributed to Munk.⁵⁸ *The Passenger* remains unique in its style and composition, making it very memorable piece, a requiem to a director. In 1964 it won the FIPRESCI Prize at the Cannes Film Festival and was very well received at Venice. It remains Munk's best known film outside Poland.

The Passenger was adapted by Munk from Zofia Posmysz's short story and play of the same name. The idea came to Posmysz while she was on holiday abroad and she bumped into a group of German tourists. Among them she heard the voice of a woman that sounded very similar to her warden at Auschwitz. She reasoned that of course it was not her, but she began to wonder how she would act if it had been. Would she try to expose it? Initially Posmysz was asked for permission to adapt the story into a television drama, directed by Munk. It was broadcast on 10 October 1960 but was not recorded, meaning it could not be used to assist

⁵⁷ Czesław Michalski, 'Ostatnie dzieło Andrzeja Munka', *Walka Młodych*, (29 September 1963)

⁵⁸ *ibid*

Lesiewicz in deciphering Munk's conception of the film. Munk was mostly interested in the modern drama of someone pursued by the past and the issue of responsibility: he decided to include the retrospective scenes in Auschwitz because he did not have enough material to fill a complete script. He intended the present to be the most important part of the story, with the flashbacks only enhancing the reality. According to Posmysz the image of Auschwitz fascinated Munk, and when she first saw the footage he had shot she was shocked by this authenticity of the mood in the camp, something she was very familiar with having been an inmate for three years.⁵⁹ This was the first time that she used her camp experiences in her writing, and her decision to look at the concentration camp from the view of a perpetrator rather than a prisoner marked a move away from the common approach in literature of highlighting martyrdom. It was a significant novelty at the time in which it was written.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, by 1963, while the Holocaust received a great deal of attention in the West, after the capture and trial of Adolf Eichmann, in Poland it was a subject that was avoided in public discourse. In cinema, although not commonplace, it was the subject of Jerzy Zarzycki's *Biały niedźwiedź* (*White Bear*, 1959) and Andrzej Wajda's *Samson*, and was also referred to in *Birth Certificate* and Kutz's *Cross of Valour*. During the socialist realist period the Holocaust all but disappeared from literature and cinema, but in 1956 it experienced a revival in literature, allowing Posmysz's novel to be published. Until the mid 1960s, in contexts where reference to the Jews was unavoidable, their fate continued to be seen as something exceptional, but their 'genocide', was incorporated into a suitably ideological narrative, and was seen as a result of passivity in the face of fascism.⁶⁰ This was counterposed to redeeming acts of resistance. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising became central to the narrative and a way of commemorating the Holocaust as a

⁵⁹ 'Pasażerka', *Dziennik Polski*, (21 December 1963)

⁶⁰ Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, p.71

whole. At the same time, the death and concentration camps were internationalised. In 1965 a new memorial was completed at Treblinka. It represented a trend of designing more avant-garde memorials that also used Jewish symbols. It included 17,000 stones, evoking a Jewish cemetery, many of which were inscribed with the names of Jewish villages that had been wiped out by the Holocaust. There remained representations of different nationalities, however, with a set of larger stones, which detailed the countries of origin of those killed at Treblinka.⁶¹ At the unveiling, despite the many Jewish references, the press spoke of Treblinka's victims as 800,000 citizens of European nations.⁶² Steinlauf argues that by consigning the memory of the Jews to that of 'other nations' martyred by the Nazis the effect was to marginalise or 'ghettoise' the subject.⁶³ This was the state of Polish Holocaust memory when *The Passenger* was released.

The Passenger flips Zofia Posmysz's own experience and focuses on a former Auschwitz guard Liza who is on holiday on a cruise ship. While on deck she spots someone who resembles one of her prisoners, Marta. This prompts Liza to tell her husband, who had been unaware of her past, about the relationship she had with this particular inmate. Her initial retelling seems difficult to reconcile with our knowledge of the camp system and its logistics. Liza portrays herself as benevolent, someone who tried to help a favoured captive, who in turn took advantage of her kindness. Scenes from the camp show that, in fact, the opposite is true, and that Marta does not defend herself against the animosity of her supervisor, and, in fact, shows her compassion. Liza plays a psychological game with Marta, so that she will become trusted amongst enemy prisoners and ultimately break their morale. Marta, however, understands what is behind the game and is not fooled: she appears stronger than Liza. By her own admission

⁶¹ Harold Marcuse, 'Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 115, No.1 (February 2010), p.87

⁶² *ibid*

⁶³ Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, p.71

Liza enjoyed the game: it excited her, especially when she felt she had the upper hand. It becomes clear, however, from flashbacks, that Liza is telling her own version of reality, one that she had perhaps constructed in the post war years. Filtering her memory, she is still trying to garner sympathy for herself and other guards, as she envies Marta and Tadeusz and their love, which she claims she cannot have. The unfinished nature of the film means the audience will never know Marta's fate. We know that Liza was sure she had not survived, but we never learn whether she was a passenger on the liner.

Munk presented the events of the Holocaust with powerful understatement. Annette Insdorf argues that *The Passenger*, along with *The Last Stage*, Sidney's Lumet's *The Pawnbroker*, Agnieszka Holland's *Bittere Ernte (Angry Harvest)* and István Szabó's *Mephisto*, succeeded best in illuminating the Holocaust as they kept it visible and rendered it meaningful.⁶⁴ Munk's portrayal of the everyday running of Auschwitz is done with subtlety and he avoids playing up the cruelty of Nazi oppressors. The murder of children is simply alluded to; men in uniforms are shown placing the Zyklon B into the gas chambers and empty pushchairs are brought into the storeroom. He does not show people being shot, just a silhouette and the firing of a gun. The next image is of a black car with a human hand hanging from it. The fate of the Jews is an issue that is very much present: Munk does not make much reference to it out loud, but it is illustrated in the use of the Star of David, which is clear on the coats left behind in the storeroom and on the arms of the children as they are led to their deaths, an act which Marta witnesses. As with *The Last Stage*, however, the murder of the Jews happens in the background of *The Passenger*, while the main story focuses on political prisoners. Avoiding drastic descriptions of brutality allowed Munk to look at the essence of moral destruction that was brought by the Nazis. It also makes it all the more horrific. Wajda claimed in the documentary about Munk's life and the making of his last completed work, *The Last Pictures*, that *The Passenger* was the

⁶⁴ Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (Cambridge 2002), p.241

most terrifying image of Auschwitz he knew.⁶⁵ Munk avoided the spirit of martyrdom that infused *The Last Stage* and earlier works of literature. This more detached perspective was very much in keeping with the spirit of both *Eroica* and *Bad Luck*. In documenting the ordinary life in Auschwitz Munk reflected an important trend in Polish prose about the camps, represented by *Medallions* by Zofia Nałkowska and the short stories of Tadeusz Borowski. They tried to document with precision how the Nazi machine worked and the effect it had on victims and perpetrators, without making explicit judgement. Munk differed from Borowski in one key way: he did not share his pessimism and his theory that everyone was corrupted by the system. Ernest Bryll⁶⁶ argued that, for the first time, a film reminds us of what was seen in Borowski's memoirs and prose: that the community of prisoners was not easy to penetrate.⁶⁷ While in many ways Munk shows Auschwitz in a very different way to the movies that came before, he also, like both *The Last Stage* and *The End of Our World*, highlighted the work of the camp resistance.

The Passenger was a departure from Munk's previous war films, turning from the ordinary man caught up in history, to the psychological drama. The complex relationship between victim and perpetrator had not been focused on before in Polish cinema. In placing Liza at the centre of his story Munk was able to explore the motivation behind those who worked within the camp system, and the way they viewed their actions in the post war years. Just two days before his death, Munk remarked: 'In the film Auschwitz is shown from a distance of twenty years and is seen through the eyes of an S.S woman. She relates facts coldly while retaining a

⁶⁵ *Ostatnie zdjęcie*, dir. Andrzej Brzozowski (Film, 2000, DVD, 200), 14.30

⁶⁶ Ernest Bryll is a poet, writer, journalist, film critic and former diplomat. From 1974 to 1978 he was the director of the Polish Cultural Institute in London, and between 1991 and 1995 was Ambassador to the Republic of Ireland. Bryll wrote for *Po prostu*, *Sztandar Młodych*, and was on the editorial board of *Współczesność*. He was literary director of Kamera from 1967 to 1968. His writing often looked at Poland's role in Europe and evaluation of the country's national character and vices. He was critical of romantic patriotism, and spoke out against what he saw as the Polish 'victim cult', and the celebration of loss.

⁶⁷ Ernest Bryll, 'Wyjście z legendy', *Współczesność*, (31 October 1963)

clear conscience.’⁶⁸ *The Passenger* also poses the question about culpability. Were functionaries carrying out orders from on high, or acting on their own initiative? Liza appears to feel guilt for her actions during her time as a guard: she may not have abused Marta or tortured her, but she was still trying to break her spirit by offering her the privileged prisoner position. She, however, does not see herself as liable. It is not until she believes she sees her former prisoner twenty years later that she begins to be troubled by her past. Munk appears to suggest that the evil committed in the camp was not necessarily due to the cruelty and sadism of the oppressors, but rather was brought about by the inhumanity of the Nazi system as a whole. Munk also moves away from a clichéd portrayal of the Nazis: Liza is a normal woman, not stupid and incompetent or unnecessarily sadistic and cruel. *Życie Literackie* claimed, in an article shortly after the release of the film, that Munk carefully studied materials about war criminals in preparation for the creation of Liza.⁶⁹

The fundamental question asked by *The Passenger* is whether post war justifications by Germans are trustworthy or merely self-exonerating. Munk’s early death means that audiences will never find out whether he planned to answer this question or leave it open-ended. To portray Liza’s memories, and the political realities of dissenters in Auschwitz, similar visual materials are used with divergent interpretations. Liza’s shots are points of view and thus are very subjective: but they are only revealed to be so later when the camera pans out. For Munk the modern drama was what was most compelling: someone pursued by the past, trying to come to terms with the issue of responsibility. Liza’s recalling of events is incomplete and sometimes false, in direct contrast to the words of the camp commandant who tells Liza ‘an SS Officer never evades responsibility.’⁷⁰ The narrator states ‘for she is among those who prefer not to remember yesterday’s crimes, among the people who even today...’ Here the voiceover breaks,

⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁶⁹ ‘Andrzej Munk o *Pasażerce*’, *Życie Literackie*, (29 September 1963)

⁷⁰ *Pasażerka*, dir. Andrzej Munk (Film, 1963, DVD, 2006), 57.28

forcing the viewer to finish the sentence and the film.⁷¹ This ending acts as a stimulant rather than closure, insisting that the chapter is not over. Insdorf argues that perhaps the end of the sentence can be found in the last shot, a still of the luxury liner, implying we remain isolated, unconnected to events, unable to see and touch what is happening around us.⁷²

Critics were united in their praise for *The Passenger*, realising its important place in Polish cinema. It was widely recognised that Lesiewicz had made the correct decision in leaving the film unfinished: it served as a fitting tribute to Munk and avoided the risk of altering the message that he wished to convey. The understated way in which he portrayed the horrors of Auschwitz mainly drew admiration, as does his focus on what Janusz Gazda described as the main issue that should concern contemporary Poles: ‘the psychological case against Germans for the crimes in which they were involved.’⁷³ Konrad Eberhardt argued that *The Passenger* was not a continuation of Munk’s earlier work but rather marked the start of a new chapter.⁷⁴ The grotesque nature of *Bad Luck* and the dark humour of the first part of *Eroica* are far from the vision of Auschwitz in *The Passenger*. Even his portrayal of two camp situations is very different: the POW camp of *Ostinato lugubre* is merely a convenient setting for the story Munk wishes to tell. It is not a character in its own right, unlike Auschwitz in *The Passenger*. While Munk was possibly moving into a whole new genre, he continued to avoid playing into Polish national mythology and its worship of heroism. Now, however, he began asking important questions about the nature of humanity, and investigating how people react and the motivation behind their decisions during extreme situations. We will never know what the destination of his artistic journey would be, but it is clear that the three films analysed in this chapter are among the most important and enduring films of the Polish School.

⁷¹ *ibid*

⁷² Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, p.53

⁷³ Janusz Gadza, ‘Pasażerka’, *Ilustrowany Magazyn Studencki*, (29 September 1963)

⁷⁴ Konrad Eberhardt, ‘Przeciw Niepamięci’, *Film*, (13 October 1963)

Munk has traditionally been described as a rationalist, but his characters did not always act in a rational fashion. Munk does not judge them or give any suggestion that their behaviour was wrong. This perhaps tells us something pertinent about Munk: that while he was outwardly critical of what he perceived to be a slavish Polish duty to fight no matter how hopeless the circumstances, this is how he himself had behaved during the war and so he understood it and saw it perhaps as an inevitability. Munk the pragmatist and realist might be more appropriate.

Kazimierz Kutz: the bard of little fatherlands and ordinary people

Biography

Kazimierz Kutz was born 16 February 1929 in the town of Szopienice. His father was a railwayman and participated in the Silesian Uprisings.⁷⁵ Following his father's early retirement, the family was run by Kutz's mother who went to work, an unusual occurrence in Silesian, paternalistic society.⁷⁶ Kutz described his world as being very small. Until the war he did not even know Katowice, which was only a few kilometres from where he lived. This goes some way to explaining why Kutz was such a fan of 'little Poland', always focusing on provincial and small-town areas. When war broke out, he was just a child living in Upper Silesia, which was incorporated into the Third Reich. The area was inhabited by both Poles and Germans. This meant that he was exposed to German films in his early teenage years, although he argued that, despite seeing work by some of the great German comedians, the movies made little impression on him. Consequently, he did not use them as inspiration in his later career. He saw his first film, directed by Leon Buczkowski, at the age of eight or nine. Kutz argues that his greatest film education came at the Łódź Film School, and that his greatest

⁷⁵ The Silesian Uprising was a series of three uprisings that took place between 1919 and 1921 in Upper Silesia. The area was part of Germany, but had a significant Polish minority, which led to tensions. Ethnic Polish separatists, who wanted the area transferred to Poland fought German police and paramilitary forces. As a result of the conflict, the area was split between the two countries.

⁷⁶ 'Być sobą', *Polska*, (January 1981)

influences were Robert Bresson and Sergei Eisenstein, singling out in particular *Battleship Potemkin* and *Ivan the Terrible*.⁷⁷

During his formative years Kutz was exposed directly to communist thought. At his Roman Catholic secondary school, immediately prior to the war, the Polish language and Introduction to Philosophy classes were taught by Ignacy Filk and his colleague Dyrkova, both prewar communists. Kutz described the ideological temperature in the school as high, with teachers fighting for the souls of the students. Everyone, however, was given the opportunity to choose and support one side or the other.⁷⁸ He was politically active from very early on in his life and after becoming disillusioned with the Scout movement, he joined the youth movement of the PPS, as his father and many other family members belonged to the party. While studying at the Film School in Łódź, he was involved with the Union of Polish Youth (Związek Młodzieży Polskiej, ZMP), the descendant of the organisation that was portrayed in *A Generation*, on which Kutz was the assistant director. Kutz has stated that his time at the Film School was extremely significant because of the films he was able to view and the teachers to whom he had access. He studied under Antoni Bohdziewicz, who taught him that social matters were the most important.⁷⁹

Kutz is particularly significant for being the only notable director from the Silesian region, frequently highlighting the history and issues of the area. His early war films, however, show very little about life in Silesia as part of the Reich. Kutz set himself up as different from other members of the Polish School; his heroes occupied very different worlds to those inhabited by Wajda and Munk's protagonists. It is unsurprising that Kutz painted such a different picture of the Second World War to that of Munk and Wajda. Unlike his more affluent colleagues, he

⁷⁷ 'Sztuka Uwodzenia', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, (12 January 1996)

⁷⁸ Edmund Żurek, 'O tych, którzy są nadzieją', *Literatura*, (26 September 1980)

⁷⁹ *ibid*

came from a working-class family. He was also only a child during the war and lived in an area where national consciousness could swing a number of ways. Kutz's heroes have very little to do with national martyrdom, but more the great human effort required to sustain a war, providing a different dimension to that of Munk and Wajda.

Kutz was the leading figure of the plebeian trend, which showed civilian protagonists, those who could be considered anti-heroic and apolitical that viewers were able to identify with. These simple people were placed in films that were concise and brief, almost reportage-like in their style, devoid of any psychological retrospection. It was this that set Kutz apart from Munk. He was not interested in national mythology, but rather everyday life. Kutz's early cinema stayed away from national symbols, focusing on concrete situations. It provided a stark contrast to movies that placed extraordinary soldiers at the centre of the story, men who were heroic under any circumstances and invariably idealistic, willing to die rather than betray their beliefs. With *Cross of Valour*, Kutz established that he would be reconstructing the way in which ordinary people perceived reality, in this case the insane reality of war.

Cross of Valour

Cross of Valour, Kutz's debut, had its premiere on 27 March 1959 and appears to be a rebellion against the romantic and intellectual themes of Wajda and Munk. His focus on the ordinary soldier was one of the main reasons that the film was almost universally loved by both critics and audiences; Kutz gave them characters to whom they could relate, in circumstances that were familiar. Writing on Kutz in *Nowa Kultura*, Bolesław Michałek titled his review, 'People We Like', stating that it was about our older brothers at the front and the things we love about

them.⁸⁰ In 1959 *Cross of Valour* was awarded the ‘Warsaw Mermaid’, the Polish Film Critics’ award for the best Polish feature of the year.

Cross of Valour is made up of three short stories. The first story *Krzyż (Cross)* follows a young soldier who up until the time he joined the army had been fairly unremarkable, but in the military he shines and is awarded the Cross of Valour. He is given a holiday to celebrate with his loved ones, but when he returns to his village it is completely destroyed and his family murdered: the only person he meets is an old, slightly crazed peasant. When confronted with his own personal tragedy, the soldier, who was fearless at the front, breaks down. The second story, *Pies (Dog)*, centres on a group of sappers who are working near Auschwitz. One of them adopts a stray dog, but later discovers he was once the property of the SS camp guards. This brings about a moral dilemma as they hate the dog and want to kill it, but also realise that it is difficult to transfer the crimes committed by men onto an animal, so eventually they leave it in a field. The final story, *Wdowa (The Widow)*, focuses on a small town in the Western territories resettled by the military. The soldiers live in the shadow of the memory of their captain who died heroically, which results in the townspeople displaying an immense reverence for his widow. A conflict forms as she is young and wishes to live her life, but the inhabitants treat her as a relic, almost feeling an ownership over her. Ultimately, she rebels and flees, leaving behind a scandal.

Cross of Valour was written by Józef Hen, adapted from his own stories. Hen fought with the Polish Army formed in the Soviet Union, and lost his father, brother and sister in the Holocaust. His personal story has echoes of that of Socha in *Cross*.⁸¹ Hen had a keen power of observation, and knowledge of soldiers’ psyche and sense of humour, which he was successfully able to transfer onto the page. Kutz credits Tadeusz Konwicki, who was then literary director of Kadr,

⁸⁰ Bolesław Michałek, ‘Ludzie, których lubimy’, *Nowa Kultura*, (5 April 1959)

⁸¹ Kazimierz Kutz, *Będzie skandal. Autoportret* (Kraków, 2019), p.145

with his introduction to Hen's work, which appealed instantly to Kutz.⁸² As Hen was part of the First Polish Army the inference is that all of the military characters in *Cross of Valour* were too, but Kutz does not make this explicit. He avoids any propagandistic images of Polish-Soviet friendship and victorious battles.

The minutes of the Script Assessment Commission meeting held on 27 June 1958 reveal that initially the film comprised four short stories, the final one being about hunger and bread. The idea was based on a play on words, a verbal interpretation of the word famine. There was disagreement amongst those present about the necessity to include the final story, particularly as it was seen to be much weaker. Antoni Bohdziewicz argued that the metaphor of bread did not really come through and that the naivety of the hero was exaggerated. K. T. Toeplitz claimed it was too literary. Both Jerzy Andrzejewski and Tadeusz Konwicki, however, suggested that adjusting the screenplay too much would cause it to lose its charm and character, thus it should go forward for production as it stood. This is one of numerous examples of Konwicki standing up for a member of his unit. *Widow* was unanimously seen as the most impressive of the three stories, both in terms of subject matter and literary merit. There were some members, including Ludwik Starski, who argued that it should be expanded into a full-length film. The ultimate conclusion of the meeting was that *Cross of Valour* was an ambitious piece that was far from the stereotypical fare that was often the subject of the Commission's discussions. The screenplay was assessed positively with no changes suggested and Kutz was commended for choosing such difficult and original material for his debut work.⁸³ While the fourth story was sanctioned for production, it never made it to the screen.

Cross of Valour represented a growing trend in the 1950s of films evolving from shorter novellas. Often they did not appear to have much thematically that bound them together. On

⁸² Adamczak, 'Film Units in the People's Republic of Poland', p.239

⁸³ FN A-214 poz: 97 'Komisja Ocen Scenariuszy 27 czerwca 1958 r.'

the surface all that unites Hen's stories is the period of time they represent, each one slightly later than the previous, and moving from the last days of the war to the early days after liberation. Probing deeper, however, it is clear they have more in common. Their main protagonists, for example, are all ordinary people trying to navigate their way in a world they no longer recognise, with no point of reference. They each mourn what they have lost, and feel a sense of anger. They represent the beginnings the plebeian trend in cinema, showing characters reacting in very human ways. Socha breaking down on returning to his village, the two soldiers taking their frustrations out on a dog, and the young widow escaping her repressive situation are all reactions that feel understandable. Both Socha, and the soldiers in *The Dog* question how they will behave when they enter Germany: will they match the cruelty of the enemy or treat them with compassion? Neither have an answer, leaving it on the audience to reflect, and creating a space for discussion on what is appropriate behaviour for the victorious army.

Like Munk in *Eroica*, Kutz's film asks questions about the point of war, and also posits that heroism can have destructive consequences. As previously discussed, he also shows the struggles that many went through trying to live their lives in the aftermath of what they experienced. Socha never showed any talent in his civilian life, yet as a soldier he was rewarded for heroic actions. This, however, means nothing to him when he discovers his whole family have been killed, and his village destroyed. They are who he had been fighting for, not a sense of national duty or ideology. When he returns, he does not remain stoic, and hide his emotions: he is no longer a soldier, but a bereaved boy. It raises the question of whether his actions were worth it, given he no longer has anyone to be proud of them. The two soldiers in *The Dog* cannot comprehend the horrors they see on liberating the concentration camp, which leads to them taking their disbelief and anger out on the camp dog. Kutz's final story looks at the metamorphosis of a heroic cult into a secular religious cult, with the deceased captain

revered as a god like figure, and his young widow unable to live her own life. As with Munk's POW camp scenario, the town in *The Widow* shows how damaging mythology can be, both to its subjects, and those who create it. Kutz is deeply critical of the worship of the captain, and the way it prevented those who knew him from moving on with their lives during the early, fragile, postwar years.

Critics and audiences responded very well to *Cross of Valour*. Newspapers were full of admiration for Kutz's debut piece and the maturity it showed. The choice of ordinary people and everyday situations was a key factor in the film's success, providing an alternative to the heavy discussions of Polish heroism and national mythology. A great deal of the praise was reserved for cinematographer Jerzy Wójcik, who had also been responsible for some of the greatest films of the 1950s and 1960s, including *Eroica* and *Ashes and Diamonds* and who was a favourite collaborator of Jerzy Kawalerowicz and Stanisław Różewicz. Wiktor Woroszyński commented on his mature style and his considerable talent that was already beginning to draw widespread attention.⁸⁴ The fact that *Cross of Valour* focused on soldiers of the Polish Army commanded by the Soviets was a key reason for the success of the movie amongst reviewers, particularly those in staunchly communist papers, which had been waiting for a portrayal of their wartime comrades. Stanisław Janicki wrote in *Żołnierz Polski* that the green uniform, with the Piast eagle worn by Socha in *Cross* obviously had a special military meaning for some viewers, while Woroszyński commented that a work that placed the spotlight on Polish Army soldiers coming from the east had been a long time coming, remarking that *Cross of Valour* lived up to expectation.⁸⁵ Any criticism was levelled at the choice of the three short stories: this stylistic choice divided opinion as it had in the Script Assessment meeting. Audiences reacted very favourably to characters whom they recognised and identified with, as was

⁸⁴ Wiktor Woroszyński, 'Jeszcze nie zginęła', *Film*, (12 April 1959)

⁸⁵ Stanisław Janicki, 'Dajmy się lubić', *Żołnierz Polski*, (19 May 1959)

commented in *7 Dni w Polsce*: ‘This new Polish film has met with a very warm welcome from the audience, so success is assured.’⁸⁶

Cross of Valour contained many similar themes to *Eroica*, in particular, questioning heroic narratives and the glory of fighting, yet *Cross of Valour* was almost universally praised, while there were those who found *Eroica* offensive. The fact that Kutz did not use satire, and steered clear of focusing on revered events, undoubtedly contributed to this, although Kutz’s characters being seen as part of the First Polish Army, is likely to have been the main reason it sailed through the Script Assessment Commission with no suggested revisions. For viewers, Kutz’s protagonists were much more likeable and recognisable than Munk’s, and therefore aroused much greater empathy among audiences. This was to be a feature of Kutz’s work.

Nobody’s Calling

Nobody’s Calling was released on 31 October 1960 and was a significant departure from *Cross of Valour*. Kutz abandoned his realistic portrayal of the experiences of everyman during the war and instead did a psychological study of a man tormented by the consequences of his decisions as he attempts to make a new life in postwar Poland. *Nobody’s Calling* was not well received by critics and was seemingly rather ahead of its time. It was not till some years later that Kutz was able to return to the more avant-garde style that he used in *Nobody’s Calling*. The controversy surrounding the film meant that it was not released internationally for 25 years and rarely appeared at Polish film events.

Nobody’s Calling tells the story of Bożek, a former AK fighter who unlike Maciek from *Ashes and Diamonds* did not carry out his orders to continue killing. In the film’s opening he states: ‘I did not shoot the Reds; that is why I’m sitting on this roof.’⁸⁷ Bożek escapes to a small town

⁸⁶ ‘Krzyż Walecznych nowy Polski film sukcesem młodego reżysera’, *7 Dni w Polsce*, (12 April 1959)

⁸⁷ *Nikt nie woła*, dir. Kazimierz Kutz (Film, 1960), 0.30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQfBC-Bp3FE> (6 July 2019)

in the so-called Recovered Territories to avoid the wrath of his former comrades. At the train station when he arrives Bożek meets Lucyna and they develop an unorthodox relationship, driven by their extraordinary situation. Bożek is paranoid that his past will come back to haunt him and worries about involving Lucyna in his peril, but he does not inform her of the situation until towards the end of the movie. Meanwhile Bożek finds a job where he is very popular with all the women in the town due to the lack of young, single men, a very clear reminder of the impact of war on society. Eventually Bożek's concern about retribution becomes overwhelming and he decides to leave and forge yet another new life somewhere else. He leaves Lucyna behind.

Nobody's Calling is based on Józef Hen's autobiographical novel, which Hen moved from Soviet Russia to postwar Poland in the screenplay, presumably to allow it to be filmed and to avoid censorship. Kutz admitted that he saw Maciek as an example of the very Polish form of stupidity that places the momentous gesture above one's own life.⁸⁸ Both Kutz and Jerzy Wójcik, the cinematographer wanted to do something different with *Nobody's Calling* and attempt a style that had not been used in Poland before. It had a connection with the New Wave, as Kutz and Wójcik experimented with style and threw off the norms of filmmaking, but *Nobody's Calling* was placed in the Polish context. Kutz and Wójcik used short, staccato scenes, matching their choice of music, and used the ruined town as a metaphor for those whose lives were also shattered by the conflict.

Nobody's Calling was, in part, meant to show the alternative story to *Ashes and Diamonds*, a film to be discussed in detail in the next chapter, which tells the story of Maciek, a former AK fighter who struggles with his orders to murder a high ranking communist official, but ultimately carries them out. *Nobody's Calling*, however, showed the more rational, and

⁸⁸ Elżbieta Baniewicz, *Kazimierz Kutz: z dołu woleć inaczej* (Warsaw, 1994), p.152

perhaps more believable, course of action. Bożek provides a reasonable explanation as to why he did not carry out his instructions, and joins a long list of Polish characters who just wanted the war to be over and to be able to get on with their lives. Kutz states: 'My rebellion against Wajda's patriotic tradition of cinema grew out of a conviction that a person is always more important than the cause, no matter how lofty.'⁸⁹ Kutz also made sure to show that Bożek did not regret his decision and was merely anxious about the reprisals. The only small mistake Kutz perhaps made is that Bożek's life was not made significantly better by his decision, he was plagued by anxiety over the potential consequences and essentially had to live a life on the run. Bożek was not tortured by the choices that he made, or by his wartime experiences, only the potential consequences that never materialise. What *Nobody's Calling* lacks is a story that really draws in the viewer and involves them in the fate of the characters: the love story develops quickly and is not always wholly convincing, and the potential drama of a reprisal never manifests itself. In fact, not much happens in *Nobody's Calling* at all, which is the beauty of the movie, but was such a contrast to other Polish cinema at the time that it is easy to see why many people, who just wanted to be entertained, would have found *Nobody's Calling* boring. While Kutz may have used a more artistic style in *Nobody's Calling*, his characters were ordinary people, who found themselves in everyday situations. In that sense *Nobody's Calling* is not so far removed from Kutz's other war films.

Kutz shows the Western Territories in a different way to his colleagues, particularly Passendorfer and the Petelskis. Kutz portrays them as rather bleak and hostile. The town in *Nobody's Calling* is ruined, almost on the point of collapse, both structurally and morally. Water is contaminated; families have been torn apart and there is a general feeling of chaos. The film reminds the viewer of the state in which much of the country was left at the end of the conflict: no real municipal government; a lack of housing and amenities and a general lack

⁸⁹ Kutz, *Będzie skandal*, p.154

of direction. Instead of the settlers appearing hopeful and excited for their new lives, they are displaced with no home to go to and no family to reunite with. Lucyna, her sister and Henryk have to find their way in unfamiliar surroundings with no guidance and limited assistance from the authorities. None of the characters have chosen to be there: the Western Territories are shown as a hiding place; a last chance saloon. Kutz used the situation in the town as another way of showing the trauma of the Second World War, with millions of people having to start their lives again in a different place. This feeling of physical and emotional displacement was common in Polish society in the postwar years. Kutz's portrayal of the Recovered Territories was an accurate one. These areas were devastated by the war, with high crime rates and looting by gangs. It took years for civil order to be restored.⁹⁰ This, however, went directly against the image of the Western Territories presented by the PZPR. Polish and Soviet officials encouraged Poles to relocate to the West: it was described as a land of opportunity where there were opulent villas abandoned by the Germans and businesses available for appropriation.⁹¹ The Recovered Territories also played a part in the legitimisation of the communist regime through anti-German propaganda.⁹² The ever-present German threat was played up, with the communists being the only guarantors and defenders of Poland's continued possession of the Western Territories.⁹³

There was a lengthy discussion about *Nobody's Calling* at the Script Assessment Meeting. Antoni Bohdziewicz, who was not at the meeting but sent in his review, raised a fairly significant plot hole. If Lucyna is not the reason Bożek wants to leave then why not take her with him? Bohdziewicz argued that if Lucyna truly loved Bożek then she would go with him,

⁹⁰ Tadeusz Leboida, 'Poland, *die Vertriebenen*, and the road to integration with the European Union, in Kral Cordell and Andrzej Antoszewski (eds), *Poland and the European Union* (London, 2000), p.169

⁹¹ *ibid*

⁹² Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warsaw, 2001), p.305

⁹³ *ibid*

particularly if she knew about the threat to his life. Bohdziewicz's solution was either that Lucyna could find out about the danger Bożek was in later in the film or that she had more convincing reasons as to why she had to stay and ideally Hen would incorporate both.⁹⁴ Konwicki fiercely defended Hen's script and stated that while they were willing to make some adjustments the core of the film and the characters of Bożek and Lucyna had to stay the same. This is yet another example of Konwicki stepping in to defend a director in his unit, showing how the units were able to provide some protection to their members and in some cases helped them have their films put into production. The attendees were split between these two views. Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski agreed with Konwicki that *Nobody's Calling* should be left in its original form, while Jerzy Bossak sided with Bohdziewicz. There was then a further debate on whether a second script should be produced, based on the comments made by those present, in particular about the strength of the story. Lewiński, the chair of the meeting, decided against requesting revisions to the script and would recommend it for production to the Minister of Culture. Changes would only need to be made if the Minister suggested them and he would then discuss the issues with the directors of the Kadr Film Unit, Kutz and Hen.⁹⁵ In the film Lucyna does not find out about the threat to Bożek until the latter part, but otherwise there were no major changes, and once again a movie that raised significant objections was put into production, although its international release was delayed. The portrayal of the Recovered Territories was not discussed at the meeting and Kutz was not put under any pressure to present a more sanitised view of the Western Lands.

Despite the lack of serious objection at the Script Assessment meeting, *Nobody's Calling* was deeply unpopular with the government. In his autobiography, Kutz claims that issues with the

⁹⁴ FN A-214 poz.128 'Protokół z Komsji Ocen Scenariuszy w dniu kwietnia 1959 r. Scenariusz ob. Hen pt *Nikt nie wola* Zespół Kadr'.

⁹⁵ *ibid*

film went all the way to the Politburo, which was unprecedented at the time.⁹⁶ As a result of their displeasure, Kutz almost lost his filmmaking privileges, but Jerzy Kawalerowicz and Konwicki, the heads of the Kadr unit Kutz was involved with, lobbied on his behalf and protected him.⁹⁷ This is a very clear example of an occasion in which members of the film community who were members of the PZPR assisted those who were not. Kutz suggests that the Politburo's problem with *Nobody's Calling* was that the style was influenced by western trends, but it is possible that it was the portrayal of the Western Territories that they objected to. Along with Kawalerowicz and Konwicki, Kutz attributes the revival of his career to Vice Minister of Culture Tadeusz Zaorski. He sent the screenplay for *People from the Train* to the Script Assessment Commission while the Minister Galiński was away in China, and did not include the name of the director, so it was put into production.⁹⁸

Nobody's Calling was not popular with critics at the time of its release. Czesław Michałski wrote that *Nobody's Calling* was ambitious but unsuccessful, as although it had some interesting features, it was not accessible to audiences, which should be the goal of any film.⁹⁹ Bolesław Michałek argued that *Nobody's Calling* was stylistically consistent and maintained the same visual tone throughout, but this meant that it was pure art, which a film should not be.¹⁰⁰ K.T. Toeplitz was disdainful in his review, claiming that *Nobody's Calling* was a madness of the most talented people. He agreed with both Michałek and Michalski, stating that it was a movie that had been poisoned by artistry.¹⁰¹ Grzegorz Dubowski, writing in *Ekran*, saw that *Nobody's Calling* had the ambition to illuminate the fate of young people during the occupation from a different perspective, the alternative version to Maciek's fate, but that it did

⁹⁶ Kutz, *Będzie skandal*, p.158

⁹⁷ *ibid.* p.159

⁹⁸ *ibid.* p. 164

⁹⁹ Czesław Michałski, 'Nikt nie woła o takie filmy', *Walka Młodych*, (20 November 1960)

¹⁰⁰ Bolesław Michałek, 'Znowy awantura o polskie filmy', *Nowa Kultura*, (20 November 1960)

¹⁰¹ K.T.Toeplitz, 'O braku i nadmiarze', *Świat*, (13 November 1960)

not fulfil the potential. Dubowski stated that nothing happened by despair.¹⁰² Stanisław Grzelecki was able to look beyond the unconventional artistic style and saw how well Kutz captured this moment in time and placed everyone living in the ruined town under microscopic observation. He hoped that in the future audiences would revisit the film and recognise Kutz for his outstanding work.¹⁰³

While *Nobody's Calling* caused quite a stir for its experimental style and was by far the least popular of Kutz's war films, fundamentally it was not all that far removed from *Cross of Valour* and *People from the Train* in terms of how it portrays the Second World War. Kutz tries to show Bożek's decision not to follow orders as the rational choice in which he placed the value of his own life above duty. Bożek, however, can be seen as a heroic character as he fought in the underground and in the aftermath of the war had to escape both his former AK comrades and the authorities who hunted down former Home Army soldiers. While the threat of reprisals from his comrades makes his situation slightly out of the ordinary, Kutz portrays it as regularly common, as Lucyna understands his situation with very little explaining. *Nobody's Calling* was an interesting, microscopic perspective on postwar reconstruction, which is now being somewhat rehabilitated and is developing a cult following.

People from the Train

Ludzie z pociągu (People from the Train) had its premiere on 11 May 1961 and was the third of Kazimierz Kutz's films. It very much followed the trend he set with *Cross of Valour*, taking ordinary people as his key characters, showing a cross section of Polish society under occupation, highlighting their sense of humour, their reactions to dangerous situations and their moments of true greatness. Once again, the movie was set in a small provincial town of no

¹⁰² Grzegorz Dubowski, 'Nikt nie woła – nieudana polemika', *Ekran*, (13 November 1960)

¹⁰³ Stanisław Grzelecki, 'Portrety osaczonych', *Życie Warszawy*, (3 November 1960)

particular significance. For critics it was a welcome return to a realistic depiction of the Second World War after the controversy of *Nobody is Calling*.¹⁰⁴ It was released at a time when cinemas were saturated with war films and audiences were looking for something different. *People from the Train* won the Silver Prize at the Locarno International Film Festival in 1961 and gained Kutz governmental awards, therefore redeeming his career.¹⁰⁵

The script of *People from the Train* was written by Marian Brandys and Ludwika Woźnicka, and based on Brandys' short story, *Boy on the Train*. The story is told as a flashback by the old station master Kaliński, who recalls an event he witnessed in autumn 1943. The film is set at the railway station of a small provincial town where commuters are forced to wait because of damage to their train. They represent a wide cross section of society: smugglers, conspirators, a war widow, a young girl who appears to have Jewish features, a pair of lovers and a young boy. Their conversations paint a picture of life under occupation, the food shortages, family members lost as a result of conflict and other seemingly mundane complaints. The German railway guard (*Bahnschultz*) drinks too much and is convinced that everyone at the station is a partisan, and thus he raises the alarm. While searching the station German soldiers find a rifle and demand to know to whom it belongs: they threaten to kill every fifth passenger until someone confesses. At the last moment, when those condemned to die have been pulled out of the line-up, the young boy confesses. Consequently, he is beaten to unconsciousness. Amidst the chaos, Kaliński finds the German railway guard, who reveals that he is the owner of the gun but, in his drunken state, he had lost it. When asked why he did it the boy answers, 'Because I am not a member of any organisation. So, if they tortured me, I could not betray anyone.'¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, p.93

¹⁰⁵ Kutz, *Będzie skandal*, p.165

¹⁰⁶ Kazimierz Kutz, *Ludzie z pociągu*, dir. Kazimierz Kutz (Film, 1961, DVD, 2000) 1.27.02

People from a Train bears more than a passing resemblance to *Cross of Valour*. Kutz's particular style is very evident in both films. His characters are regular people: some are likeable, others are not. To a modern-day viewer, the events of *People from a Train* may seem extraordinary, but it is clear from the reaction of the characters that this is a fairly typical day in occupied Poland. The station master Kaliński, in particular, acts with a degree of calm and level headedness that suggests experience of the more sinister aspects of German occupation. Everyone, down to the youngest character Marylka, possesses an understanding of the potential consequences of the Germans' arrival at the station. Kutz specifically chose to represent a day in the life of Poland under occupation, just as he had done in the first two stories of *Cross of Valour*. This was the perfect vehicle for his realistic manner, which avoided metaphor and symbols. Kutz accurately represents the different types of human emotions and behaviour that emerge when faced with the threat of death.¹⁰⁷

In *Cross of Valour* Kutz, like Munk, asked questions about the value of gallantry and showed how destructive legends can be. In *People from the Train* Kutz took a different approach, celebrating the feats of ordinary people and those who went above and beyond what was expected with their actions. There is no 'hero' in *People from the Train*. Kaliński, who finds the real culprit in the gun saga is only acting in the most logical fashion given the circumstances. The young boy who confesses to owning the gun could be considered to be a hero, but he too was simply taking the most rational course of action. As the boy himself notes, many of his fellow passengers had ties to underground organisations, and so were likely to suffer much greater consequences if they owned up to taking the weapon. He is also simply acting in a way he considers to be right: he behaved in a similar way saving his dog from being shot by local villagers.

¹⁰⁷ 'Ludzie ze stacji Kuriany', *Głos Pracy*, (15 May 1961)

Films that gave a voice to the Nazi occupiers were rare; works that did not show them in a clichéd fashion were scarcer still. In *People from the Train* Kutz clearly showed the lengths to which the Germans would go to gain information, the threat of shooting innocent passengers and the way in which they beat the young boy almost to death in front of everyone. At the same time, they are not shown as mindless sadists who engage in brutality for brutality's sake. He even injects some humanity into the *Bahnschultz*, as he talks about his family and the injury that has left one arm useless, leaving him with a fondness for alcohol. Kutz is careful to avoid anyone becoming a caricature. The casual way in which Kutz shows the violence makes it all the more poignant when the audience realises that this happened on a habitual basis and was an everyday lived reality. *People from the Train* also counteracted the strong anti-German sentiment that formed a key part of the PZPR's mythology of the Second World War.

The reaction to *People from the Train* was more lukewarm than it had been for *Cross of Valour*, but it was universally agreed that it was a vast improvement on *Nobody's Calling*. Zbigniew Klaczyński described *People from the Train* as a partial success, in which Kutz opens a window into the occupation, but there are moments where the film appeared almost empty, and there was not enough material to make a full-length movie.¹⁰⁸ K.T. Toeplitz agreed that *People from the Train*, while being an honest and accurate story, was at times boring.¹⁰⁹ Bolesław Michałek, who often wrote favourably about Kutz, claimed that Kutz created a picture of society in a time of crisis, which was the value of the movie, and that each character was alive, individual and painfully true.¹¹⁰ The journalist Henryk Tronowicz took a similar view, that *People from the Train* was one of the most credible portraits of heroism. Alicja Helman summed up the prevailing opinion: *People from the Train* was undoubtedly one of the more valuable films of the time, but it did not fill the expectation of Kutz's audience and critics, leaving the impression

¹⁰⁸ Zygmunt Klaczyński, 'Prolog wielkiego filmu', *Trybuna Ludu*, (13 May 1961)

¹⁰⁹ K.T. Toeplitz, 'Za długo, za mało', *Świat*, (28 May 1961)

¹¹⁰ Bolesław Michałek, 'Kazimierz Kutz', *Nowa Kultura*, (11 April 1961)

of being inadequate.¹¹¹ It is not surprising that many reviewers and audiences took this view. *Cross of Valour* was so highly regarded that it would have been difficult to live up to, and they had been disappointed by *Nobody's Calling*. As *Cross of Valour* was made up of short stories, the slow pace and lack of dramatic action did not cause viewers to lose attention, but it was much more difficult in a full-length feature like *People from the Train*.

Kazimierz Kutz developed a personal style that was as recognisable as that of Munk and Wajda. Throughout his career, and most notably in his war films, he portrayed ordinary people and the everyday experiences of war and occupation. He created likeable character, providing images of the conflict that were recognisable to almost everyone. He noticeably avoided any showing of national symbols and engagement with myth and legend. His protagonists were silently heroic, acting in a way that could be considered gallant, but it was not a conscious decision. They could not be deemed to be irrational or have their actions guided by a sense of duty or fate. Kutz's sense of the mundane and average even stretched to the locations he used as the settings for his work. With the exception of Auschwitz, which appears in the second novella of *Cross of Valour*, all the landscapes and villages could be anywhere in Poland, enhancing the sense of universality that prevailed in Kutz's films. This approach meant that Kutz came across fewer roadblocks than his Polish School colleagues. His focus on the day to day life of occupation, was far less controversial, and explains why Kutz met less resistance. Kutz's protagonists fit more comfortably into the PZPR's cultural policy, but Kutz did not confirm or contradict Gomułka's image of the Second World War and his films played no part in strengthening national communism. Only in *Nobody's Calling* did Kutz openly contradict communist propaganda and despite this, he was able to release the film unedited, just like his colleagues.

¹¹¹ Alicja Helman, 'Trudna umiejętność uogólniania', *Ekran*, (14 May 1961)

Conclusion

Dina Iordanova argued that some of the finest East Central European films belong to a strong tradition of personalised interpretations of history and that the relationship between individual experience and national fate is conceived in a different manner than is officially sanctioned memory.¹¹² This is an accurate analysis of war films made by the Polish School. Kutz and Munk each had their own ideas about how the war should be portrayed, influenced by their own experiences and the worlds they inhabited. This led to them each having a very distinct style. Munk grew up in a middle class, educated family, and it was for this audience that his films were intended. Consequently, he asked philosophical questions and attempted to uncover the rationale behind seemingly heroic actions, and exposed their irrationality. Munk did this by often using events he was familiar with or had taken part in. Kutz, on the other hand, came from a working-class family in rural Poland; he was too young to fight, thus took no part in any military action. His work during this period reflects this as he shows no battle scenes: his characters are simple people trying to go about their lives amid the constant fear and danger that accompanied years under occupation. Munk and Kutz, each in his own way, provided a different perspective on the war to that of the PZPR. They also both openly contradicted official propaganda about certain wartime and post-war moments, such as the Warsaw Uprising and the Recovered Territories. Despite Munk and Kutz making movies that raised heated discussions at their respective Script Assessment Meetings, they were able to resist widespread changes. This was in part thanks to support from their Film Unit colleagues, but also due to the fact there is no evidence to suggest that the Main Office of Cinematography and Ministry of Culture made any concerted effort to prevent their production and release.

¹¹² Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, p.58

Chapter 4: The Polish School Part Two: Andrzej Wajda

Introduction

Andrzej Wajda is the most widely discussed and highly celebrated director in Polish history, with a career spanning almost sixty years: his first war film, *A Generation*, being released in 1955 and his last, *Katyń*, premiering in 2007. None of his contemporaries made movies well into the twenty-first century. He received numerous prizes at international film festivals and four of his works were nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the Oscars. In 1990 he was honoured at the European Film Awards for lifetime achievement. In 2000 he was awarded an honorary Oscar for his contribution to world cinema. With his war trilogy Wajda truly brought Polish cinema to the world for the very first time. Steven Spielberg wrote: ‘The example of Andrzej Wajda reminds all of us as filmmakers, that from time to time history might make profound and unexpected demands on our courage; that our audiences might call on us for spiritual uplift; that we might be required to put our careers at risk to defend the civic life of our people.’¹

Biography

Wajda was born on 6 March 1926 in Suwałki, into the family of Jakub, a cavalry officer, and Aniela Zofia Białowąs, a schoolteacher. As a garrison town, Suwałki followed the rhythm of the army; Wajda often referred to the influence garrison life had on the formation of his artistic interests.² Indeed elaborate scenes involving soldiers or sequences depicting army life, found their way into many of his films and a number of cinematic moments were drawn directly from his memories of Suwałki’s 3rd May parades. The fervent nationalism that is often shown in his

¹ Steven Spielberg’s letter to the American Academy of Motion Picture, Art and Sciences (22 November 1999). Available from <http://www.wajda.pl/en/list.html> [Accessed 23 January 2018]

² Janina Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda: History, Politics, and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema* (New York, 2007), p.12

work presented in an army context stems from his childhood recollections.³ Jakub Wajda was an amateur painter, often copying works by Jan Matejko, Jacek Malczewski and Artur Grottger. As a consequence, young Andrzej grew up surrounded by some of the most famous patriotic Polish paintings, depicting parades, army uniforms and battles. Whilst his father provided him with an interest in fine art, it was his mother who exposed her sons to cinema.

In 1934 the Wajdas moved to Radom and were still living there when war broke out. As it was for so many families in Poland, the conflict had a significant impact on the Wajda family. Jakub was immediately sent to the front and the family lost contact with him for a number of years. Aniela-Zofia and the boys had to flee with very little in the way of money and possessions. However, in 1940 Wajda's mother received two letters and some money from her husband, who was detained in Starobielsk. This correspondence revealed that he had been imprisoned by the Soviets, but with no further communication from him, he was presumed dead.⁴ The family would not learn about his death in Kharkiv for many years. Jakub's death left Wajda suspicious of, if not hostile to, the communist regime. His mother never came to terms with her husband's death and her struggle formed the basis for Wajda's most personal work, *Katyń*. The restrictions of the Nazi occupation forced Wajda to continue his schooling underground. In 1942 he joined the Home Army in Radom and served as a courier until 1943 when he became aware of a forthcoming ambush by the Gestapo. He escaped into hiding with his uncle in Kraków, where he continued to be part of the AK. In mid-1944 he was nearly arrested; thus, he returned to Radom, where he remained until the end of the war.⁵ One of

³ Much of Wajda's biography comes from *Kalendarium* This is a typewritten calendar of the major events of Wajda's life, compiled by Wajda himself along with several other collaborators. It is at Wajda's personal archive at the Manggha Centre in Kraków.

⁴ *Kalendarium* entry 1940

⁵ Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda*, p.13

Wajda's most enduring memories from this time was of Warsaw completely destroyed.⁶ This very visual recollection later found its way into the opening scenes of *Kanal*.

Despite these experiences, Wajda claimed that he had a relatively easy war. Wajda frequently talked about the driving force behind his war films: that it was his duty to tell the story of those who had not survived, because he was left alive to be able to.⁷ The Second World War was Wajda's first encounter with history and it had a lasting impact. For Wajda and members of his generation, it was both a humiliation for the country and a personal tragedy. In his diary he observed with despair the countless Polish soldiers marching to German POW camps, a symbol of the defeat and disaster that the country had felt in the autumn of 1939, a tragedy for both the nation and their families.⁸ Due to his age he was unable to join the army and so had to watch his father go to fight and never come home along with countless others, leaving Wajda with a feeling of guilt that he survived.⁹ In his autobiography Wajda wrote: 'For if fate had spared me this in reality it was my duty to make up for this in my films.'¹⁰

After the war Wajda finally completed his secondary education, enrolling in 1946 in the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków to study painting, but he eventually realised that his passion lay in moving pictures rather than stationary ones. This artistic background, however, would never leave him; it can be observed in his recurring symbolism, and in the wide sweeping landscape shots to which he was partial. Surprisingly Wajda's time at the Film School was not an enjoyable experience; he described it as 'disastrous for me; I was extremely disappointed.'¹¹ At the time there were very few practical classes available and students were restrained by the fact their work was overseen by their instructors. He graduated, however, in 1953 and

⁶ *Kalendarium* entry for 1945

⁷ Interview with Andrzej Wajda, conducted by Lucinda Fenny, Aktion Studio 20 June 2013; in the author's possession

⁸ Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda*), p.12

⁹ Interview with Andrzej Wajda

¹⁰ Andrzej Wajda, *Kino i reszta świata. Autobiografia* (Kraków, 2013), p.306.

¹¹ *Kalendarium* entry for 1950

immediately went to work as assistant director to Aleksander Ford on *Piątka z ulicy Barskiej* (*Five Boys from Barska Street*, 1954), one of Ford's most celebrated works.

In 1954 the Party asked that a film be made to celebrate the tenth anniversary of People's Poland and Ford was approached to take on the project. He was not interested, but passed it on to Wajda, leaving him and his team of first time filmmakers largely to their own devices.¹² Despite starting their careers during the period in which socialist realism was the dominant influence on the arts in Poland, Wajda and his co-workers were heavily inspired by Italian neo-realism, in particular the films of Roberto Rossellini. Wajda also greatly admired Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* and tried to use some of his artistic techniques in *Ashes and Diamonds*.¹³ *A Generation*, Wajda's first film, that was supposed to be a celebration of the anniversary, signalled a change in Polish filmmaking, as the political thaw allowed Wajda to become one of the key members of the Polish School, that would challenge the established filmic norms in Poland.

A Generation

A Generation had its premiere on 26 January 1955. The intention was that Wajda would work under Ford's artistic supervision. He assembled a cast and crew of other debutants, some of whom would go on to be leading names in the Polish cinema industry, including Jerzy Lipman, Kazimierz Kutz, Zbigniew Cybulski, Tadeusz Łomnicki and Roman Polański. The film signalled the beginnings of a change in the Polish film industry, because although it contained communist propaganda, it also heralded the beginnings of a break with socialist realism. It was the first instalment in Wajda's war trilogy, providing viewers with an idea of what to expect from his later works: visually elaborate pictures and a fascination with the fate of his generation

¹² Interview with Andrzej Wajda

¹³ *ibid*

during the Second World War. Jerzy Wilmański observed that ‘we see in this first film that the signs of genius are already present’, and he is entirely correct in this assertion.¹⁴

A Generation opens with Stach and two friends playing a game; they are carefree, seemingly unaffected by the war happening around them, the year is 1942. On hearing a train carrying coal, they decide to steal some for themselves. In the ensuing chase, Stach’s two friends are killed and he is wounded. Hiding under a bridge he meets a drunk who takes him to a bar. Here he encounters Sekuła, who arranges a job for him at his workplace, where he meets another inexperienced young man, Jasio Krone. As his supervisor, Sekuła gives him a basic economic education and highlights the exploitation by their boss, Berg, who is both trading with the Germans and reluctantly allowing an unspecified underground organisation to hide their weapons on the premises. Stach moves further along the path to enlightenment when he signs up for night classes and meets Dorota, a member of the communist youth organisation, the Union of Fighting Youth (Związek Walki Młodych, ZWM), which also had combat groups. They quickly fall in love and their storyline introduces a theme that will appear in a number of Wajda’s films, that of love and politics. Under her influence he steals a gun and actively seeks to become a member of the AL. There are two prominent sequences in *A Generation* which depict the horrors of war. In the first sequence, Jasio, who has been reluctant to join the resistance, walks under the gallows filled with fresh corpses. The second sequence leads to the most iconic scene in the movie: after being cornered by the Nazis Jasio leaps to his death from the staircase of a tenement building. After Dorota is led away by the Gestapo, Stach is left alone, the final scene showing him in tears on the outskirts of Warsaw; he is no longer an idealistic, naïve boy but an experienced and aggrieved man. Suddenly young people appear out of nowhere and await his orders to continue the struggle in the resistance movement.

¹⁴ Jerzy Wlamański, ‘Cztery Pokolenia’, *Odgłosy*, (14 October 1973)

A Generation was adapted by Bohdan Czeszko from his own novel. Czeszko had been a member of the AL and the People's Guard (Gwardia Ludowa, GL) in Warsaw and fought in the Warsaw Uprising.¹⁵ His story followed characters not wildly different from himself, and it was his intention that the film adhered to a similar format, a coming of age story, ending with the central character, Stach, joining the Polish Worker's Party. During the meeting of the Qualification Committee, Czeszko claimed he wanted to show the youth of the PRL that joining the Party was a serious matter.¹⁶ Wajda, on the other hand, reworked the underlying message of the film, placing the emphasis on the image of a careless young man growing into a mature resistance fighter. With his chosen ending Wajda did, to some extent, follow Czeszko's version of the story. In London's *Tribune*, Derek Hill observed that *A Generation* documents 'Stach's development from the casual, instinctive anarchy of near-delinquency to political awareness'.¹⁷ Wajda realised, however, that he could not follow Czeszko to the letter. This would have resulted in producing a piece of Stalinist propaganda not vastly different from the socialist realist films being made at the time. Instead Wajda wanted to portray the young generation of resistance fighters caught up in history.¹⁸

The screenplay, under the title *Candidate Term*, raised concerns with the Script Assessment Committee. Those present were apprehensive about the political message being overshadowed by the imagery in the film, the atmosphere of death and fighting and the focus on the personal drama of individual characters. In his concluding remarks, Stanisław Albrecht, who chaired the committee, expressed the need to make the script more ideologically profound. The ending was considered to be too pessimistic: thus to improve the screenplay quality, Czeszko had to

¹⁵ Bohdan Czeszko (April 1923-December 1988). Czeszko was involved in left wing resistance during the war. After it ended he was an active figure in both the PPR and the PZPR. He made his writing debut in 1948 with the collection of short stories *Początek edukacji (Beginnings of Education)*. He was editor of *Przegląd Kulturalny* and later deputy editor-in-chief of *Kultura*. From 1965 to 1980 he was a member of the Sejm for the PZPR.

¹⁶ Andrzej Wajda Archives, 'Protokół z posiedzenia Komisji Ocen Filmów i Scenariuszy w dniu 8.VII.1953 r.'

¹⁷ Derek Hill, 'Young Polish Anarchists', *Tribune* (24 June 1960)

¹⁸ Interview with Andrzej Wajda

overcome his resistance to an, 'easier', happy ending. Dora Gromb, director of the Film Screenwriting Office (Filmowy Biuro Scenariuszów), asked what type of film they were trying to make: a historical one or a film for the present day, evoking the events of the past? Although the members expressed doubts, they did not propose any fundamental changes; thus Czeszko accepted the minor corrections and agreed to incorporate them.¹⁹

The concerns expressed by those in charge of assessing *A Generation* were proven to be well founded when the film received a frosty reception at its screening to members of the Politburo. Objections were levelled at almost every element of the film, from its composition and cast to, its ideological implications and viewpoint. In fact, the Party was so deeply critical that Wajda feared that his movie would never make it onto Polish screens. Aleksander Ford attempted to come to Wajda's defence, but he achieved nothing but a harsh rebuke; the Politburo had seen nothing of value and the young protagonists were labelled 'lumpenproletariat'.²⁰ Roman Polański claimed that *A Generation* faced serious obstacles before it was distributed and that certain scenes had to be re-shot to strengthen their ideological message; thus the final version was a pale reflection of the original.²¹ The finished product that Polański was talking about however, was the one the Politburo were shown and had concerns about, but it was still released unchanged. Wajda has always attested that the film was saved after a private viewing at the Central Bureau of Cinematography for Bohdan Czeszko and Wanda Wasilewska, the leading communist activist, whose opinion was respected by Stalin.²² No one else was present in the room, but Wajda came to the conclusion that Czeszko was obviously a favourite with Wasilewska.²³ Wasilewska asked Wajda what the Politburo had objected to and promised to

¹⁹ 'Protokół z posiedzenia Komisji Ocen Filmów i Scenariuszy w dni.18.XI.1953.r.'

²⁰ Andrzej Wajda, *My Films* (Warsaw, 2008), p.6

²¹ Polański, *Roman*, p.89.

²² Wajda, *My Films*, p.10

²³ *ibid*

discuss the matter with the right people.²⁴ He never saw her again, but several months later *A Generation* was released. John Connelly, in his research into university professors, argues that, in particular under Stalinism, some professors made compromises such as supervising co-operation with the state, or appearing to embrace the new regime.²⁵ This meant that they were able to remain in control of the universities and use their positions to protect one another. In some cases, interventions from these professors went as far as appealing directly to top ministry and Party functionaries.²⁶ Wajda's relationship with Czeszko, and later Andrzejewski, suggests there were similar networks within cinema as well, that assisted non-Party directors in getting their movies made.

The time in which *A Generation* was made meant that, like in Czeszko's novel, Wajda's film rewrites the war from a communist perspective, providing a partially distorted view of the occupation. Wajda puts the AL at the centre of *A Generation*: they are shown as the true patriots, while the AK are portrayed as passive, not engaging in conflict with the Nazis. The movie also switches the significance of the two groups, exaggerating the size and role of the left-wing resistance, while playing down the role of the Home Army. Wajda's portrayal matched with the image of the former underground organisations that were promoted in public memory. The AL was shown as the core of the fight against fascism. Rank and file members of the AK were included in the legend but their leaders were either removed from memory or presented as traitors and enemies of the people. Between 1949 and 1955, both the veterans' organisation the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację, ZBoWiD) and its press organ *Za Wolność i Lud*, put together about 100 descriptions of military acts during the Second World War, and more than half of them were from the GL and AL. From the very beginning the PPR used the myth of the victory over

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Connelly, *Captive University*, p.166

²⁶ *ibid*

fascism to give the party historical legitimacy, showing the Communist Party and the AL fighting together, as the only forces that could morally and physically oppose fascism.²⁷ In his autobiography Polański claimed that if Wajda had attempted to deviate from this version of the story of the underground resistance, *A Generation* would have almost certainly have never made it onto cinema screens.²⁸ Given the climate within Film Polski and the Ministry of Culture at the time, this is almost certainly the case.

Although Wajda had to make significant ideological concessions, *A Generation*, along with Andrzej Munk's *Człowiek na torze* (*Man on the Tracks*, 1956) and Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *Cień* (*Shadow*, 1956), is considered to be one of the founding works of the Polish School. The opening shot of the film depicting an impoverished Warsaw suburb with its run-down buildings introduces a setting familiar to viewers of a number of neorealist films. Polański observed that presenting of an authentic depiction of the climate and atmosphere in Warsaw at that time was very important to Wajda.²⁹ He wanted to do justice to the places he had been familiar with during the occupation and to create characters that fitted into this landscape. He asked Jerzy Lipman only to take shots on grey, rainy days, ignoring the sensitivity of the film to water. Even the music he used was unorthodox. Wajda was not interested in the pomp that usually surrounded war films, more in showing the irony of the situation: the contrast between the young fighters and their desperate situation. Wajda's editing, characterised by rapid cuts, helped to recreate the atmosphere of the German occupation, as so many life events took place in short, tense moments.³⁰

Not only did *A Generation* mark a break away from the aesthetics that dominated during the Stalinist period, but it also introduced some of the themes that would be commonplace in

²⁷ Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD*, p.140

²⁸ Polański, *Roman*, p.89.

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ Stanisław Grzelecki, 'Pokolenie', *Życie Warszawy*, (1 February 1955).

Wajda's later war films. While Wajda places Stach, the working-class hero, at the centre of the story, he provided the character of Jasio as the counter to this; the prototype of his later heroes, troubled and tragic. Jasio's storyline, in which he transforms from having no interest in resistance, to killing the German rail guard, is in many ways more compelling to the viewer: he is multidimensional and ambiguous, ultimately dying an unnecessary death, a storyline that is revisited and built upon with Maciek in *Ashes and Diamonds*. Even Stach shares some characteristics with Wajda's later protagonists: not content to sit and watch the war happening around him, circumstances persuade him that he wants to be actively involved in armed resistance. This demonstrates that *A Generation* was not as far removed from the rest of the war trilogy as it might seem on first viewing. There is also a significant hint towards future romanticism in the scene where Stach is initiated into the People's Army; characters stand over a single candle, pledging allegiance to Poland and to fighting the German oppressor. This clearly alludes to Adam Mickiewicz's play *Dziady*, a drama about Russian domination, political dissidence and insurrection.³¹ The 'heroes' of *A Generation*, just like all those of Wajda's later war films, were caught up in a historical tragedy and were acting as they felt they should under the circumstances, which frequently resulted in their death. Consequently, *A Generation* should not be seen as simply the politically compromised, lesser part of the war trilogy, but instead as the film that started it all.

A Generation met with mixed responses in Poland. This, however, is not a huge surprise, given that the vast majority of the cast and crew of *A Generation* were making their first film and so some mistakes were to be expected. Ironically most of the positive reviews came from the hard-line communist newspapers. The *Łódzki Express Ilustrowany*, claimed that no existing Polish film caused as much discussion as *A Generation*, praised for its innovation and yet also

³¹ Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda*, p.38.

blamed for the obvious political compromise in its subject matter.³² *Żołnierz Wolności* lauded it as a true and honest story that paid a fitting tribute to members of the ZWM who had passed away.³³ The fact that the people the film depicted were happy with the narrative and their portrayal speaks volumes: it shows that Wajda made a very impressive film, despite the political compromises. When reviewers put aside the ideological components of the film, they saw the characters as very honest and, in their motivations and personalities, representative of many young people from that wartime generation.³⁴ Almost everyone was impressed by the mature product created by such a young group of filmmakers, and *A Generation* was almost universally praised as a debut piece.

Outside of Poland, particularly in Britain, *A Generation* was received extremely well. The British director Lindsay Anderson sent Wajda a postcard in 1985 with a picture that reminded him of the ending to *A Generation*. On the back Anderson wrote that *A Generation* had always been his favourite film.³⁵ When *A Generation* was shown in the UK, along with the other two parts of the war trilogy, it was not considered to be inferior to *Kanal* and *Ashes and Diamonds*. In fact, Derek Hill, like Anderson, considered it to be the greatest one of the three.³⁶ *The Guardian* also reviewed it favourably, their London critic wrote that ‘something of the basic human tragedy of Poland comes through in spite of the conventional coat of communist paint’, and ‘it is an uneven film; but it is often very powerful and in its gaunt way ... beautiful.’³⁷ The British publication *The Daily Cinema* observed that *A Generation* achieved an almost newsreel-like quality and that most resistance films seemed trite compared with the savagery of this picture.³⁸ It is telling that removed from the specific political context of Poland in the

³² T. Wojciechowska, ‘Film młodego pokolenia’, *Łódzki Express Ilustrowany*, (12 January 1955)

³³ ‘Pokolenia’, *Żołnierz Wolności*, (23 January 1955)

³⁴ Zbigniew Zapert, ‘Pokolenie’, *Dziennik Bałtycki*, (5 February 1955)

³⁵ Andrzej Wajda Archive, ‘Postcard from Lindsay Anderson to Andrzej Wajda’, (March 25 1985)

³⁶ Hill, ‘Young Polish Anarchists’

³⁷ ‘Eastern European Films’, *The Guardian*, (12 February 1958)

³⁸ ‘A Generation’, *Daily Cinema*, (24 June 1960)

1950s and viewed by audiences who were not aware of the significant concessions that Wajda made, *A Generation* was reviewed in a far more favourable light.

A Generation was not just a harbinger of things to come both thematically and aesthetically; it also gave an early indication of the relationship that Wajda would have with the communist authorities, and how they would deal with him. While *A Generation* was not as politically sensitive as *Kanal* or *Ashes and Diamonds*, it is clear from the Script Assessment Commission, and the story of the showing to the Politburo, that at the very highest levels of the Communist Party there were concerns about the film. Significantly they were afraid that Wajda was diluting the political message with his story, which is undoubtedly true. Yet despite the concerns of the Politburo *A Generation* was released with no changes to the finished product, which would have almost certainly emboldened Wajda, and gave him a sense of where the boundaries lay. During the Stalinist period the Ministry of Culture had not been afraid to make drastic changes to both finished films and scripts as Jerzy Zarzycki's *Miasto nieujarzmione* (*Unvanquished City*, 1950), was completely re-written.³⁹ *A Generation* was almost certainly helped onto the screen thanks to powerful allies, most notably Ford and Wasilewska. Gaining the support of important figures, and using this to his advantage, was to become a feature of Wajda's career.

While Roman Polański may have been exaggerating when he claimed that the entire Polish cinema could trace its roots back to *A Generation*, it was, at the time, very different to all the other films that had been made in People's Poland. *A Generation* launched the careers of some of the key figures of the early postwar Polish film industry that would go on to help the break away from socialist realism and usher in a new era. It is certainly true, therefore, that all of Wajda's war movies owe a great deal to *A Generation*.

³⁹ Haltof, *Polish Cinema*, p.81

Kanal

The release of *Kanal* on 20 April 1957 made Andrzej Wajda into one of the towering figures of Polish cinema, but at the same time sparked a huge controversy. Wajda and his team carried a great weight of expectation when they took on the task of making one of the first films about the Warsaw Uprising and for many Poles their film fell far short of this expectation.⁴⁰ The first movie on the subject, Zarzycki's *Unvanquished City*, had been butchered by the censors and ended up a socialist realist depiction of the Uprising, with members of the AL fighting Nazis in the ruins of Warsaw.⁴¹ While domestic audiences, however, may have taken a long time to appreciate Wajda's vision, foreign critics and viewers were immediately impressed when the film had its international premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1957. It won the Jury Special Prize along with Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. It maintained continuity with *A Generation* by employing many of the same personnel, including Kutz, Jerzy Lipman and Tadeusz Janczar and was one of the earliest productions from the newly formed Kadr Film Unit. *Kanal* is one of the most important Polish war films of the twentieth century, and one of Wajda's finest works; it opened up dialogue on the Warsaw Uprising for the first time and firmly established Wajda's artistic vision of the Second World War.

Kanal follows Lieutenant Zadra's platoon in the last days of the Uprising. The voiceover introduces us to the men whose number has, in the space of three days, been reduced from seventy to forty-three. We are told to watch carefully as these are the last hours of their lives. Zadra's company finds itself pinned down in Mokotów and after suffering further losses and injuries is ordered to retreat to Śródmieście through the underground sewers. Following their guide, Stokrotka, they descend into what becomes hell for each and every one of them. Stokrotka takes care of Korab, who has been injured. When they reach their designated exit,

⁴⁰ Michałek and Turaj, *The Modern Cinema of Poland*, p.133

⁴¹ Haltof, *Polish Cinema*, p.81

Korab does not have the strength to climb out, so they head towards the river. Their story ends as they look longingly through the metal bars that prevent their escape. Without their chaperone the others become lost and splinter off. Eventually the only soldiers left with Zadra are Kula and Smukły. Zadra is deceived by Kula into believing that his men are following him. Mądry, the second in command, his lover Halinka and the artist Michał find themselves together, but Michał loses his mind and walks away playing an ocarina. Mądry reveals that he has a wife and child which causes Halinka to commit suicide and when he finds a way out of the sewer he is disarmed by a German soldier as he looks around to see others under armed guard. Zadra, Kula and Smukły miss their intended manhole but find another which is booby-trapped. The engineer disables two grenades, but is killed by the last one. Climbing out to a deserted area of the city, Zadra tells Kula to bring the others up, but Kula admits that he has lied about the rest of the men. Enraged, Zadra shoots him, and descends back into the sewers to search for the rest of his company.

Kanal is a very powerful film that provokes a strong reaction as Wajda successfully combines the realistic and the surreal. In the scenes outside of the sewers Wajda attempted to accurately represent the destruction and chaos of the last days of the Uprising, both for civilians and combatants, as well as making it very clear what happened to those insurgents who were captured. Wajda uses almost documentary style footage during the opening sequence, a wide panning shot, showing the extent of the physical damage brought about by the fighting. Wajda then moves to showing the personal loss and sacrifice as he focuses in on casualties littered around the debris, inextricably linking the annihilation of the city with that of its people. The underground scenes of *Kanal* are set up and shot in such a way that they put the viewer right into the sewer along with Zadra's men. The tight, dark spaces bring up feelings of claustrophobia. The mist rising up from the water creates an air of surrealism and the image of a mystical underworld that seduces its victims and drives them mad. There are moments

where viewers question whether what they are seeing onscreen is the product of a brain starved of oxygen or an accurate representation of what happened in the sewers, for example when Stokrotka and Korab see Michał walk past them playing music. Michał seems not to hear Korab shouting at him and it is not clear whether this is because Michał has lost all grip on reality, or whether Michał is a hallucination.

The script for *Kanal* was written by Jerzy Stefan Stawiński, based on one of his short stories and his own wartime experiences. It was his first foray into the world of screenwriting and the beginning of his very successful relationship with directors associated with the Polish School. Stawiński fought in the September campaign, became a member of the AK and fought in the Warsaw Uprising, experiencing the sewers from Mokotów to Śródmieście. He began to write his story *Kanal* after the death of Stalin and published it in *Twórczość* magazine in March 1956. For Stawiński, *Kanal* the story was, in a nutshell, that of the Warsaw Uprising and its tragic end.⁴² His treatment of the subject was balanced, sober and sympathetic towards the Home Army, tempered with a streak of scepticism about the purpose and price of their heroism.

Kanal entered a public space that had been devastated by the propaganda lies of the Stalinist period referred to in the section on *Eroica*.⁴³ The decision of how exactly to present the Uprising weighed heavily on *Kanal*'s creators. Wajda claimed: 'we are the voice of the dead, it is our duty to give testimony regarding those dreadful years, the dreadful fate that happened to the Polish nation, to the best of us.'⁴⁴ Ultimately Wajda and Stawiński attempted to present a movie that did not pass judgement, to avoid any commentary on the decision of the rank and file soldiers to fight. They also aimed to show the rising in a realistic manner, including the hopeless way in which it ended. Just as Munk would be a year later, Wajda was also quietly

⁴² Monika Koniecpolska, 'Dziś w Cannes obchody 50-lecia powstania Kanału, do którego scenariusz napisał Jerzy Stefan Stawiński', *Dziennik* (21 May 2007)

⁴³ See the discussion of the Stalinist portrayal of the Warsaw Uprising on page 95

⁴⁴ Don Frederickson & Marek Hendrykowski, *Wajda's Kanal* (Poznań, 2007), p 28-9.

critical of the decision to launch the Uprising, echoing the opinion of many of his generation. At the same time, Wajda also gently picked at the legend that had developed around the Uprising in the private sphere. While Wajda's characters may have taken part in the fighting, which made them worthy of respect, they are not all admirable or likeable. Mađry and Kula are liars and cheats, concerned only with their own lives. Wajda pulled the insurgents down from the pedestal many had placed them on, showing them as deeply flawed. The image of the Polish fighter, that of the smart, well-kept, handsome young man on horseback, was notable in its absence from *Kanal*; it was replaced by dirty, unkempt figures. The choice to follow a small band of fighters gives *Kanal* specificity, highlighting personal and individual experiences, but Wajda was also able to depict the great tragedy that affected a whole city and hundreds of thousands of its inhabitants. The Home Army are shown to have a sense of duty and willingness to fight for Poland, despite an awareness that their efforts will be futile. In the end, Zadra's company were ill-fated casualties of war, and victims of political decisions taken much higher up.

Kanal was the first of Wajda's films to use extensive religious imagery and references. It begins with a number of crosses in a makeshift gravesite and the sound of a priest blessing the injured and dying as Zadra talks to one of his comrades about the last judgement. When Smukły is killed, the shocking image of his torn body is juxtaposed with crisscrossed metal rods, a clear reference to Christ's crucifixion. Wajda uses the same presentation in *Ashes and Diamonds* and *Samson*, amongst numerous others. As the company descends into the sewers, hell becomes a reality for them all. The bodies floating in the water conjure up images of the River Styx. In his existentialist play, *Huis Clos* (*No Exit*, 1944), Jean Paul Sartre paints a picture of hell that is personally tailored to each individual, eternally haunted by images that distress them the most.⁴⁵ Wajda, whether intentionally or not, takes a similar view in *Kanal*:

⁴⁵ Jean Paul Satre, *Huis Clos*, (Barcelona, 2005)

for any soldier to have to flee through the sewers, like rats, is the deepest humiliation and the worst form of hell they could endure. Wajda uses this to show the psychological impact the retreat had on everyone, concluding that everyone dealt with the trauma and physical confinement of the sewers in a different way. The progression of the characters through the dark has often been compared to Dante's journey in *Inferno*, the first part of his fourteenth century epic poem, *Divine Comedy*. Michał even quotes Dante's work as they begin their journey through the sewers. Wajda's protagonists and their fate represent almost all of Dante's nine circles of hell. At the very beginning of the film the insurgents are in limbo, caught between the fighting they have left behind and the unknown outcome that awaits them. Mądry's lust for Halinka and her mistaking it for love has tragic consequences as she commits suicide and he runs into the hands of the waiting Germans. It is Zadra who suffers the greatest number of circles, because he takes out his anger on Kula in a violent fashion, after he learns of his betrayal.

Wajda claimed that he owed the success of *Kanal* to Konwicki, who at the time was literary director of Kadr. He was responsible for passing Stawiński's story to Wajda and for helping to push the screenplay through at the Script Assessment Commission.⁴⁶ As had been the case for both Kutz and Munk, Wajda was assisted by the support of his Film Unit, in this case Konwicki. Konwicki was particularly significant because he was a member of the PZPR and had not yet fallen out of favour with the regime. Konwicki was convinced that if people who had lost their families during the uprising were to read the screenplay, they would have no moral objections. The Commission meeting sparked a great deal of discussion, the main question being whether the Warsaw Uprising should be a film topic at all. The most significant opposition came from Aleksander Ford, who although absent, communicated his concern about the subject matter on the phone. He suggested that seeing their loved ones 'dying like rats'

⁴⁶ Wajda, *My Films*, p.12

would cause people to question what the Red Army was doing on the other side of the Vistula. K.T. Toeplitz countered this by reminding those present that as novels about the Uprising already existed, it would be unreasonable to suggest that it was impossible to make a film on that theme. Once again Konwicki came to *Kanal's* defence, reasoning that Polish cinema should be able to show people, in particular those in the West, what Poland had experienced. Despite the passionate defence of the screenplay, not just by Konwicki, but also by Toeplitz, Jerzy Zarzycki and Jerzy Kawalerowicz, the chairman of the gathering, the then-head of cinematography Leonard Borkowicz, was as opposed to the film as Ford and did not feel that *Kanal* should be put into production. His apprehensions included the portrayal of heroism, its explanation as a historical duty and the fact that the creator's good intentions were not obvious enough. He feared that any backlash after the film was released would come back to haunt him, rather than Wajda and his team. He accused Wajda of accepting an ahistorical and even libellous screenplay that had weak ideological content. He referred to the difficult political situation in 1956, reminding the filmmakers that even using subtext, the Soviet Union could not be overtly criticised for their abandonment of the insurgents.⁴⁷

The Script Assessment Meeting for *Kanal* took place in January 1956, before Khrushchev's Secret Speech and the article 'Na spotkanie ludziorz z AK' calling for the rehabilitation of AK soldiers.⁴⁸ It is not surprising, therefore, that many of those present at the Assessment Commission were strongly opposed to it, although the composition of the meeting about *Kanal* showed how much had changed within the Polish film industry since the discussion about *A Generation* three years earlier. Previously, the members of the Commission were mostly party functionaries, but with *Kanal* it featured far more writers and directors; in fact, they constituted the majority of those present. It is also possible to note dissension in the ranks and the

⁴⁷ FN, A-214 poz. 55 ' Protokół z posiedzenia Komisji Ocen Filmów 24.I.56 r.'

⁴⁸ For more information on this article please see the section on *Eroica*

premonitions of Polish October, as some of the members contested the views held by the political leadership. The discussion included cinematic issues, questions about the way in which art portrays history, and considerably fewer ideological concerns than in the case of *A Generation*. The split in opinion about *Kanal* fell along very clear lines: the young directors and writers, the future of the Polish film industry, were supportive of the project, whilst representatives of the Party and the old guard, such as Ford, were sharply opposed. As it was the Party functionaries who wielded the greatest power and Borkowicz, as chair of the meeting recommended that *Kanal* not be put into production, it is amazing that it was, and again with no significant changes.⁴⁹ The decision of Borkowicz, to show the film at Cannes was also surprising. After *Kanal* was shown at Cannes it was subsequently sold to twenty-four countries and brought in a significant amount of money, which explains why the attitude of the Party changed once it garnered international success, but still does not fully elucidate why they allowed its submission in the first place. The Ministry of Culture sanctioned the production of *Kanal*, almost certainly due to the partial rehabilitation of the Home Army by Gomułka, and the explosion of memory which began in 1956.

Kanal's initially frosty reception from critics and audiences came as no surprise to Wajda. He understood that numerous viewers had lost loved ones in Warsaw during the war, and as a result they wanted to see their moral and psychological victory, rather than their deaths in the sewers.⁵⁰ Bolesław Michałek criticised *Kanal* for not providing enough analysis and explanation of the events, claiming 'the Warsaw Uprising remains an enigmatic creation in which unknown forces destroy human beings.'⁵¹ Bohdan Węsierski concurred that the psychological layer of *Kanal* did not tell the viewers anything they did not already know, although his assessment was not altogether negative. He argued that it is a shocking film, but

⁴⁹ 'Protokół z posiedzenia Komisji Ocen Filmów 24.I.1956 r.'

⁵⁰ Tadeusz Płażewski et al., *Wajda Films I* (Warsaw, 1996), p.49.

⁵¹ Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda*, p.51.

only because it faithfully depicted the events of those days.⁵² Leon Bukowiecki claimed that it was reasonable to expect that the first non-hypocritical film about the Uprising should be an epic work that would be a breakthrough in Polish cinema. Bukowiecki concluded that *Kanal* was neither.⁵³ The tone of the criticism, however, was quite different to that which accompanied *A Generation*. Putting aside their issues with the portrayal of the Uprising, reviewers were able to discern the real artistic merit of *Kanal* and were more receptive to its political message. After *Kanal* was shown at Cannes reviewers took a slightly different approach to the film as for the first time a piece of Polish cinema was sparking real interest in Western Europe, educating audiences on one of the most tragic episodes of Poland's war. *Kanal* certainly proved Konwicki right when he said that Wajda and his team had something to tell the world. Although *Kanal's* success at the festival did not convince everyone that they had been incorrect in their early assessment of the film, it did force some to view the film in a new light.⁵⁴

Just as with *A Generation*, *Kanal* was received far better when taken out of the context of volatile Polish politics, when viewers were less aware of the controversy surrounding the subject matter. When the film was shown at Cannes, screenwriters and critics congratulated Stawiński and praised his screenplay; they were incredulous upon learning that it was based on facts. There were also those, however, who felt that the subject matter of *Kanal* was not suitable for festival audiences.⁵⁵ *The Guardian* in Britain described *Kanal* as 'astonishing' and 'purely and simply a testimony to the courage of man in fearful adversity with no obvious motive of propaganda at all'.⁵⁶ The eminent French writer and honorary chairman of the festival Jean Cocteau declared that Wajda's shocking picture reminded him of Goya's famous series of

⁵² Bohdan Węsierski, 'Kanał', *Express Wieczorny* (11 May 1957)

⁵³ Leon Bukowiecki, 'Kanał', *Dziennik Polski*, (25 April 1957)

⁵⁴ Wajda, *My Films*, p.16

⁵⁵ Konicpolska, 'Dziś w Cannes'

⁵⁶ 'Eastern European Films', *The Guardian*, (12 February 1958).

drawings on the horrors of war.⁵⁷ His feelings were echoed in the wider French press, a journalist in *L'Humanité* writing that *Kanal* was a tribute to the heroism of the Polish youth who fought in the Warsaw Uprising.⁵⁸ The highest praise came from Italy, where the correspondent from *L'Unita* claimed that 'the final tragic heroes were described with such authenticity that the audience shared in the real tension of the film and were deeply impressed by the image of Dante's hell.'⁵⁹ Both of these comments have particular significance as *L'Humanité* and *L'Unita* were the press organs of the French and Italian Communist Parties, who retained their allegiance to Stalinism much longer than Poland. Without the depth of feeling about the Uprising, international audiences and reviewers were able to appreciate the artistic merit of *Kanal* and the compelling and realistic way it portrayed the last days of resistance.

Władysław Bartoszewski wrote that *Kanal* is not a historical film about the Warsaw Uprising, nor is it a psychological film about the Uprising.⁶⁰ Bartoszewski had been a decorated insurgent, and his opinion perhaps indicates what other veterans felt about *Kanal*.⁶¹ Wajda's decision to look at the Uprising from a more objective perspective meant that he opened himself to criticism from both those who had been involved and the government. While *Kanal* may not have earned universal praise from either critics or audiences, it was instrumental in opening up a debate not just about the Warsaw Uprising, but on the war as a whole, something that had been missing from the public sphere since the imposition of Stalinism. Wajda's portrayal of the descent into the sewers brought to life some of the horrors that the AK suffered and brought

⁵⁷ Jerzy Płażewski, 'Sukces polskiego filmu w Cannes', *Teatr i Film*, (1-15 June 1957)

⁵⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁹ *ibid*

⁶⁰ Władysław Bartoszewski, 'Kanał', *Stolica*, (12 May 1957)

⁶¹ Władysław Bartoszewski (1922-2015). Bartoszewski took part in the defence of Warsaw in 1939 and after the defeat was sent to Auschwitz. He was released due to pressure from the Red Cross, and became involved in Żegota. He then took part in the Warsaw Uprising. For his working in helping the Jews he was named Righteous Among Nations. Bartoszewski was critical of the communist regime, and was imprisoned for his views. He wrote a number of works about the history of the Nazi occupation and the fate of the Jews. In postcommunist Poland he twice served as Foreign Minister.

home the reality that a large proportion of those fighting were killed in action. To this day, *Kanal* is seen as one of the seminal works of both the Polish School, and cinema in Poland as a whole, forming a central part in academic discussions of representations of the Second World War. It continued some of the themes that had begun in *A Generation* and confirmed that Wajda's preoccupation would be with the fate of his peers and the sacrifices they made, whether by choice or as a result of events. With *Kanal*, Wajda showed the destructive nature of the myth that it was a Pole's duty to sacrifice themselves tragically and heroically.

Ashes and Diamonds

Ashes and Diamonds is the conclusion of Wajda's 1950s war trilogy and is considered by numerous scholars, critics and directors alike to be the greatest masterpiece of Polish cinema and Wajda's finest achievement. It was always a risky project. While Andrzejewski's novel had the approval of the Communist Party, the film took quite a different direction, showing the plotting and murder of a communist official by a former Home Army soldier, which was extremely politically sensitive. As with *A Generation* and *Kanal* Wajda managed to find support for his project, most notably from Andrzejewski himself, and through a series of fortunate circumstances *Ashes and Diamonds* found an audience both in Poland and in the West. It premiered in Poland on 3 October 1958, having overcome attempts to block its release. Despite not being the official Polish entry for the 1959 Venice Film Festival, it won a critics' award and was subsequently included in European screenings tour of the ten best films made worldwide since the Second World War.⁶²

Ashes and Diamonds tells the story of Maciek Chełmicki, played by Zbigniew Cybulski, a member of the anti-communist underground and a former Home Army soldier, who has instructions to assassinate Szczuka, district secretary of the regional committee of the Polish

⁶² Wajda, *My Films*, p.22

Workers' Party. The action takes place over twenty-four hours on 8 May 1945. As the movie opens, Maciek and his friend Andrzej, are waiting for Szczuka's car, while a third man, Drewnowski, stands guard. They shoot two men they believe to be their targets, but quickly realise they are not. The three men flee, just as Szczuka, their intended victim, arrives. They are given another chance at the Monopol hotel where the end of the war is being celebrated by a special banquet arranged by the town mayor and his assistant Drewnowski, who is working for both sides. While Andrzej and Maciek wait for the right time to strike, Maciek falls in love with a waitress, Krystyna. As Maciek overhears a conversation between Szczuka and his assistant about the failed assassination attempt, Maciek realises that he is going to have to kill again, despite the war being over. At the banquet a singer begins the song 'The Red Poppies of Monte Cassino', while Andrzej and Maciek listen at the bar and toast their fallen comrades. Later Krystyna and Maciek go for a walk; it begins to rain and they find refuge in a ruined church. On the wall they find the words to Cyprian Kamil Norwid's poem 'Ashes and Diamonds', from which the film takes its name. As Maciek reads the verses, he reaffirms his conviction that he must sacrifice himself to do his national duty. On the return to the hotel Maciek kisses Krystyna goodbye and returns a reluctant assassin, questioning Andrzej on the necessity of killing and professing his desire for a future, but Andrzej is a man of absolute principle and states that they both have a duty to carry out. As Szczuka leaves the hotel Maciek follows and shoots him. As Maciek approaches the train tracks, he sees Andrzej beating Drewnowski for serving two masters. Drewnowski sees Maciek and calls out to him, which startles him so he runs to catch the train and he accidentally runs into some Polish soldiers, who are on the lookout for members of the outlawed Home Army. They shoot at Maciek, fatally wounding him. In the now-infamous 'laundry scene' Maciek, bleeding, tries to hide among white hanging sheets, still in disbelief that he has been hit. He lurches towards the railway but his strength finally fails and he dies falling into a pile of dirt. In the last sequence

Maciek's death is juxtaposed with the old porter at the hotel taking out the Polish flag, as the last notes of the polonaise play at the banquet.

Ashes and Diamonds cemented the themes and techniques that Wajda had used in *A Generation* and *Kanal*, but combined them in such a way as to make *Ashes and Diamonds* his greatest cinematic achievement. Once again, he is his generation's spokesman, focusing on tragic heroism, romanticism and nationalism, the examination of Polish political dilemmas, and love versus duty. Aesthetically, it combines the surreal and baroque with realism as he attempted to accurately show the very particular situation that Poland found itself in at the end of the Second World War. *Ashes and Diamonds* is also the culmination of Wajda's many interests and influences: Maciek is almost the wartime figure that Wajda wanted to be; Szczuka's propagandist monologue while standing over his fallen comrades' bodies is a throwback to socialist realism. There are also several symbols representing Wajda's interest in symbolist art, in particular the paintings of Andrzej Wróblewski. The film has a brisk, fast moving narrative, with language that is loaded with meaning, especially for domestic audiences.

Ashes and Diamonds had gone through several directors before Wajda took on the project, starting with Antoni Bohdziewicz, who could not obtain political approval. It then went to Wanda Jakubowska who gave up, for reasons unclear.⁶³ Jan Rybkowski also tried, and Wajda took over from him, after approaching Andrzejewski for permission to adapt his novel resulting in Andrzejewski producing a screenplay. Wajda had Andrzejewski's support from the beginning, which is why he went to great lengths to make sure that it was released in its original form.⁶⁴ Andrzejewski started his career before the war as an author and journalist. During the war he was active in the underground cultural scene and helping Jews, experiences drawn upon in the story *Wielki tydzień* (*Holy Week*), which Wajda adapted into a film of the same name in

⁶³ Wajda, *My Films*, p.18

⁶⁴ *ibid*

1995. While Andrzejewski was initially a strong supporter of the communist regime, during the 1960s he participated in democratic opposition. Andrzejewski's favour with the PZPR was no longer at its peak in 1957, but he still held enough power to be able to help Wajda.

Ashes and Diamonds is set in a specific historical context, and while the film only shows one day, it perfectly demonstrates the ideological struggle that Poland suffered in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Audiences are instantly thrown into the conflict as Wajda sets up the two protagonists: Maciek, the young former Home Army fighter, who represents the old Poland, and Szczuka, the long-time communist, who represents those who were coming in to take over. During the war, all political parties were fighting with goal of forcing out the Nazi occupiers, but as the conflict ended, many underground groups began to fight each other, in an ideologically driven guerrilla war. This included units made up of former AK soldiers, who were caught in a bitter conflict with the pro-communist, Soviet backed and trained, People's Army. With his two characters Wajda showed there were those on both sides with the best intentions who wished to secure and maintain Polish independence. The two adversaries are both likeable in their own ways: Wajda introduced Szczuka's backstory of having fought in the Spanish Civil War, making him more relatable, and added a subplot that saw Maciek and Szczuka develop a vague father-son relationship, meaning the audience is moved by both their deaths at the film's end. Wajda stated that he did not want Szczuka to be a soulless puppet.⁶⁵

Both characters are also not beyond reproach. Maciek murders two men accidentally, and Szczuka, after discovering the bodies, makes a speech reminiscent of socialist realist propaganda movies, in which he informs his comrades that the fight for Poland has just begun, and this would require the elimination of political opponents. The character of Drewnowski

⁶⁵ *ibid*

demonstrates how many Poles were unsure which political direction to take, and that some co-operated with the communists, to advance their own careers. The hotel, and party, provided a microcosm of Poland at the time.

More than any of Wajda's previous works, *Ashes and Diamonds* is an expression of Wajda's admiration of romanticism, and in this sense, Maciek is his ultimate hero. This is epitomised when Maciek reads out Norwid's poem inscribed on the church wall. Norwid himself was a strong nationalist, who firmly believed in, and supported Polish freedom, although he was not a romantic.⁶⁶ Maciek's recitation of: 'Or will the cinders hold the glory of a starlight diamond, the morning star of lasting triumph' expresses not only Maciek's hopes for his country, but also those of many young Poles.⁶⁷ Here Maciek bears out the belief that he must sacrifice his happiness for the sake of national duty; but also witnesses the demise of this romantic, nationalist ethos that defined Polish identity and was crushed by the outcome of the Warsaw Uprising. As with the first two parts of his war trilogy, Wajda uses religious imagery to add an extra dimension: some of Maciek's defining moments happen in a church, beginning with his act of murder in the opening scene, shooting a man as the Madonna, queen of Poland, looks on. It highlights Maciek's lack of respect for authority and that despite being a veteran of the Warsaw Uprising, he still behaves in a youthful and reckless manner. Still more shocking is the image of Maciek mending Krystyna's shoe on the altar of a ruined church, in front of a crucifix and the bodies of the two men he murdered. Setting the scene in such a sacred place shows the extent to which Maciek has been hardened by the war and his experiences, losing his moral compass and sense of respect. In Szczuka's dying moments he stands still, appearing as though he has been crucified, and as he grabs on to Maciek his twisted body appears like Christ on the cross, reminiscent of Wajda's earlier sequence.

⁶⁶ Eile, *Literature and Nationalism*, p.130

⁶⁷ Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda*, p.58

Ashes and Diamonds pushed the boundaries further than any previous war film. Portraying the murder of a communist official by a likeable Home Army soldier, was almost an unthinkable topic. Making Szczuka a more three dimensional and personable character did not negate the subject's sensitivity. During the banquet scene a young singer performs 'The Red Poppies on Monte Cassino', a moving song that refers to the heroism of the Polish Second Corps in Italy at the Battle of Monte Cassino. The ballad was written in 1944 and was popular with troops, until under Stalinism it was banned with public performances punishable.⁶⁸ At the same time, the Polish forces contributions in the West was also downplayed, in favour of events in the East. *Ashes and Diamonds* was the first time the song was used in such a public display.

Wajda claims he managed to avoid widespread cuts thanks to Zbigniew Cybulski and the fact he was able to demonstrate so much with a look and a gesture while all the censors were looking at was words.⁶⁹ As with *A Generation* and *Kanal*, Wajda benefitted from having allies who had a good standing within the PZPR, and could help with bringing the film to release. In this case it was Andrzejewski and the acting president of the CUK, Jerzy Lewiński. Andrzejewski, to pre-empt potential Party objections, arranged an advanced screening for some literary colleagues, which helped strengthen support, as all were key PZPR members.⁷⁰ Lewiński used the aftermath of Polish October, when interference by the Party in cultural matters was almost non-existent, to help bring the movie to fruition.⁷¹ This combination of Wajda's abilities, powerful friends, and taking advantage of a more relaxed political climate, that brought *Ashes and Diamonds* into production.

Despite the potential controversy of *Ashes and Diamonds*, Wajda did not have to use his connections to have his initial screenplay put into production. The Script Assessment

⁶⁸ Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, *Beyond Glasnost: The Post-Totalitarian Mind* (Chicago, 1992), p.63

⁶⁹ Wajda, *Double Vision*, p.74

⁷⁰ Wajda, *My Films*, p.18

⁷¹ *ibid*

Commission Meeting, held on 17 January 1958, made no comment on potential ideological concerns. Chairing the discussion was Tadeusz Karpowski, director of the Central Board of Film Studios, (Centralny Zarząd Wytwórní Filmowych) who had been involved with Film Polski from its inception. He was a very influential figure in party supervision of cinematography. He would be expected, therefore, to potentially have serious concerns about *Ashes and Diamonds*. Instead, however, he claimed ‘the film very seriously shows the tragedy of the communists and the tragedy of the new generation’. Karpowski did contrast the ideological positions of the novel and the screenplay. The book was a warning to PRL authorities and showed the futility of the AK’s actions, while the script portrayed how all the positive characters died, leaving the scoundrels behind. Andrzejewski interjected later that this was not their intention. Konwicki again stepped in on behalf of Wajda and the Kadr film unit, explaining there was nothing to fear from the film. The discussion mainly focused on the development of Szczuka and Maciek. Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski had particular concerns feeling that Maciek was portrayed in a poor light, and that giving Szczuka a son who was in the AK was a cheap, theatrical trick. Andrzejewski defended this decision, by claiming that without this family dynamic, Szczuka would be too much of a ‘paper character’. The writer Andrzej Braun was also worried about Maciek, and felt that he viewed murder too much as an adventure. K.T. Toeplitz defended this, however, by arguing that the occupation would have hardened Maciek, and made him habituated to killing.⁷² Despite the issues raised, however, those present at the meeting overwhelmingly supported sending *Ashes and Diamonds* for production.

By the completion of filming of *Ashes and Diamonds*, the Polish political situation had changed and this filtered down to cinema. The previous Minister of Culture, Karol Kuryluk was dismissed and replaced by Tadeusz Galiński, who took a much harder line. Kuryluk was a

⁷² FN A-214 poz.86 ‘Protokół z posiedzenia Komisji Ocen Scenariuszy w dniu 17.1.1958r.’

supporter of cultural liberalisation and co-operation with the West. He felt it was important to develop the arts and make sure that culture was widely disseminated.⁷³ Galiński, on the other hand, when he assumed the role, expressed the view that party organisations should be more active in cultural work.⁷⁴ Instructions were relayed to Jerzy Lewiński from the Cultural Section of the KC PZPR to show *Ashes and Diamonds* to a group of party activists. During this informal meeting those present had several critical remarks, largely directed at the portrayal of Maciek as the hero while Szczuka failed to arouse sympathy.⁷⁵ During the Film Assessment Commission for *Ashes and Diamonds* on 12 July 1958, before its screening, those present agreed the film had many good points and initial reviewers were almost universally positive.⁷⁶ This did not remove its potential as a political liability, but the authorities decided to give it a widespread release: it is not clear from the meeting why they allowed it. Wajda suggested that the scene the authorities were most concerned about was Maciek's death; he even tells a story of how he received an anonymous phone call telling him to cut the final scene when *Ashes and Diamonds* was shown at the Kino Moskwa in Warsaw. It was felt that it did not clearly symbolise the downfall of the ideology that Maciek represented.⁷⁷

The Party did try to limit the impact of the movie abroad. Wajda was refused a passport to travel to Paris for the film's French premiere.⁷⁸ *Ashes and Diamonds* was also passed over as the official Polish entry at the Venice Film Festival in favour of Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *Train*, and when Favre Le Bret, director of the Cannes Film Festival, asked for screening permission, he was refused. Once again, Wajda was assisted by Jerzy Lewiński, who took it upon himself to take *Ashes and Diamonds* to Venice and arrange for a screening outside of the Festival. The

⁷³ Fijałkowska, *Polityka i twórcy*, p.451

⁷⁴ *ibid*

⁷⁵ Andrzej Wajda, *My Films*, p.22

⁷⁶ Andrzej Wajda's Archives 'Protokół z dyskusji nad filmem pt. *Popiół i diament*' (12 July 1958)

⁷⁷ Wajda, *My Films*, p.22

⁷⁸ Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda*, p.62

authorities also underestimated Wajda's fame in the West and the contacts he had garnered that ensured *Ashes and Diamonds* was seen by people who could help to distribute it internationally. By this point the Politburo had officially lost control.⁷⁹

As foreign critics had done with *A Generation* and *Kanal*, some commentators in Poland were able to see *Ashes and Diamonds* for what it was: a cinematic masterpiece. Thus the movie received mostly positive press reviews, even in official Party papers like *Trybuna Ludu*. Aleksander Jackiewicz, who was the editor of *Film*, wrote that it was unusual in any art for a young professional such as Wajda to create a work so early in their career that might go on to be his greatest ever piece.⁸⁰ This reaction further suggests there was a certain degree of press freedom at this time, given that even *Trybuna Ludu* were able to print a positive review. There were criticisms with concerns centred round Maciek and Szczuka as Home Army and Workers' Party representatives.⁸¹ In their eyes Maciek should have been shown as a rebellious and unnecessary remnant of the war, not a romantic warrior; while Szczuka should not have been portrayed as ineffectual and non-threatening.⁸² Jackiewicz claims it was Aleksander Ford who, so incensed by Wajda's apathetic depiction of Szczuka, prevented *Ashes and Diamonds* from being the Polish entry at the international film festivals. He felt the film was too nationalistic and should have its influence suppressed.⁸³ Thanks to Jerzy Lewiński's efforts, *Ashes and Diamonds* was very well received in the West, and won Wajda the respect of many peers, including René Clair who was extremely pleased to see the film's success.⁸⁴

Marek Haltof states: 'Like other Polish romantic characters, Maciek is a prisoner of fate so that he is powerless to escape.'⁸⁵ A theme that runs through the other parts of the trilogy tying them

⁷⁹ Wajda, *My Films*, p.22

⁸⁰ Płażewski, *Wajda's Films I*, p.70

⁸¹ 'Protokół z posiedzenia Komisja Ocen Scenariuszy w dniu 17.1.1958r'

⁸² *ibid*

⁸³ Mirosław Derecki, 'Wajda niepokorny. Rozmowa z prof Aleksandrem Jackiewiczem', *Kamena*, (21 June 1981)

⁸⁴ Wajda, *My Films*, p.22.

⁸⁵ Haltof, *Polish National Cinema*, p.88

together. *Ashes and Diamonds* remains one of Wajda's greatest works and its universal appeal continues to make it a hit with audiences in the twenty-first century. Maciek, the young romantic hero scarred by his wartime past and deprived of the future he longed for, continues to find resonance. It is his appeal as a character, along with Wajda and Jerzy Wójcik's aesthetically beautiful shots, that allowed *Ashes and Diamonds* to find success despite the surrounding political controversy. Maciek was a character that Wajda admired and this, combined with Zbigniew Cybulski's well-crafted performance, made him Wajda's most engaging character. Maciek's death symbolised the end of the hopes and dreams of an entire generation that were snatched away with the imposition of communism. Wajda once again created a central protagonist who sacrifices himself because of a sense of duty, but gone is the idea he is driven by a historical sense of Polish heroism. Instead, Maciek is propelled by an obligation he has been following throughout the war and a reaction to the bitter struggle for political control in Poland as the Second World War ended. While *Ashes and Diamonds* may have been set in a particular moment in time, many themes were universal, allowing it to be relatable to audiences not familiar with Polish history.

Throughout his war trilogy Wajda had been telling stories of his generation and the devastating effects of the war on them. With *Ashes and Diamonds*, he reached a crescendo. At the same time, *Ashes and Diamonds* also harked back to its predecessors. Maciek took part in the Warsaw Uprising and tells Krystyna that his glasses represent the darkness he experienced in the sewers; he also hints that his eyes had been damaged, suggesting he had retreated just like Zadra's platoon in *Kanal*. *Ashes and Diamonds* was a very important project to Wajda who considered it to be almost a personal story he had to tell; much later he wrote: 'The fate of the boys from the canals, Tadeusz from *Landscape after Battle*, Marcin from *The Crowned-Eagle Ring* and Maciek Chelmicki from *Ashes and Diamonds*, could be my life story. I was simply

luckier than they were.’⁸⁶ This quotation sums up Wajda’s attitude not just to *Ashes and Diamonds*, but also the rest of his war trilogy. Wajda felt he had a relatively easy war and was determined to tell the tales of those who, unlike him, had not survived. His aim was to do so in what he considered to be an authentic manner, in spite of any attempts at censorship. In this Wajda was almost wholly successful.

Lotna

Lotna had its premiere on 27 September 1959, coinciding with the twentieth anniversary of the September campaign depicted in the film. It was a romantic epic, based on Wojciech Żukrowski’s short story. As with many of Wajda’s works it immediately raised controversy. Above all, it was accused of perpetuating erroneous myths about the defence of Poland in 1939. It is like an epic painting played out on screen, the visual representation of the artistic visions with which Wajda grew up, heavily inspired by his own memories. As it was the first major work about the September campaign, viewers had very specific ideas of how it should look. Despite being a disaster with critics and Wajda’s peers, it is a very interesting movie, most notably because of the artistic choices that Wajda made and that it is the only war film he wanted to remake and improve.⁸⁷ It introduced another writer into the world of cinema, Wojciech Żukrowski, who co-authored the screenplay along with Wajda. Żukrowski would go on to have a very successful working relationship with Jerzy Passendorfer.

Lotna refers to a white mare, which becomes a source of obsession and desire for a company of uhlans during the September campaign. The film opens with a sequence showing the four main characters, members of a cavalry unit, on their horses. Captain Chodakiewicz, Lieutenant

⁸⁶ Andrzej Wajda, ‘Moje notatki z historii’, *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, (Autumn/Winter 1996-1997) *Landscape After Battle* was released in 1970 and will be discussed later in this chapter. *The Crowned-Eagle Ring* was made in 1993 and provides a nostalgic look back to *Ashes and Diamonds*.

⁸⁷ Interview with Andrzej Wajda

Wodnicki, Officer Cadet Grabowski and Sergeant Major Latoń observe a white horse running wild. The shot that follows is of a nude female in the garden of a nearby manor. These two moments introduce the central theme of the film: the intense desire the men feel for Lotna that even goes as far as to interfere with their human relationships, stirring up jealousy and resentment. The soldiers, on entering the manor, find an elderly man lying in bed in the master bedroom with Lotna standing next to him eating out of his hand. Chodakiewicz informs him that the war front is moving their way, but he replies that he is too old and sick to move. He offers his horse to the uhlans, begging them to take her with them and 'let the horse carry you to victory'. These personal scenes are interspersed with shots of large numbers of people fleeing the Germans, surrounded by scattered luggage and screaming children, a picture of chaos. The cavalry ride through the fugitives but they cannot protect civilians from German planes that massacre refugees. This is the first of many scenes depicting the contrast between a noble, but antiquated cavalry and the modern Nazi army and which comes to a head in the most famous and notorious scene of the movie, that of the battle between the Polish cavalry and the Germans. What begins as a triumphant assault on German infantry ends with a grisly slaughter as the uhlans encounter German tanks. Faceless and inhuman, these machines easily overpower and crush the cavalry, leaving scores of dead. At the end of the sequence Lotna is shown bearing the lifeless body of Chodakiewicz, the captain. He is taken back to the village to be buried. Meanwhile, Grabowski meets a young teacher, Ewa, and marries her in a village church. As they leave, Lotna is waiting for them, causing Ewa to show her dislike of the mare, apparently jealous of her as if she was a woman. Once again, the regiment leave and take up a hiding place in nearby woods. As German bombers approach, Lotna becomes frightened and runs out, inadvertently indicating the location of the uhlans to the planes, Grabowski dies in the ensuing massacre. Wodnicki now assumes charge of Lotna and after disbanding the unit he rides away, heading out for the hills. When he falls asleep, Latoń sneaks in to steal the mare,

trying to escape after being surprised by Wodnicki's cries. However, Lotna is badly injured by all the debris left behind by the retreating army. Torn between his love for the horse and his wish not to see her in pain, the lieutenant is ultimately unable to put her out of her misery, so it is left to Latoń to do so. The sadness and humiliation over their defeat is clear on both their faces as they bury the horse. The final scene of the film sees Wodnicki turning away and leaving.

Not unlike the Warsaw Uprising, the September Campaign acquired legendary status, but also became prey for Stalinist propaganda as the defeat held a number of negative connotations. School textbooks at the time painted the Polish capitulation as a result of Polish Army generals and officers desertions leaving soldiers to fight without leadership.⁸⁸ Rulers, landlords and bourgeoisie were blamed for the loss, 'revealing the nation's interest to be its selfish class interests.'⁸⁹ The 'fascist' Polish government also came under fire for rejecting help from the Soviet Union, the only country that 'wanted' to help and by doing so they condemned Poland to a hopeless, uneven fight.⁹⁰ The Soviets also adopted the Nazi myth of the Polish cavalry charging tanks, which was designed to humiliate and undermine Polish contributions to the Second World War. The problem with *Lotna* is that it did not step far enough away from the Stalinist image of the September Campaign. Wajda intended to show a Poland unprepared for the Nazi onslaught, and that September 1939 not only marked the collapse of the Polish state, but also the loss of a generation's hopes. Wajda, however, did not lay the blame for the defeat at anyone's feet and portrayed the uhlans with respect. As a result, audiences were forgiving over *Lotna*, recognising that it provided quite an accurate representation of the atmosphere at

⁸⁸ Gryzelda Missalowa and Janina Schoenbrenner, *Historia Polski* (Warsaw, 1951), p.266

⁸⁹ *ibid.* p.268

⁹⁰ *ibid.* p.270

the time; viewers felt that Wajda had presented the cavalry in an appropriate way, highlighting their traditions and sense of duty towards their homeland.⁹¹

Of all the scenes confirming existing stereotypes, the one that caused the most consternation was, unsurprisingly, the cavalry charging tanks, due to its association with both the Nazis and the Soviets. The sequence was, in fact, inspired by one of Wajda's own memories of escaping from Puławy in 1939. He was sitting in a horse drawn army cart when German planes began to fly overhead. The soldier accompanying them took out his rifle and began to shoot at the aircraft, with understandably no impact.⁹² To Wajda, this perfectly demonstrated how the Polish Army was dealing with technology they were unprepared for: they fought on anyway and the story of the uhlans attacking tanks was the most extreme representation of this. Polish horsemen charging German tanks was a myth with origins in the skirmish at Krojanty in September 1939, where the cavalry attacked a German infantry battalion, only to come under the fire of armoured cars and tanks. The incident, reported by German and Italian war correspondents, was used to demonstrate the stupidity of Polish soldiers.⁹³ Wajda knew about the fallacy of the myth, yet he decided to use the charge as a symbol. His defence was that the phrase 'with swords against tanks', had already become a permanent part of the Polish language, and that art did not always have to comply with reality.⁹⁴

The heavy symbolic content and imagery Wajda used in *Lotna* are reminiscent of the nineteenth century art and literature that dominated his childhood. The detailed tableaux and wide panning shots that fill the film are impressive, thanks to Wajda's training as a painter, and his ability to use landscapes in such an evocative fashion. Like the nationalist authors of the nineteenth century, Wajda painted a nostalgic picture of a Poland that had long since been lost, one that

⁹¹ Mirosław Przyłipiak, 'Spór o Lotna', *Gazeta Gdańska*, (5-6 January 1991)

⁹² Wajda, *My Films*, p.30.

⁹³ Stephen Zaloga, *Polish Army, 1939-1945* (London, 1982), p.9-10.

⁹⁴ Wajda, *My Films*, p.29

included palaces, noble houses and aristocratic conventions. When she dies, *Lotna* embodies the unknowing innocence of Poland in September 1939, a country that believed itself invincible, but is defeated in a humiliating and brutal fashion.⁹⁵ The company of uhlans themselves are also deeply symbolic, portraying the long history of the Polish cavalry, full of proud traditions and a strong sense of duty. This Poland, and Wajda's characters, were the twentieth century versions of those in the plays of Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki. These authors were trying to resurrect a Poland that had been divided amongst its neighbours, while Wajda was harking back to the Poland of his childhood, and those he grew up with. *Lotna's* rural setting, like Wincenty Pol's *Song of our Land (Pieśń o ziemi naszej)*, glorified the fatherland as agricultural, famous for its hospitality and unrestricted freedoms. While to an extent, Wajda glorified the uhlans in *Lotna*, he also, like Norwid, resented the national inclination to reckless deeds. Norwid wrote: 'Every fifteen years the Poles counted on the blood sacrifices of consecutive generations, on the periodic massacre of the innocent.'⁹⁶ This quotation perfectly sums up Wajda's attitude, both in his war trilogy, and *Lotna*.

Lotna's release prompted an immediate almost universally negative reaction from critics, but it did lead to a debate about the September Campaign for the first time. The rich iconography, especially that of the uhlans, was considered excessive. Alicja Helman wrote, 'In *Lotna* we find cheap, flashy and unambiguous symbolism which is neither artistically justified, nor thematically needed.'⁹⁷ Other reviewers took objection to the heavy reliance on the cult of the Polish cavalry, officially encouraged by Edward Rydz-Śmigły and Marshal Piłsudski in the interwar period. K.T. Toeplitz compared the uhlans to 'the merry Hungarian dragoons in operettas',⁹⁸ and Bolesław Michałek claimed that 'the issue of so called uhlans romanticism is

⁹⁵ Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda*, p.70

⁹⁶ Eile, *Literature and Nationalism*, p.130

⁹⁷ Alicja Helman, 'Sarmata na płonącej żyrafie', *Ekran*, (2 October 1959)

⁹⁸ Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz, 'Podzwonne kawaleryjskiej Polski', *Świat*, (18 October 1959)

dead and out of date' and that the anachronistic viewpoint of the film was offensive.⁹⁹ Zygmunt Kałużyński criticised the surrealism in *Lotna* and argued that it was so forced that it took on the characteristics of a parody.¹⁰⁰ Western reviewers such as Marcel Martin and Guy Gauthier similarly noted the surrealistic, baroque style, but were not as devastatingly critical as Polish critics.¹⁰¹ Not only did *Lotna* lack critical acclaim, but the Party's reaction was so negative that the NZK took a great deal of time issuing payment, Wajda had to write to the chair of the Board of Cinema, Tadeusz Zaorski.¹⁰² There had also been concerns raised at the Script Assessment Commission meeting. Jerzy Bossak was worried that *Lotna* would be too 'stylised' with Wajda as director, and that because this was only the second film to look at the September Campaign it had to be treated with real care.¹⁰³ Much of the reproach levelled at Wajda has some merit, but *Lotna* has been somewhat rehabilitated in recent years. Film critics have begun to see past the obvious mistake that Wajda made and to regard *Lotna* as an interesting and original piece that faithfully reproduces the tone and mood in September 1939.¹⁰⁴ It is important to remember that the film has some very beautiful moments that linger with the viewer.

After the high standard of Wajda's war trilogy, *Lotna* was a disappointment. Despite Wajda's best intentions, he made some fundamental errors that distract from the film's positive aspects. It is difficult for the audience to invest in any characters other than Lotna as she appears to be the central protagonist; the most tragic death of all is hers. The image of the Polish cavalymen lying dead, strewn across the battlefield, leaves a lasting impression and is one of the iconic moments of Polish war cinema, but it is tainted by the use of the controversial and erroneous

⁹⁹ Bolesław Michałek, 'Lotna', *Film*, (1 November 1959)

¹⁰⁰ Zygmunt Kałużyński, 'Koszmar kawaleryjski czyli koniec Polski szlacheckiej', *Polityka*, (24 October 1959)

¹⁰¹ Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda*, p.71

¹⁰² Andrzej Wajda Archives, 'Letter to Przewodniczącemu Zarządu Kinematografii, Minister Tadeusz Zaorski', (20 July 1959)

¹⁰³ FN, A-214 poz. 102 'Protokół z Komisji Ocen Scenariuszy w dniu 14 sierpnia 1958 r.'

¹⁰⁴ Andrzej Buckowski, 'Lotna', *Życie Warszawy Telewizja* (19 November 2004)

image of Polish uhlans charging German tanks. *Lotna* also has too much symbolism, so it borders on the kitsch. Paul Coates posits that *Lotna* failed because the subject matter was too close to Wajda and his family and it was a film that Wajda desperately wanted to succeed, which made *Lotna*'s story unrepresentable.¹⁰⁵ This goes some way to explaining why Wajda struggled so much to translate his concept onto screen. Contemporary criticism of *Lotna* was perhaps too harsh: much of the skill that Wajda showed in his earlier works was still visible. The cinematography of *Lotna* is very impressive, and Wajda beautifully captured the end of the summer of 1939 and the uncertainty and tragedy that followed the German invasion. *Lotna* once again showed Wajda's skill at capturing the mood and atmosphere at any given moment during the Second World War. He very effectively showed that the Poland he had grown up in and had great affection for was lost with the defeat of September 1939. What Wajda intended to illustrate, was that the September campaign signalled the end of the cavalry age, and the start of the reign of modern, industrial and inhumane warfare.

Lotna was Wajda's last film of the 1950s; thus by the end of the decade his position as a leading filmmaker was firmly established. Despite his young age he was widely recognised both in Poland and abroad. His thematic interests had clearly evolved, focusing on the reactions of his own generation to traumatic events in history, particularly the Second World War. *Lotna* provides a slight deviation from this as Wajda includes not just his peers, but also his father's generation. His films became easily identifiable, not only because of the subject matter, but also his visual style, heavy with symbolism and carefully composed shots. The 1960s saw Andrzej Wajda move in a different direction with his filmmaking, choosing projects that greatly differed from his work of the previous decade.

¹⁰⁵ Paul Coates, 'Wajda's Imagination of Disaster: War Trauma, Surrealism and Kitsch', in John Orr and Elzbieta Ostrowska (ed) *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda: the art of irony and defiance* (London, 2003), p.27.

In the 1960s, Wajda's focus shifted and he only made two war films: *Samson* (1961) and *L'amour à vingt ans*, (*Love at Twenty*, 1962). *Samson* looked at the struggles faced by Polish Jews, but it said very little that was new and used images that were common in other Holocaust films. Although the central character in *Samson*, Jakub Gold, is Jewish, his death is portrayed according to the Polish romantic tradition that is found in a number of Wajda's films. Just like Munk, Wajda was not afraid to show Polish antisemitism, but this characteristic is mostly limited to prewar 'bourgeois Poland' and, by association Polish nationalists.¹⁰⁶ In both *A Generation* and *Samson*, Wajda shows the collective struggle of the Jews and also places Jewish suffering alongside that of Poles. This is a theme he picked up in *Landscape After Battle*. *Love at Twenty* was made up of five stories, from directors in five different countries and Wajda's was the last one. It was not a full-length feature, which is why it is not discussed in this thesis. Wajda had mixed success with his eclectic array of films.

Landscape After Battle

Krajobraz po bitwie (*Landscape After Battle*, 1970) is significant in Polish cinema as the first film to be adapted from one of Tadeusz Borowski's short stories. It is based on 'The Battle of Grunwald' ('Bitwa pod Grunwaldem') from Borowski's most famous work, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*. It marked a coming together of Poland's most noted director of films about the Second World War and a huge figure in the genre of Holocaust literature. Released on 8 September 1970, it was Poland's entry to the Cannes Film Festival in the same year. The screenplay was written by Wajda and Andrzej Brzozowski, who brought to the script pieces of dialogue taken from some of Borowski's other stories and his own ideas.¹⁰⁷ The film won numerous awards in Poland, including the readers' award from the magazine *Film* and first prize at the International Film Festival in Milan in 1971. *Landscape After Battle* was a

¹⁰⁶ Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust*, p.89.

¹⁰⁷ Wajda, *My Films*, p.82

departure from the war films that Wajda had made earlier in his career. Gone were the heroic narratives, replaced by a vision of the conflict as pointless, and a sense of hopelessness that continued well after it ended.

Landscape After Battle opens with one of the most iconic scenes in Polish cinema, which sets the tone for the film to come. There is no dialogue, the only sound is Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* as the viewer watches liberated prisoners experiencing their first minutes of freedom. In their striped camp uniforms, they run through the snow-covered field, until they reach the barbed wire fence. They wait, unsure, until one of them touches it and discovers it is no longer electrified. The narrator states that it is 1945 and that the detainees are being kept behind bars to maintain some order. The next sequence is a sharp contrast as the inmates take their revenge by killing one of the kapos and stamping him into the dirt, despite warnings against such behaviour from an American officer. The audience is then introduced to one of *Landscape After Battle*'s central protagonists, Tadeusz, played by Daniel Olbrychski.

The action then moves to a displaced persons camp, housing former concentration camp inmates: prisoners of war and Polish refugees who all have to wait under the supervision of American soldiers until they can be sent home. The early days of freedom are anything but, as Tadeusz and his fellow captives realise that they are still subject to countless restrictions and rules. During a mass at the camp a bus arrives with female ex-prisoners and viewers are introduced to *Landscape After Battle*'s other principle character, Nina, a Jewish refugee from Poland. She immediately captures Tadeusz's attention. Nina asks Tadeusz to escape from the camp with her, but he is unable to, so they take a walk in the woods instead. When Nina asks Tadeusz whether he wants to go back to Poland or stay in the West he does not know, so she reluctantly decides to go back to the camp, taking Tadeusz with her. Nina is accidentally shot and killed by an American soldier as they approach the camp, on what turns out to be the last day of its existence. To celebrate the end of the camp the former prisoners burn effigies of

Germans soldiers and perform a re-enactment of the Battle of Grunwald. The film's final scene is a stark contrast to the joy felt at the beginning. Tadeusz leaves the camp with a small cart of books, his face pale and full of resignation. Nina's death has allowed him to open up psychologically for the first time in some years and feel some human emotions.

Tadeusz Borowski is one of the most important Polish authors of the twentieth century, and his Auschwitz stories are masterpieces of Polish, and world literature. Borowski was arrested in February 1943 and sent to Pawiak prison.¹⁰⁸ Like Wanda Jakubowska, from his cell window Borowski saw the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising unfold, and the houses systematically burnt to the ground.¹⁰⁹ He was subsequently transported to Auschwitz, where he worked as slave labour. Borowski ended the war in Dachau, where he was liberated by the Americans in May 1945, and then found himself in Freimann camp for displaced persons outside of Munich.¹¹⁰ Despite being freed by the US Army, however, Maria Borowska claimed that both she and her husband believed they survived Auschwitz thanks to the Red Army, giving them a more positive attitude towards the Soviet Union, and communism.¹¹¹ Borowski wrote extensively about Auschwitz. Most of his stories are in the first person, showing everyday terrors of camp life, and privileges given to non-Jewish prisoners. The most striking element of Borowski's work, however, is how his characters are so desensitised to their surrounding death and destruction. Borowski's work stood out from work by other Auschwitz survivors: it does not show solidarity between prisoners, or acts of extraordinary heroism. Borowski's work was considered nihilistic, amoral and decadent, although Paweł Jasienica, the historian and editor of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, retracted his criticism of Borowski after he read *We Were in Auschwitz*, as he felt it portrayed a more accurate picture of the camp than other stories.¹¹² Borowski joined the PPR in 1948,

¹⁰⁸ Bikont and Szczęsna, *Lawina i kamienie*, p.72

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*

¹¹⁰ *ibid.* p.69

¹¹¹ *ibid.* p.205

¹¹² *ibid.* p. 209

and was a committed member, as he felt communism was the only political force capable of preventing Auschwitz reoccurring. He believed in the system, despite its flaws, but did become conflicted, particularly after his friend Czesław Mankiewicz was arrested, and Borowski was unable to intervene.¹¹³ On 1 July 1951 Borowski committed suicide, using gas. The chapter 'Beta' in Czesław Miłosz's *The Captive Mind*, is about Borowski.

Landscape After Battle was the first film in the aftermath of the state-sponsored antisemitic campaign to refer to Jewish issues. Nina very beautifully encapsulates the struggles felt by Polish Jews both at the war's end and in 1968. In Nina's case she is stuck, both geographically and emotionally. She has no natural home, considering herself to be neither Polish nor Jewish and in the displaced persons camp she is stuck between East and West, Jewish and Gentile, unsure of where to go. Nina exemplifies the problems experienced by many Jews who were liberated from camps but were now homeless. By showing Nina's unwillingness to return to Poland, Wajda asks an interesting question about whether or not there was truly a place for the Jews in the liberated Poland of 1945, and also post 1968. The decision that Nina was struggling with, whether to leave or stay, had a great deal of resonance in 1970 as many Poles of Jewish origin, particularly those in the film industry, were once again facing a similar dilemma thanks to the antisemitic purges. In this way *Landscape After Battle* very beautifully mirrored the domestic situation of the time. The release of *Landscape After Battle* was embroiled in some political controversy. Firstly, all the material that had been shot was confiscated by secret police agents, who were trying to find Adam Michnik and Barbara Toruńczyk's faces onscreen.¹¹⁴ They had both been hired as extras without permission by Wajda's assistant. While Wajda had always admired *The Battle of Grunwald* story it would appear to be far from

¹¹³ *ibid.* p.206

¹¹⁴ Adam Michnik and Barbara Toruńczyk were both prominent members of student opposition; they were dubbed 'commandos' by regime propaganda. They were both imprisoned after the March events of 1968. Michnik played a crucial role in the Polish Round Table Talks. Toruńczyk emigrated to France in 1980 but continued to work with Polish underground publications. She returned to Poland in 1992.

coincidental that Wajda adapted it at the time he did, in 1968. Although Michnik and Toruńczyk were hired by Titkow, Wajda's willingness to employ them on their release from prison, suggests a level of contempt for the regime and human solidarity.

By 1970 memory of the Jewish experience during the Second World War had undergone a significant change, heavily impacted by the anti-Zionist campaign. A key player in this transformation was the ZBoWiD, which had its own press organ, *Za Wolność i Lud*. Between 1956 and 1964, its slogan had been unity of all communities, and their publicity reluctantly allowed that it was only the Jews who went to their immediate deaths in the gas chambers.¹¹⁵ By 1967 and 1968, this narrative shifted: Poles were the most important victims of the war. Jews also suffered, but the Poles heroically saved them, and now Jews accusing Poles of crimes against Jews during the war were ungrateful beneficiaries of Polish aid. References to Polish informing or indifference to the fate of the Jews during the war were increasingly censored, while accounts of Polish aid to the Jews, and exposés of Jewish collaboration with the Nazis proliferated.¹¹⁶ *Landscape After Battle* can be read in a way that supports this revised view of history. Tadeusz is the more stereotypical picture of a former inmate: pale and thin, obsessed with the food and books he has been denied. Nina, on the other hand, appears healthy, with long hair and glowing skin. This directly contrasts with known images of female, Jewish prisoners. This could be explained by Nina being liberated well before Tadeusz, but Wajda does not provide their backstory, and neither does Borowski's short story. It is Nina who has to comfort Tadeusz, and defers to his decisions because he is psychologically so fragile. The suggestion is that Tadeusz suffered more than Nina, particularly due to the fact his tattoo shows he was a very early Auschwitz inmate. This may have been a comment on Tadeusz and Nina's respective mental fortitudes, and that Nina had the strength to overcome her past and look to

¹¹⁵ Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD*, p.284

¹¹⁶ *ibid*

the future, while Tadeusz did not. The easier inference, however, is that Poles suffered more than Jews in the camps, and during the war; but this portrayal of the two prisoners comes directly from Borowski's short story, which was written in 1948 and it is unclear whether Borowski did this deliberately. He suffered in Auschwitz himself, but he survived, unlike the Jews he watched being sent to their deaths in the gas chambers. Borowski does not show much sympathy for the Jews in his work: in *This Way for the Gas* the narrator Tadeusz says 'I feel no pity. I am not sorry they're going to the gas chamber. Damn them all!', but he does not deny that Jews suffered in the camps, or that they were the group who largely went straight to their deaths.¹¹⁷ There is no evidence to suggest that this reading of *Landscape After Battle* was the one Wajda intended, but there is no doubt that, to an extent, it supported this revised history of the camps.

Despite the subject matter of *Landscape After Battle*, its Film Assessment Commission meeting passed off largely without incident or concern. It was chaired by the Minister of Culture, Wiśniewski, who claimed that the film 'rightly settled accounts with events that took place'. The meeting was attended by a large number of people, mostly party functionaries, but also film professionals, but very few people spoke about *Landscape After Battle*. Of those who did, the comments were overwhelmingly positive. K.T.Toeplitz stated that 'the committee has received a perfect artistic piece', and argued that it was an outstanding achievement in Polish cinematography, from which everyone would benefit and share the glory when the film was shown to the world. Walatek agreed with this assessment, and further praised the movie for its demonstration of the mental state of victims of fascism, suggesting that it was a study that was needed, even after so much time has passed. There was only one dissenting voice in the group. Stanisław Trepczyński, the head of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the PZPR, felt that while Polish audiences would understand the film, and the various symbols and nuances

¹¹⁷ Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (New York, 1976), p.40

used, foreign viewers might see *Landscape After Battle* from a different perspective which might give a negative impression of Polish society. Nobody else shared Trepczyński's concern, and Wiśniewski even went as far as to suggest that the movie would inevitably provoke social discussion, as many of Wajda's previous works had, which would be welcomed, and useful. Ernest Bryll, the literary director of the Wektor film unit, which produced *Landscape After Battle*, agreed with Wiśniewski, and felt that because the movie was based on Borowski's work it was bound to cause some controversy, but this was an acceptable consequence, given its important contribution to Polish cinema.¹¹⁸ Trepczyński, being a member of the KC PZPR, perhaps gives the best indication about how the government felt about *Landscape After Battle*, but despite his reservations about the image of Poland it might present to foreign viewers, the film was sent to the Milan International Film Festival, and released internationally. The meeting minutes also suggest that communist authorities were used to Wajda's films causing controversy, yet raised no objections.

Landscape After Battle had a very different tone to Wajda's war films of the 1950s. As a viewer one is left with a feeling of hopelessness and despair. There is no heroic rhetoric, the war is shown to be pointless, leaving behind chaos and disillusionment. Wajda uses the psychological state of Tadeusz and his fellow prisoners to show how the conflict robbed people of their dignity, and sometimes sanity, making them helpless victims no longer able to function independently, or fully move on. This mood is faithful to Borowski's original story. Wajda felt he understood the bitter irony of Borowski's *Battle of Grunwald*, in which Tadeusz chooses to return to a Poland he is not sure he belongs in. Wajda likened it to intellectuals immediately after the war who were disillusioned with prewar Poland and welcomed the communist regime, but eventually realised that it would be difficult for them to work under it.¹¹⁹ Wajda's apparent

¹¹⁸ FN, A-344 poz.477 'Stenogram z posiedzenia Komisji Kolaudacyjnej w dniu 3.III.1970r'

¹¹⁹ Wajda, *Kino i reszta świata*, p.123

contempt for Moczar also almost certainly suggests he was unhappy with the contemporary situation, which mirrors some of Tadeusz's feelings, and perhaps explains why Wajda turned to Borowski when he did. Borowski's stories all take a nihilistic approach to life in the camps, and Wajda made sure not to deviate. This is particularly evident in the opening scene, when the former inmates take revenge on a kapo. The murder of camp guards and kapos by prisoners was not a widely discussed subject, as it did not sit well with the simplistic victim/perpetrator narrative. Like Borowski, as K.T. Toeplitz astutely noted, 'Wajda presents a terrifying picture of the camp, and does it in a situation where there were no more guards, police dogs, and when the furnaces of the crematoria had already cooled.'¹²⁰ The shift from Wajda's war films of the 1950s was already visible in *Samson*, made in 1961 which also provided a bleak view, focusing on a central character forced to watch the death of his fellow Jews from his hiding place, and then feels such guilt he ultimately kills himself. As John Pym correctly suggests, *Landscape After Battle* is 'less romantic and more honest in its reassessment, twenty-five years on, of the period covered by the director's more widely known trilogy celebrating the Polish resistance.'¹²¹ *Landscape After Battle* does share some themes with Wajda's earlier war films. Just as he had done in the 1950s, Wajda chose to adapt a work that centred around members of his generation. Tadeusz and Nina, just like Stach, Maciek and Zadra's platoon have had their lives stolen, or irreparably changed by the war. Wajda also, once again, explores the subject of young love that is cruelly cut short by circumstances beyond their control. Tadeusz, however, like Jakub Gold in *Samson*, was a departure from the military men who had previously dominated Wajda's work: he is quiet and studious, with no sense of bravado or national duty. Although Borowski's stories are semi-autobiographical, and it is widely thought that Tadeusz is the alter ego of the author, the film version of the character is the closest of Wajda's heroes to himself, despite the

¹²⁰ K.T. Toeplitz, 'Krajobraz po bitwie', *Miesięcznik Literacki*, (July 1970)

¹²¹ John Pym, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, (January 1977)

fact that Tadeusz appears as almost a stereotype: absent minded and bespectacled, obsessed with books and reading. Both Wajda and Tadeusz were deeply affected by the war and their experiences but took no part in the conflict: both were intellectuals not fighters.

Just as with many of Wajda's previous works, responses to *Landscape After Battle* were mixed. Although official publications did not condemn the film their reactions were lukewarm. Zbigniew Klaczyński writing in *Trybuna Ludu*, noted that once again Wajda had returned to the past and that he presented a wide human landscape with irritating, ironic and bitter moments. His review rather stated the obvious and avoided any glowing praise of Wajda's work which is unsurprising as Klaczyński was close to Moczar's faction, which enthusiastically supported the antisemitic purges.¹²² Wajda has long claimed that it was Moczar who was responsible for any criticism of *Landscape After Battle* in the press.¹²³ It is certainly true that the film had nothing in common with Moczar's rhetoric, which was included in several other war films of the 1960s. There were critics, however, who greatly admired *Landscape After Battle* and expected nothing less from a Wajda war film. Stanisław Grzelecki wrote in *Życie Warszawy* that *Landscape After Battle* was a work of great talent and sensitivity, rich, psychological, and with deep moral content. Grzelecki was liberated from Westerlimke POW camp near Hanover where he was imprisoned after the Warsaw Uprising.¹²⁴ He wrote that *Landscape After Battle* brought back his own personal memories and showed an authentic picture of the first days of freedom.¹²⁵ Wajda's personal archives contain some private responses to *Landscape After Battle*, which offer a different picture to that presented in official publications. Agnieszka Osiecka wrote that Wajda had made a great film that addressed issues of crucial significance to every Pole, and that he conveyed 'our greatness and our baseness,

¹²² Zbigniew Klaczyński, 'Lekcja wolności', *Trybuna Ludu*, (19 Septebmer 1970)

¹²³ Wajda, *My Films*, p.22

¹²⁴ Stanisław Grzelecki, 'Być Polakiem', *Życie Warszawy*, (10 September 1970)

¹²⁵ *ibid*

and in such a way that each is reflected in the other, as in a mirror'.¹²⁶ Janusz Zarzycki, who was twice head of the Main Political Board of the Polish Army (Główny Zarząd Polityczno-Wychowawczy Wojska Polskiego), and an inmate in Buchenwald and an American transit camp, claimed in his letter to Wajda that it was a marvellous film, probably his best. He noted 'It is true, brave and beautiful. And that is why it makes such a deep impression.'¹²⁷ Zarzycki was a mighty ally: although by 1969 he had lost his political influence he still had a powerful network of friends in Gomułka's regime. Just as he had done in the 1950s, Wajda once again used his connections, suggesting that social networks existed within the film industry which helped non-Party members advance their careers.

Conclusion

Andrzej Wajda's early career was dominated by films about the Second World War, he returned often to the subject during his life, even well into the twenty-first century. Throughout the changing political circumstances, and despite working with a number of different writers his vision of the conflict remained largely unchanged. It did become more mature and solemn as the years went by, but kept at its core the relationship between individuals and history, and the impact of the war on a generation whose youth was shaped by it. Wajda almost always chose iconic events, often offering a different perspective, to encourage audiences to rethink their perceptions. *Kanal* and *Lotna* opened up a national debate on subjects and his whole catalogue of war films remain a significant voice in the discussion of the Second World War, and its artistic representations. There is nothing small or quiet about Wajda's work; it always focused on large issues and questions. Wajda's final war movie *Katyń*, released in 2007, is perhaps the best example of how his ideas about the war changed very little. *Katyń* was made after the collapse of communism, and over fifty years after *A Generation*, yet it shared a number

¹²⁶ Andrzej Wajda's Archive, 'Personal Letter from Agnieszka Osiecka to Andrzej Wajda' (5 October 1970)

¹²⁷ Andrzej Wajda's Archive, 'Personal Letter from Janusz Zarzycki to Andrzej Wajda', (9 October 1970)

of characteristics with those earlier works. Andrzej, one of the central protagonists, has the chance to escape from Soviet captivity, but tells his daughter that it is his duty as an army officer to stay with his men. This is similar to the sense of responsibility that Zadra felt in *Kanal*. With *Katyń*, Wajda once again commented on the tragedy that came from people acting out of an antiquated sense of national obligation, the key theme of his Gomułka era movies.

Wajda appeared to relish the challenge of covering difficult topics, and those that had never been portrayed on film before. This opened up his works to a great deal of criticism, both in the press, and at official assessment meetings. The communist authorities considered *Kanal* and *Ashes and Diamonds*, in particular, to be potentially subversive, yet they were given cinematic release in Poland, and went on to international success. On several occasions very serious issues were raised about Wajda's war movies at their assessment commissions, and yet they all went to cinemas unedited. Stories that Wajda himself told suggest that this happened because of incompetent censors. The reality, however, was more complex than this. His ability to avoid his work being butchered, or confined to the shelves, was due to several factors. *Kanal* was released in part, thanks to the political thaw, and the partial rehabilitation of the Home Army. The easing of censorship also, almost certainly, meant that those party members who were present at the Script Assessment Meeting for *Ashes and Diamonds* were more receptive to it. It is also clear that Wajda enjoyed the full support of the film units he worked with, in particular Tadeusz Konwicki, the literary director of Kadr, who was a regular defender of Wajda's choices. Not only was Wajda backed by his unit, but also some key members of the PZPR, who stepped in to promote his films. The international fame that came with *Kanal* also worked to Wajda's advantage, as it made it much harder for his films to be censored, or banned, without the PZPR damaging their attempts to foster an image of cultural liberalisation abroad. Wajda was an unusual case, as no other director so regularly came up against such strong

reservations from the authorities, but it would appear that they felt that ultimately, Wajda would not push the ideological boundaries too far.

With such a variety of personalities involved in the Polish School it is easy to see why attempts to find common features amongst their work have proved to be challenging. A key unifying factor is their obsession with the Second World War and the fact that it was their films about the conflict that were often their finest pieces, defining their careers, certainly during the School period. Very few directors, with Jerzy Kawalerowicz being the most notable, only referred to the subject once. For Wajda, Munk and Kutz, the leading figures of the School, movies about the conflict constituted almost their entire repertoire. Their work forms an important part of memory of the war, providing a lasting legacy, much more so than films made during the socialist realist period and by directors who supported the regime. The Polish School's rethinking of the Second World War was so pervasive that in 1960, the KC PZPR issued a Resolution that sought to re-establish greater ideological control. There was one other director who was as influenced by the war as his peers who were part of the Polish School, and that was Stanisław Różewicz.

Chapter 5: Stanisław Różewicz

Introduction

One of the most arresting images of Polish cinema is a little boy wearing butterfly wings, standing in front of two SS officers. This scene comes from Stanisław Różewicz's *Birth Certificate*, and beautifully captures the theme of the film: childhood innocence in the face of the evils of Nazism. This scene also set up a central theme of Różewicz's war films: the Second World War involved ordinary people dealing with extraordinary events. Różewicz consistently undermined traditional Polish myths and legends about the Second World War. This chapter will focus on a selection of films made for cinematic release, including *Wolne Miasto* (*Free City*, 1957); *Birth Certificate*; *Echo* (1964) and *Westerplatte* (1967). *Na melinę* (1965) will not be used because it was made for television, despite it being a scathing attack on the prevailing image of the Polish guerrilla, breaking the unwritten rule that certain situations in the forest should not be talked about.¹ Stanisław Różewicz made several excellent war films that had an interesting story to tell.

Różewicz's work has received less scholarly attention than many of his peers, despite making a significant contribution to the war film genre. There is even less of a focus on the man himself, who remained a very private figure, giving very few interviews. Krzysztof Zanussi claimed: 'he is too remarkable in his simplicity, too enigmatic in his modesty and too little known for what he has done.'² Różewicz was never universally loved by mass audiences, or critics, yet today his most significant war films, *Birth Certificate*, *Free City* and *Westerplatte* are considered classics of Polish cinema.³ Piotr Śmiałowski describes him as one of the most important Polish directors, as he provided a new angle on wartime events, particularly the

¹ Stanisław Różewicz, *Było, minęło...w kuchni in a salonach X Muzy* (Warsaw, 2014), p.70

² Łukasz Maciejewski, 'Orzeł 2001 za całokształt twórczości', *Cinema*, (June, 2001)

³ *ibid*

September campaign, questioning the sense behind acts of desperate heroism.⁴ K.T.Toeplitz wrote that Różewicz was an artist whose works were often overshadowed by sensational pieces; they rarely dazzled, but were peaceful and moderate, requiring audiences to watch them intently.⁵

Barbara Hollender argued that Różewicz as an artist was always isolated as he was never part of the Polish School or the Cinema of Moral Anxiety.⁶ His approach has been described as 'poetic realism' avoiding much of the pathos of the romantic tradition, while retaining an artistic quality.⁷ Critics split Różewicz's war films into two trends: the epic documentary style that attempted objectively to reproduce tragedies associated with the September campaign, and the more personal films, closely associated with the lives of both Stanisław, and his older brother, the poet Tadeusz Różewicz, who was often wrote the scripts of that genre of films.

Biography

Różewicz was born in Radomsko on 16 August 1924, the son of a court official and a housewife. Różewicz was the youngest of three brothers. His mother, Stefania, came from a Jewish family, which converted to Catholicism. Culture, particularly literature, was brought into the house by his siblings Janusz and Tadeusz who were up and coming writers. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Różewicz did not attend film school: instead he learnt through working as an assistant director to Jerzy Zarzycki on *Zdradzieckie serce* (*Treacherous Heart*) (1947) and *Unvanquished City* (1950). In 1947 Różewicz worked with Wojciech Has on the documentary film *Ulica Brzozowa* (*Birch Street*), which took place in the ruins of Warsaw. His first solo film, *Trudna miłość* (*Difficult Love*), came in 1953, followed by his first foray into the subject of war and its consequences with *Trzy kobiety* (*Three Women*, 1956). Along

⁴ Piotr Śmiałkowski, 'Bez patosu retrospektywa filmów Stanisława Różewicza', *Kino*, (7 June 2006)

⁵ Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz, 'Niedopowiedzane słowo, Echo', *Polska*, (October 1963)

⁶ Barbara Hollender, 'Podobny do swoich filmów', *Rzeczpospolita*, (16 July 2004)

⁷ Maria Oleksiewicz, 'Świadectwo urodzenia', *Żołnierz Polski*, (29 October 1961)

with many filmmakers of his generation, Różewicz began his career under Stalinism, but he really flourished during the Polish School period and beyond. He made his final film in 2007, a year before he died, and thus became part of a small group of directors from that period, like Wajda and Kutz, who were still making movies in the twenty first century.

From the creation of the Film Units in 1955 Różewicz worked with Rytm run by Jan Rybkowski and Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski. In 1967 he became the artistic director of Tor, which was able to survive the antisemitic purges within the film industry, which demonstrated the trust and respect he had from others in the film community. An independent film studio Tor still exists. Różewicz was able to draw in directors such as Wajda and Zanussi and fostered the talent of Krzysztof Kieślowski. Tor's chief of production Włodzimierz Śliwinski claimed that Różewicz enjoyed great authority in that environment and knew the right people to choose.⁸ Różewicz described his recruiting policy as choosing those he could trust. Although its most famous members are now Zanussi and Kieślowski, it is important not to forget Różewicz's contributions and the part he played in developing the talents of two of Poland's most celebrated postcommunist directors. Hollender wrote that Różewicz became 'enrolled in the history of cinema as a founder of Tor.'⁹

Różewicz had two sources of inspiration for his war films. For *Birth Certificate* it was his own experiences, that shaped his childhood and adolescence. For *Free City* and *Westerplatte* it was the fate of the nation, shown in terms of historical accidents that were a part of Polish wartime mythology. He felt a need to bring justice for people who fought and died for their country, to talk about September 1939 without a tone of irony or indictment to show civilian and soldier attitudes in dramatic moments of Polish history. He never broke away from the subject of the

⁸ Barbara Hollender, 'Pan Stanisław', *Kino*, (July-August 1999)

⁹ Hollender, 'Podobny do swoich filmów'

war, and continued to believe that it was important to keep the memory of the conflict alive, to show what really happened.¹⁰

The impact of war

When war broke out Stanisław was entering his final years of secondary school, which was interrupted by the conflict. By his own admission, his character was shaped by the war: it was the time of his adolescence, when his ‘story’ was being fashioned.¹¹ In a 2001 interview Różewicz was asked what pictures he associated with the word ‘war.’ His response was that it was difficult to discuss images that were so shocking and appalling. He described the war as a nightmare in which the world he lived in collapsed. Everything started to look different as the world rotated 180 degrees and what had once been paradise was now hell.¹² Towards the end of his career he stated that something in his life ended with the outbreak of the conflict: the experience was so powerful that it weighed over everything he did.¹³ Różewicz frequently talked about the need to find a creative outlet for the things he saw and experienced during the conflict. He was particularly influenced by his brothers, who were both involved in partisan activity. Tadeusz survived fighting in the forests, while his oldest brother Janusz was murdered by the Gestapo two months before the liberation of Łódź, having been involved in conspiracies in Poland and Germany. Janusz’s death had a significant impact on the family. In 1957 Tadeusz wrote: ‘right until today – this very day, I cannot think about what the Gestapo did to him’; while Różewicz’s mother wrote on the back of a photograph: ‘year 1944 cruel to me.’¹⁴ In an interview in 2005, he stated that he still was not free from the ghosts of the Second World War.¹⁵

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Grażyna Banaszkiewicz, ‘Nie lubię krzyczeć’, *Tydzień*, (8 February 1976)

¹² ‘Zagraj mi tego Niemca, Stasiu’, *Magazyn Gazety*, (16 August 2001)

¹³ L. Kosycarz, ‘Nieodzowne powroty’, *Głos Wybrzeża*, (29-30 November 1975)

¹⁴ Tadeusz Różewicz, *Mother Departs* (London, 2013), p.xiii.

¹⁵ ‘Jan ten trzeci Stanisław Różewicz’, *Przegląd*, (27 February 2005)

Radomsko fell quickly and the Germans marched in on 3 September 1939, which Stanisław and his brother Tadeusz remembered vividly.¹⁶ Nazi planes bombed the streets, and columns of people fleeing the city were machine gunned from the air, an image that Różewicz used in *Birth Certificate*. Radomsko had a thriving Jewish community of at least seven thousand in 1939. In 1943 seventeen thousand were crammed into the city's ghetto, all of whom were sent to Treblinka, and by the summer of that year the town was declared *judenrein*: free of Jews.¹⁷ The list of local victims of the Holocaust included members of Stefania Różewicz's extended family. The Różewicz's left Radomsko for Częstochowa and days later their home was raided. The fate of their Jewish neighbours particularly troubled Tadeusz, who saw God's failure to intervene as a shadow over faith.¹⁸ This shows through in *Birth Certificate*, where the brothers comment on the irrationality of Nazi racial policy.

Różewicz's had two very distinct war film styles: *Westerplatte* and *Free City* each closely resembled a documentary, going as far as using archival footage to heighten the feeling of authenticity, while *Birth Certificate* shows the hushed intimate parts of war and occupation. His epics tried to objectively reproduce tragedies of the September campaign, proposing a modified version of the wartime past, moving away from discussions of heroism and martyrdom. His more personal films, however, focused on the realities of occupation for ordinary people. His aim was to keep as faithful to reality as possible.¹⁹ Even in his combat dramas he chose regular men and soldiers in extraordinary circumstances. He argued that the truth of those times was shown far better by concentrating on the survival of one man, rather than a number of people, events and situations.²⁰ Critics have identified a third type of

¹⁶ Różewicz, *Było, minęło*, p.172

¹⁷ Różewicz, *Mother Departs*, p.xii.

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Małgorzata Dipont, 'Człowiek istota ta sama. Rozmowa ze Stanisławem Różewiczem', *Życie Warszawy*, (10-11 December 1977)

²⁰ Maria Oleksiewicz, 'O swojej twórczości mówi Stanisław Różewicz', *Film*, (17 March 1962)

Różewicz film, where war is not at the centre, rather the stigma it left in the minds of the protagonists and the struggles they went through to move on in postwar Poland.²¹ This is the case in *Three Women* (1956), which saw the first collaboration of the Różewicz brothers, and *Echo* (1964), also a joint project with Tadeusz.

Tadeusz Różewicz

Stanisław's professional bond with Tadeusz played very significant. His most poignant and well-crafted films were their collaborations. Tadeusz was one of the most important poets and playwrights of postwar Poland. He spent much of his career creating a new lexicon to describe the horrors he witnessed during the Second World War. During the war Tadeusz edited his unit's newsletter and his commander encouraged him to write about their experiences. In 1944 he penned *Forest Echoes*, a collection of verse and prose, which included work by Janusz, and helped by his future wife Wiesława he was able to circulate one hundred copies. After the war Tadeusz studied art history in Kraków; which left him with a contempt for 'aesthetic values' and made him determined to confront the brutality of the war. He saw this, not just as his responsibility, but that of all artists who survived.²² Tadeusz influenced his more famous compatriots Czesław Miłosz and Władysława Szymborska. The phrase 'mała stabilizacja' (little stabilisation), which was ironically used to describe the Gomułka era, was from the title of Tadeusz's play *Świadkowie albo nasza mała stabilizacja* (*Witnesses or Our Little Stabilisation*). In his memoirs Stanisław described how Janusz introduced Tadeusz to the world of poetry, and after the war Tadeusz introduced him to art and prose. They went to the theatre together, which Stanisław saw as important training for his life as a director, and discussed the films they watched, such as *Citizen Kane* and *Aleksander Nevsky*.²³ By Tadeusz's

²¹ Hendrykowski, *Stanisław Różewicz*, p.25

²² *ibid*

²³ Różewicz, *Było minęło*, p.173.

own admission their working relationship was not always simple, it was often a struggle between two different psyches, artistic personalities and temperaments, but they shared a common goal in filmmaking.²⁴ They both wanted to speak clearly and simply about what they considered to be the most important theme of their work: the Second World War.²⁵

Free City

Free City had its premiere on 1 September 1958, and holds a special place in the history of Polish cinema as the first film to look at the very beginning of the war. It was also the start of a successful relationship between Stanisław Różewicz and writer Jan Józef Szczepański.²⁶ Marek Hendrykowski argues that *Free City* opened up a new chapter of creativity for Różewicz as his collaborations with Szczepański expanded his literary and artistic inspirations.²⁷ Despite the large number of Polish war films already in existence by 1958 covering a range of subjects, only one had looked at the September campaign. *Domek z kart* (*House of Cards*, 1953) directed by Erwin Axer was a political drama about the collapse of the Sanacja regime in 1939, but contained no battle scenes. The political thaw, however, allowed a different narrative of the defeat of 1939 to be shown onscreen for the first time. This placed a great deal of pressure on the makers of *Free City* who had a responsibility, to those who remembered those times, and the younger generation who had only heard the stories second hand. It was released on the 19th anniversary of the outbreak of war, heightening the sense of occasion. The first showing was held in Wrocław, in the same hall where Nazi leaders called on the German nation for

²⁴ *ibid.* p.174

²⁵ *ibid.* p.176

²⁶ Jan Józef Szczepański (1919-2003) was an author and scriptwriter who specialised in war prose. He took part in the September campaign and then joined the Home Army. He used his experiences as a guerrilla in his novel *Polish autumn* (*Polska jesień*) and volume of short stories *Buty* (*Shoes*) as well as his films. He was critical of the heroic legend of the forest partisans. Szczepański was associated with the newspaper *Tygodnik Powszechny* for forty years and wrote their cinema reviews. Between 1980 and 1983 he was President of the Polish Writers Union (Związek Literatów Polskich) and from 1989 to 1990 he was President of the Polish Writer's Association (Stowarzyszenia Pisarzy Polskich).

²⁷ Hendrykowski, *Stanisław Różewicz*, p.29.

reinforcements against the Poles.²⁸ The film served two purposes: to provide an artistic tribute to the heroism of the Gdańsk postmen, and as a reminder that the first shots of the Second World War were fired in Poland.

Free City tells the story of the defence of the Polish Post Office in Gdańsk in three distinct parts. The first introduces the ‘heroes’ of the film, their daily lives and aspirations. This is set against the background of the growing tension in the city, and increasing Nazi violence towards the Polish population, particularly postmen. The atmosphere gradually thickens, and there is a sense of impending doom. The middle section shows the desperate fight to defend the Post Office, and the overwhelming inequality in arms and manpower between the German forces and the postmen. The denouement is the sobering image of the postmen emerging with their hands up, and a young girl, who died from extensive burns. The fighters are led through the streets, mocked and spat at by the German population of Gdańsk. *Free City* ends with the field court martial, in which the postmen were condemned as partisans, and shot by firing squad.

There were early battles in Gdańsk, such as the struggle for the Hel peninsula or the Modlin Fortress, that had greater military and political significance than the fight for the Post Office, but the building was an important symbol of the Polish state, and the defence was a perfect example of the situation elsewhere in Poland.²⁹ Watching the small number of postmen, armed with rifles and grenades, take on German SS units with heavy artillery, tanks, and flamethrowers, showed the stark inequalities of equipment.³⁰ This was why the Gdańsk postmen took on a legendary status, as the ultimate David versus Goliath fight. By July 1939 the Nazis had prepared a plan of attack on the Post Office, but they were not sure whether it

²⁸ ‘Wolne miasto’, *Słowo Polskie*, (8 September 1958)

²⁹ Janusz Giera, ‘Znaczenie walk o Poczta Polską w Wolnym Mieście Gdańsku 1 września 1939 roku w świetle najnowszych badań’, *Niepodległość i Pamięć*, 6/2, 15, (1999), p.47

³⁰ *ibid*

would be turned into a point of resistance.³¹ The Germans were also unaware that Polish preparations for repelling a possible attack had existed for several months. These were accelerated after Germany renounced the Polish-German non-aggression pact in Spring 1939.³² On 2 April a division of the General Staff directed Konrad Guderski to Gdańsk, appointing him commandant of any future Post Office defence. Arms and ammunition were sent and the postmen were given training. Five days before the German aggression Guderski showed the most trusted members around the Post Office building, pointing out the shortcomings and defensive qualities of individual rooms and corridors, so they were able to prepare.³³ The defence lasted much longer than planned, about fourteen hours, and the postmen only surrendered when all the rooms were set on fire. Eight postmen died during the fight, six in hospital, and thirty-eight were court martialled and shot in Zaspas cemetery in Gdańsk.

Free City was the first Polish film to be made in the style of a re-staged war document, an approach derived from documentary filming on the battlefield. There were already other examples in European cinema, such as the 1948 Norwegian-French film, *Operation Swallow: The Battle for Heavy Water*, (*La bataille de l'eau lourde*) directed by Jean Dréville and Titus Vibe-Müller and Vladimir Petrov's *The Battle of Stalingrad* from 1949. Różewicz's intention was to make *Free City* as authentic as possible, he invented some characters and stories, but the rest were based on the postmen themselves. The largest part of the film is the build-up to war, and Różewicz successfully captures the atmosphere, and sense of panic felt by the defenders as the conflict progressed. Szczepański and Różewicz reconstructed events using documents, including a book published by the Nazis to justify their actions.³⁴ When Szczepański was writing the script he spoke with Mrs Pipkowa, the widow of the Post Office caretaker, who

³¹ *ibid.* p.46

³² *ibid.* p.47

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ 'Wolne miasto', *Słowo Polskie*, (8 September 1958)

was seriously injured herself during the fighting. In the Gauleiter Albert Forster's archive, Różewicz found a range of materials, including a piece of film shot by the Germans when they took control of the Post Office.³⁵ *Free City* opens with snippets of newsreels, a technique that Różewicz would use again. The movie was widely praised for its 'meticulous compatibility with history' and the way it successfully painted an accurate picture of the days leading up to the war's outbreak.³⁶ While *Free City* is a largely faithful recreation of the defence, Różewicz did not show the postmen receiving training, or that there were two commanders sent from Warsaw. The character of Konrad is meant to be Konrad Guderski, but it is not made clear he was a military man. It is not clear why Różewicz did not include this element: his choice increases the sense of the David versus Goliath struggle, but also distorts the true picture of the defence.

The defence of the Post Office was written about less than other episodes of September 1939. *Free City* showed the postmen for the first time, and contributed to changing the Stalinist narrative of the September campaign, which was widely discussed in the previous chapter. Różewicz was motivated by a need to restore the truth about the days leading up to 1 September, and the drama of the Post Office defence.³⁷ The postmen were awarded the Order Virtuti Militari V in 1946, to commemorate: 'the heroic defenders of the Polish Post Office in Gdańsk, who on 1 September 1939 were the only ones, besides the heroic crew on Westerplatte, that took arms and fulfilled their duties and paid for it with a martyr's death'.³⁸ There was, however, no monument to the postmen until 1979, and the government played no role in attempts to have the postmen pardoned by German courts, which eventually succeeded in 1997,

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ T Płużański, Wrzesień bohaterstwa i rozpacz, *Słowo Ludu*, (30-31 August 1958)

³⁷ 'Wolne miasto' *Słowo Polskie*

³⁸ Giera, 'Znaczenie walk o Poczta Polską', p.54

when the Bundestag approved the law repealing all unlawful Nazi judgments between 1 February 1933 and May 1945.³⁹

Różewicz always intended to make a film about September 1939, and wanted it to be a movie about war, without any hope of victory. He chose to tell the story of the Polish Post Office. *Free City* very much set the tone for Różewicz's later work. His characters were ordinary people, put into extraordinary situations. *Free City* showed there was no glamour in war; that far from being a patriotic spectacle, it was a bloody and terrifying time, that forced people to perform acts they were not ready for. An article in *Współczesność* summed it up very well: 'it is very difficult to make a good film about the simple heroism of regular people, without nationalist hysteria, and yet *Free City* does it very successfully.'⁴⁰

Critics mostly responded favourably to *Free City* praising its authentic feel and lack of pathos, its refreshing look at a mythologised event of Poland's wartime past. Papers that were sympathetic to the regime were able to spin the message of the film to their own end. An article in *Głos Olsztyński* claimed that the film was a reminder of what had happened in September 1939 and what would be possible in the future if Poland did not have a stronger position in the world, both politically and economically in its role as a strong force for the entire socialist camp.⁴¹ The Olsztyn paper was particularly enthusiastic because the town was formerly Allenstein in Eastern Prussia. The characters that Różewicz chose to focus on were not extraordinary; as a result, viewers identified with them; they were ordinary people that you might pass on the street or come across at work. Jerzy Giżycki, one of the founding members of *Film* magazine, wrote in *Trybuna Literacka* that although *Free City* does not show the full truth about 1939 it certainly shows the reality about the beauty of battle and the heroism of

³⁹ *ibid.* p.59

⁴⁰ F Jeżewski, 'Film bohaterstwo bez koturnów', *Współczesność*, (30 September 1958)

⁴¹ 'Wolne miasto', *Głos Olsztyński*, (30-31 August 1958)

people who love their homeland.⁴² Those who criticised the film highlighted the disproportionate length of the first half of the film, which sets up the defence of the Post Office. They also noted that some of the storyline, for example, Irene and her fiancé's love story was unnecessary, as the audience had already been captured by the characters. Within the large number of articles available on *Free City* very few contain negative comments: it even stood the test of time, and was positively received when it was re-aired on television in 2000. In *Rzeczpospolita*, Marek Sadowski wrote that *Free City* secured a place in the history of cinema, opening a new chapter in Polish cinema and reimagining the genre of the war film.⁴³

Free City's release remains an important moment in the history of Polish cinema as it brought the September campaign to the big screen and opened up discussion on it for the first time. It would be followed up by Andrzej Wajda in *Lotna*, Leonard Buczkowski's *Orzeł* (*Eagle*, 1959), and Różewicz's *Westerplatte* nine years later. *Free City* also showed the audience what to expect from Różewicz as it cemented his style. Reviewers were right to say that it counteracted the image of September 1939 that had been created during the Stalinist period, one of incompetent leaders and mass chaos, and introduced new themes.⁴⁴ While Różewicz overestimated the backstory needed to draw in viewers, and as a result hurried the actual defence of the Post Office, and dramatic climax of the film, nonetheless it was a very measured and objective take on a story from September 1939 that had become mythologised.

Birth Certificate

Birth Certificate premiered at the Kraków Film Festival in 1961, one of several war films released that year. For Stanisław it was his most personal film, firstly because it was based in

⁴² Jerzy Giżycki, 'Wtedy się zaczęło', *Trybuna Literacka*, (14 September 1958)

⁴³ Marek Sadowski, 'Wolne miasto', *Rzeczpospolita*, (25 August 2000)

⁴⁴ Hendrykowski, *Stanisław Różewicz*, p.30.

large part on his own experiences and secondly because it was his most significant collaboration with his older brother, Tadeusz. It still holds a unique place in Polish cinema as the only war film to look at the conflict solely through the eyes of children. It is considered today to be one of Różewicz's greatest works. It focuses on three small heroes, who are left to fend for themselves after they are abandoned by all the adults in their life. The director wanted to show a grown up audience the image of war as seen by a child.⁴⁵ *Birth Certificate* found a receptive audience abroad, winning the Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1962 and at the Venice International Festival for Children and Youth; at the time it was one of Polish cinema's greatest successes on the international stage.⁴⁶ A film critic in *Die Welt* wrote that *Birth Certificate* was the best film about children in war.⁴⁷ It did not just receive accolades abroad, but it was also given an award by the Minister of Culture.

Birth Certificate is split into three short stories each set in a significant moment of the war and centred on children in challenging situations. The first little boy Janek is separated from his family during the September campaign and finds himself in the company of a soldier, Józef who has lost his platoon. Despite Józef's attempt to shield Janek from the atrocities committed by the Germans against the local population Janek is fully aware of what is taking place. The story ends with Józef running into certain death sniping at a tank and Janek being told to get as far away from the oncoming troops as possible. The child is once again abandoned when the soldier undertakes an act of suicidal heroism. In the second story three brothers are left alone to fend for themselves after their father is sent to a prisoner of war camp and their mother has to work in the country to provide for her family. The oldest boy has charge of his siblings and each day he has to walk past a camp for captured Soviet soldiers, which opens his eyes to the

⁴⁵ Kazimierz Dębnicki, 'Uwaga! Patrzy Dziecko: Reportaż z produkcji filmu Świadecko urodzenia', *Film*, (6 November 1960)

⁴⁶ Hendrykowski, *Stanisław Różewicz*, p.36.

⁴⁷ *ibid*

horrors being perpetrated by the occupiers. The final story is the longest and was most divisive amongst the critics. It follows Mirka, a young Jewish girl, who escapes transportation and finds her way into a Catholic orphanage where she is evaluated by a German doctor, and declared a prime example of Aryanism. She witnesses the removal of her family, and appears to have a feeling of what their fate may be, as well as coming face to face with the seeming absurdity of Nazi ideology.

Birth Certificate was the first film that Różewicz used as a creative outlet for his own war memories and their impact on his later life. It began with the thought of making a documentary film about the cruel experience of children because of adults: a short feature that grew into a full-length film.⁴⁸ *Birth Certificate* drew very heavily on the experiences of the Różewicz brothers during the Second World War. In his memoirs Różewicz describes how he vividly remembers the invasion in September 1939; he recalls the first German soldiers he saw who arrived on motorbikes looking for directions.⁴⁹ The opening scene of *Birth Certificate*, where Janek watches refugees and soldiers fleeing, comes straight from Stanisław's own memory. In *Mother Departs* he wrote: 'At night the sky is a flaming glow, we're in the column of runaways: carts, cyclists.'⁵⁰ When the Różewiczes returned to their flat in Radomsko they discovered that much of the city had been destroyed and that businesses and apartments, including their own, had been looted, mirroring the sequence in the first novella. The second story revolves around three boys, the relationship between them and their absent mother who spends the week away from the city trying to provide for her family. Stefania Różewicz often went to the country with some of the family's valuables to exchange them for food.⁵¹ As the war was coming to an end, Stefania took in not a Soviet POW, but three German soldiers, who were looking for food

⁴⁸ 'O sym nowym filmie Świadectwo urodzenia', *Express Wieczorny*, (21 September 1961)

⁴⁹ Różewicz, *Było, minęło*, p.49.

⁵⁰ Różewicz, *Mother Departs*, p.134.

⁵¹ *ibid*

and shelter as they retreated. Stanisław was parted from not just his mother, but also his brothers, who had played such an important part in his formative years. The only story that did not gain its inspiration directly from the Różewicz family themselves was *Mirka* the young Jewish girl. Her tale, however, was also grounded in reality as it was taken from evidence given by Jewish children who had survived the war.⁵² It was this first-hand experience which gives *Birth Certificate* such an authentic feel, giving the viewer the ability to understand the children's thoughts and motivations. As Marszewska-Łupiniak writes: 'It is an indisputable fact that *Birth Certificate* grew out of the director's need to talk about what he experienced, and the indelible mark it left on his mind.'⁵³

Różewicz asks questions about the effect of war on children, a theme that is developed through his three short stories that showed how young people faced the defeat in September, life under occupation and the persecution of the Jews. His heroes, though physically weak, develop a mental toughness that arouses empathy, not pity, in the audience: the focus is not on those who died, but those who survived.⁵⁴ You feel a sense of admiration for what these children are able to withstand, as well as anger that they have had their innocence snatched from them. Unlike in Tarkovsky's *Ivanovo detstvo* (*Ivan's Childhood*, 1962), however, in which the central character loses his childhood when he becomes involved in military action, Różewicz's protagonists in *Birth Certificate* are forced to grow up in order just to survive everyday life under occupation. Placing the children in the role of both victims and witnesses to the horrors of the conflict allowed Różewicz to look at the war in a way that was previously unseen in Poland. The absence of any central adult characters, in particular in the second and third stories, means that the audience focuses its interest solely on the children and invests itself fully in their predicaments, showing clearly how during times of war many young people had to look

⁵² Hendrykowski, *Stanisław Różewicz*, p.37.

⁵³ Maszewska-Łupiniak, *Rzeczywistość filmowa Różewicza*, p.70

⁵⁴ Zygmunt Kałużyński, 'Film tygodnia Dziecko, Żołnierz i Wojna', *Polityka Warszawa*, (14 October 1961)

after themselves as the adults around them had other, larger, concerns. They lose their childhood as despite adults attempting to shield them from the horrors, it turns out that they see and understand everything. This was in contrast to the young protagonists of René Clair's *Jeux interdits* (*Forbidden Games*, 1952), the first significant war film with children as the main characters. Clair's children were initially unable to process what was going on around them and to understand truly the meaning of death. It is not until the very end of the film that Paulette, the central character, actually realises what the war has taken from her. Różewicz even keeps the camera low, at the eye level of the children, further emphasising that they are the important figures. Różewicz showed the harm that war inflicted on the younger generation, one that he was part of.

Birth Certificate's approach to Jewish issues and the Holocaust was very different to anything that had been seen before in Polish cinema. It is quiet and understated, exposing the impact of Nazi policies on the most vulnerable. Różewicz remarked that it was the story about Mirka that had the 'highest price.'⁵⁵ This final part of *Birth Certificate* is the most powerful, not just because of the subject matter, but also because Mirka makes the greatest transformation from child to adult. So much so that she makes a reference to killing herself, something it is hard to imagine a child of her age being aware of, or even understanding. In *Berliner Zeitung* a journalist wrote: how can you forget the film in which a child talks to a doctor and says: 'I no longer want to live' and 'give me poison.'⁵⁶ Różewicz's intention, using dark humour, was to point out the irrationality of Nazi racial policy, without turning the German characters into clichés. The material itself, and the SS officer's judgement that Mirka is an excellent example of Aryan genetics, is enough. Różewicz also showed the very real perils faced by Jews in hiding, even when there were Poles around them willing to provide assistance. There is a

⁵⁵ Różewicz, *Było, minęło*, p.49.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* p.51

constant feeling of tension throughout the story, and a concern that despite all the best laid plans, something would give Mirka away. The tension is diffused somewhat by the sight of the little boy in butterfly wings looking up at the Gestapo officers, but it is very clear how perilous the situation is for Mirka, and those hiding her. No other Polish movie at the time showed how some Jewish children were hidden in Catholic orphanages, or how they felt being the lone survivor of their family, and, consequently, whether they considered themselves truly rescued when they were left alone.

Konrad Eberhardt described *Birth Certificate* as an example of a rare union of talent, with an accomplished director able to rely on good literary material.⁵⁷ The collaboration between Stanisław and Tadeusz took on the themes and styles of both brothers, providing the film with its distinctive quality. Not only does *Birth Certificate* put at the centre of the narrative people going about their everyday lives and attempting to survive, which was Stanisław's particular interest, but it showed a concern about humanity because of participation in the moral catastrophe of the war and the need for internal reconstruction after these experiences, which is a permanent theme of Tadeusz's poetry.⁵⁸ Their stories leave the viewers contemplating the effect that the breakdown of family structures, and the traumas they have witnessed, will have on the children in their lives after the war. Stanisław claimed that working with his brother made the filmmaking process much easier thanks to their shared experiences and surviving the war together.⁵⁹ The brothers' attempts to settle their memories of the war gave *Birth Certificate* a distinctive dimension, and set it apart from, for example, the films of the Polish School. There were critics, such as Zygmunt Kałużyński, who considered it to be a chapter of the movement, because it showed a moment of 'patriotic suicide', just like Wajda and Munk's work.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Konrad Eberhardt, 'Świadectwo dojrzałości', *Film*, (15 October 1961)

⁵⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁹ Dębnicki, 'Uwaga! Patrzy Dziecko: Reportaż z produkcji filmu Świadectwo urodzenia'

⁶⁰ Kałużyński, 'Film tygodnia Dziecko, Żołnierz i Wojna'

Kałużyński, however, misjudges the scene's intention. It is true that Józef takes on a German platoon alone, with no hope of coming out alive, but he does it to make sure Janek is safe, not because of any sense of duty or patriotism. *Birth Certificate* is, without question, the greatest film the Różewicz brothers made together, perhaps because they had such a clear shared vision, and were able to draw on mutual experiences and memories.

Despite *Birth Certificate* receiving prizes at the Cannes and Venice Film Festivals, it did not translate to success with audiences at home. At the time of its release, cinemas were saturated with war films and viewers were beginning to tire of the subject. The then Minister of Culture, Tadeusz Galiński, was initially reluctant to accept the script, stating that there were already too many films about the Second World War. This opinion was ultimately reflected in many comments about *Birth Certificate*.⁶¹ Some viewers were also put off by the subject matter, as it forced them to relive their own memories. It was unfortunate because the film deserved far broader recognition than it originally received. Critics were divided on the film, disagreeing not only about its merits, but also on which of the stories was the strongest, with opinion split between the first and the third. The negative reviews argued that the action was too slow and the Różewiczes offered no new insights into the war, or child psychology.⁶² The majority of the articles written about *Birth Certificate*, however, painted the film in a positive light. Różewicz's work was once again praised for its high level of simplicity and modesty: he continued to take an objective look at his characters and not impose his opinions on the audience. Maria Oleksiewicz described his style in this film as 'poetic realism', presenting a true picture of the time and the horrors to which children were exposed, while maintaining a sense of artistry.⁶³ Stanisław Grzelecki wrote that *Birth Certificate* is beautiful in form while

⁶¹ Różewicz *Było, minęło* p.49

⁶² 'Świadectwo urodzenie', *Kurier Polski*, (4 October 1961)

⁶³ Maria Oleksiewicz, 'Świadectwo urodzenia', *Żołnierz Polski*, (29 October 1961)

also possessing a great sense of morality.⁶⁴ Zygmunt Kałużyński also called the opening section beautiful in form as well as portraying a simple and a true picture of the difficulties experienced by those Poles who were victims during that time. Kałużyński further claimed that *Birth Certificate* brought about a real synthesis of the crisis of September: the young boy represents the generation that was both witness and victim while the soldier becomes yet another absurd casualty of the defeat.⁶⁵ It did not, however, mock or attack the characters, instead portraying their actions as inexplicable, unnecessary, but unfortunately very human.

Różewicz had two main goals with *Birth Certificate*. The first was born out of his desire to find a creative outlet for his own wartime memories and experiences. More importantly, the film highlights the psychological impact of the conflict on an entire generation of Poles, those who were children and young adolescents during the war and who were the first generation to come of age in the PRL. Although Różewicz was older than the characters in *Birth Certificate* he was close enough to them in age to understand the experience of childhood under the Nazi occupation. The film does an excellent job of showing how quickly his young heroes had to grow up, losing their childhoods and taking on roles that were far beyond their years. It is the director's masterpiece and it is hardly surprising that it was his favourite amongst his own films.⁶⁶ What it was not able to do, however, was to satisfy Różewicz's need to exorcise the ghosts of his wartime past, as he was to portray the subject many more times during his career.

Echo

Echo, released on 25 September 1964, was the fourth collaboration between the Różewicz brothers, the first being *Three Women* in 1956, then *Miejsce na ziemi (Place on the Earth, 1960)* and *Birth Certificate*. Of these *Echo* is the least well known. It bore strong thematic

⁶⁴ Stanisław Grzelecki, 'Z Ekranów Stolicy Szkoła roku 1939', *Życie Warszawy*, (5 October 1961)

⁶⁵ *ibid*

⁶⁶ Hendrykowski, *Stanisław Różewicz* p.39.

resemblances to their earlier films: the effect of war and occupation on ordinary people and the psychological scars it left behind. Stanisław Różewicz claimed that *Echo* was directed against the war, as it showed how the conflict put ordinary people into situations in which they had to make choices they were not prepared for.⁶⁷ The movie asked interesting moral questions: how much can you judge people for actions taken under extreme duress and can you be forgiven for ‘collaborating’ if you believe nobody was hurt as a result of your actions and your life was saved? *Echo* was, for a number of reasons, almost universally disliked by critics, who took exception to both the subject matter and the execution, clearly indicating that they were not ready for such a shocking and pioneering film. The only widespread praise came for Wienczysław Gliński’s portrayal of Henryk, the central character, and he was rewarded with an acting prize at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival in 1964.

Echo follows the story of Henryk, a small-town lawyer, who seemingly lives a very successful and contented existence with his wife and son. This is all shattered by the revelation that someone has found his name on a list of Gestapo informers twenty years earlier. In the Prosecutor’s Office he admits that he signed a Nazi document to ensure his freedom. Henryk claims, however, that it was all a trick, and that he had warned the man he denounced in advance, so he was able to escape arrest. Henryk travels to Warsaw to find the only witness to his story, the man he saved, has died a few years before and his wife knows nothing about it. All she can confirm is that the Gestapo came to their apartment during the war, and her husband was not home when they arrived. Although the information about Henryk’s wartime past is never published it spreads throughout the town, reaching the office where his wife works and his son’s school; eventually leading to the breakup of the family when Henryk’s wife moves away with their son. The nightmare of his actions begins to weigh very heavily on him; he

⁶⁷ ‘Spotkanie z reż. St. Różewiczem’, *Trybuna Ludu*, (27 August 1964)

becomes lonely and isolated, even from his loved ones. *Echo* ends with Henryk considering committing suicide by throwing himself under a train, but he is unable to do it.

The key theme of *Echo* is collaboration, which is what made it so difficult for critics to accept, as Różewicz asked questions about what exactly constitutes collaboration, and what might drive a person to do it. The audience is left to come to its own conclusions about Henryk's justification: that it was necessary to save himself and no-one was harmed. Różewicz provides no answer as to whether his actions were reasonable. *Echo* opens up a discussion about what actions are acceptable during wartime, in particular how far people should go to save themselves. On the face of it, Henryk's actions cannot be faulted. The only way to avoid death was to agree to work with the Gestapo, but he found a way to do it without sacrificing someone else. The problem with *Echo* was that it directly contradicted the dominant narrative of the time, that was very black and white. Officially, Poland did not collaborate, which was true, as there was no Polish state to be able to co-operate with Germany. This extended, however, to the claim that neither did individuals.⁶⁸ In films any characters who worked with the Nazis were usually shown to be either *Volksdeutsche* or morally bankrupt. *Echo* was the first movie to have a protagonist who was just an ordinary Pole, a small-town lawyer, who could have been anyone's friend or neighbour. This made Henryk's story much more uncomfortable for audiences: his actions do not have a simple explanation. Henryk's friends and fellow townspeople ostracised him, which gives an indication of how Różewicz felt this type of action would be received by Polish society, and he read this very well. Giving both the characters and audience hindsight, it is more difficult to understand Henryk's decision. With the benefit of time it is easy to say he should have stood his ground and never collaborated, even if it meant losing his life, despite this being an implausible solution. Thus, Różewicz quietly undermined the prevailing myth of universal resistance during the war, which was one of the central

⁶⁸ Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD*, p.121

ideological and historiographical ideas of the Gomułka regime, and the main focus of Passendorfer's *Battle Colours*, which was released in the same year.

Another key feature of *Echo* is that in many ways it followed the ideas about life postwar that can be found in Tadeusz Różewicz's poetry. Henryk's story shows that the legacy of the war is never far away, that despite his best attempts to put it behind him, and to live a productive life, it still comes back to haunt him and destroy his life. *Echo* reminds the audience that a whole generation lives with their consciousness affected by the war and occupation. By setting it in the present day Różewicz is able to show the burden of guilt that many people lived with and the effects that this responsibility had on both the individuals and their families. *Echo*, like Kawalerowicz's *The Real End of the Great War*, makes the argument that the Second World War did not end when the guns fell silent, but instead it lived on in the way it distorted people's personalities and left permanent marks on the human psyche. These more psychological films struggled to find an audience in Poland, with viewers unwilling to take a deep look into the past, or potentially reflect on their own wartime conduct.

Różewicz leaves a number of questions unanswered in *Echo*, allowing the viewers to come to their own conclusions. It is never made clear whether Henryk is telling the truth about his dealings with the Gestapo. He is very insistent when he meets the widow of the man he saved and cannot believe her husband did not mention anything. Henryk's story does, however, seem somewhat implausible. Can it really be possible that he saved the man? He may not have been in his apartment when the Gestapo came to arrest him, but it seems unlikely that they would have just let him get away. Różewicz does not provide any further information about this man: did he escape and hide for the rest of the war? Was he ultimately imprisoned? Różewicz leaves this to the imagination. Różewicz makes no judgement on Henryk's character or moral compass, and tries his best to remain impartial on the subject of whether he was a coward, or not.

While *Echo* is set in the present day, Różewicz uses a small number of flashbacks to provide a limited picture of what Henryk's wartime experiences. In doing this Różewicz uses a similar technique to Kawalerowicz in *The Real End of the Great War*, Jakubowska in *The End of Our World* and Munk in *The Passenger*, although they each do it with varying degrees of effectiveness. Różewicz was also influenced by Alain Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1955) and *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959).⁶⁹ Henryk's memories are triggered by sounds, not unlike the central character Juliusz in *The Real End of the Great War*, but Henryk's recollections often seem like echoes, mirroring the film's title and theme. In Munk and Kawalerowicz's films the recollections have a clear beginning and end, while each tells a small story that explains more about the central characters. In *Echo* Henryk's recollections are often lost in the film and are simply fleeting glimpses of what he experienced. The scenes are generic: dogs barking, men in dark cells, voices shouting in German, which fails to add to the story development, as Bohdan Węsierski commented, 'in a film called *Echo* "have we really heard them"⁷⁰ The answer to this question is "no"'.

Discussions about *Echo* in the press show that the majority of critics took a very hard-line view on Henryk's wartime actions, arguing that there was never any excuse for collaboration. *Echo* was universally criticised and seen as the least impressive of all the Różewicz brothers' collaborations. It is true that *Echo* is not as captivating as *Birth Certificate*, and stylistically it did not flow smoothly, but it did not deserve such an overwhelmingly unenthusiastic press. *Echo* raised important issues and provided a compelling story. The problem was the subject matter. The idea of Poles being involved in collusion with the Germans was deeply uncomfortable. The negative evaluation was levelled at almost every aspect of the film: the script, the cinematography and the general direction of the narrative. There were a number of

⁶⁹ Bohdan Węsierski, 'Echo okupacji', *Express Wieczorny*, (26-27 September 1964)

⁷⁰ *ibid*

reviewers who went as far as to say that the story was unable to keep the attention of the viewers. Stanisław Grzelecki wrote that it is not easy to make a film where the protagonist is a character that causes ambivalent feelings in the viewer, that Henryk arouses compassion but not sympathy and that the prevailing feeling is that audiences would rather not have to pardon him for his deed, which was rather unforgiveable. Grzelecki concluded that *Echo* was an unpleasant film that would not live on in people's memories.⁷¹ J.J. Szczepański, while claiming that *Echo* was one of very few Polish films that can be considered a psychological work, also argued that it was not the strongest of the Różewicz brothers' collaborations, as it contained a number of directorial shortcomings, most notably that the reminiscences were not always consistent and did not have equal effect.⁷² The only key author who found any merit in *Echo* was K.T. Toeplitz, who wrote that despite the oddity of making a film about collaboration, in a country where the phenomenon was non-existent, *Echo* asked some pertinent questions.⁷³

Echo was pioneering in that no other film at the time tackled the sensitive issue of collaboration, as the topic was simply not discussed, at least not in any meaningful way. The Różewicz brothers challenged the accepted narrative and this was met with criticism by the press, but, interestingly, not during the Film Assessment Commission. Those present were split over whether Henryk's actions were justified, but felt the subject matter was of significance. The president of the meeting Tadeusz Zaorski summed up the prevailing opinion: that *Echo* had a moral importance, as it talked about the individual's responsibility to society.⁷⁴ Due to the press reaction to *Echo*, however, it would seem that Polish society was not ready for the subject. It took until the 21st century and Andrzej Wajda's television movie *Wyrok na Franciszka Kłosa* (*Judgement on Franciszek Kłos*, 2000) and Marcin Krzyształowicz's 2012 film *Oblawa*

⁷¹ Stanisław Grzelecki, 'Słumione, dalekie echa', *Życie Warszawy*, (6 October 1964)

⁷² J.J. Szczepański, 'Echo', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, (18 October 1964)

⁷³ Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz, 'Stanisław Różewicz', *Polska*, (October 1964)

⁷⁴ FN, A-216 poz. 16 'Stenogram z dyskusji po kolaudacji filmu pt. *Echo* reżyserii St. Różewicza, Zespołu Rytm, 31.I.64 r.'

(*Manhunt*), for Polish cinema to look critically at the conduct of some Poles under Nazi occupation.

Westerplatte

Jerzy Bossak described *Westerplatte* as ‘one of Poland’s best historical films’ and his fellow members of the Assessment Commission heartily agreed.⁷⁵ Even before its public premiere at the Sala Kongresowa in Warsaw on 1 September 1967, the film had already received prizes from the Ministries of Culture and Defence and a silver medal at the 5th Moscow International Film Festival in July 1967. *Westerplatte* once again saw a successful collaboration between Różewicz and Szczepański, resulting in praise from the critics and authorities and good audience figures: one million people saw the film within two weeks of its premiere.⁷⁶ Gone were reports that Polish viewers were tired of the topic of war; instead newspapers published articles that showed people’s enthusiasm for the subject.

Westerplatte tells the story of the defence of the Westerplatte peninsula, during which the first shots of the Second World War were fired. Two hundred defenders held out for a week against vastly superior German forces. In the opening scene, Major Sucharski, the Polish commander, reminds the audience that they were only capable of resisting for twelve hours unaided. As the conflict continued, and it is clear that no help is coming, Sucharski begins to contemplate surrendering. Sucharski has a heated debate with his second in command, Captain Dąbrowski, who wants to continue the fight to the very last man, despite understanding they have no hope of victory. Ultimately Sucharski, seeing the destruction around him, makes the decision to wave the white flag. Many of the soldiers are not happy about this, and almost do not believe it. Sucharski defends himself to his men by telling them that he does not have the right to

⁷⁵ FN, A-216 Pos.123 ‘Protokół z kolaudacji filmu fabularnego *Westerplatte*’, (February 1967)

⁷⁶ Andrzej Wernic, ‘O filmie *Westerplatte*’, *Słowo Powszeche*, (16 October 1967)

continue risking their lives, and hands the command to Dąbrowski. Sucharski is treated with respect by his German counterpart, despite his men being described as ‘bandits’. *Westerplatte* ends with the German commander asking if the defence was worth it. Sucharski remains silent.

The resistance at Westerplatte was a topic that appeared in more books and memoirs than any other part of the September campaign. Just as with many of the events of the Second World War, a legend had developed around the defence of Westerplatte, suggesting that all the soldiers fought to the death. This story was maintained through literature such as Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński’s poem ‘Pieśń o żołnierzach z Westerplatte’ (A Song for the Soldiers of Westerplatte), which was written after he was captured by the Germans in 1939. Gałczyński wrote:

‘When the days were fulfilled
and one had to die in the summer,
straight to heaven, in rows of four
went the soldiers of Westerplatte.’

‘In Gdansk we stood like a wall
not minding the jerry’s cannon,
now we glide amidst the clouds
the soldiers of Westerplatte.’⁷⁷

As a result, the action of the men at Westerplatte was seen as yet another example of an ultimate sacrifice. Różewicz’s main aim was to show that the defenders were well trained soldiers, who were skilfully led, and able to provide effective resistance over a numerically and technically superior opponent.⁷⁸ Alina Madej argues that Różewicz and Szczepański’s intention was to realign the legend.⁷⁹ They showed that the actions of the characters were not empty bravado or romanticism about dying for their homeland; instead they were trained to react this way, and

⁷⁷ Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, *Dzikię wino*, (Warsaw, 1980), p.39

⁷⁸ Krystyna Garbień, ‘Westerplatte – legenda i prawda. Rozmowa z reżyserem Stanisławem Różewiczem i operatorem Jerzym Wójcickiem’, *Film*, (29 May 1967)

⁷⁹ *ibid*

were fulfilling their obligations as soldiers. The structure of the story encouraged the audience to question why the Polish forces carried out the defence for so long, in the face of overwhelming forces. Różewicz's answer to this was simple: they did not fight because they sought martyrdom, but because they understood their duty.⁸⁰ He had no intention of belittling their sacrifice but instead to provide a more measured perspective.

Just as Różewicz and Szczepański had done with *Free City*, the makers of *Westerplatte* painstakingly looked through documents and pictures and the memoirs of participants.⁸¹ While he was not intending to make a historical reconstruction, Różewicz planned to be as accurate as possible. Jerzy Wójcik the cinematographer impressively and ruthlessly shows the escalation of the destruction of the peninsula. *Westerplatte* is full of scenes that depict the front line, encompassing the full panorama of battle, and incorporating some of the original photos that Różewicz found in the archives, that blended seamlessly into the rest of the footage, giving the film a more authentic feeling. The horror of war is not left out and the response of the soldiers to the situation they found themselves in contains no falsifications: they are afraid of wounds, missiles and gas; they are tired and just want to be able to sleep; some even talk about rebelling against their command. None of them are fearless in the face of battle. What is interesting, however, is that despite the desire to create a truthful and realistic picture of the Battle of Westerplatte, Różewicz, as he had done in *Free City*, left out a key detail of the story: *Westerplatte* does not show the truth of who was leading the defenders. Sucharski had tried to convince his officers to capitulate on 2 September.⁸² His soldiers went against his command and carried on the fight under Dąbrowski's leadership. On 7 September, when the second guardhouse was destroyed Sucharski simply gave the order to surrender, which was fully

⁸⁰ Wojciech Wierzewski, 'Wojna zwykłych ludzi', *Ekran*, (3 September 1967)

⁸¹ *ibid*

⁸² Mirosław Maciorowski, Tajemnica majora Sucharskiego, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, (1 September 2014), http://wyborcza.pl/alehistoria/1.121681.16550762.Tajemnica_majora_Sucharskiego.html (1 December 2017)

complied with.⁸³ There were two key reasons why Różewicz made the choice not to show this. Firstly, Sucharski's soldiers kept what happened a secret, which allowed Sucharski to be revered after the war.⁸⁴ Secondly, Różewicz did not wish to make a judgement on who had truly been in charge during the action. In his memoirs he wrote: 'The truth is that both Sucharski and Dąbrowski fulfilled their duty to the soldier's oath.'⁸⁵

Różewicz takes up the debate between rationalism and nationalism in his portrayal of the debate between Major Sucharski and Captain Dąbrowski over the decision to surrender. Sucharski struggles with the weight of the choice he has to make, but seeing the death and destruction that surrounds him, and realising that help is not coming, he concludes that a continued loss of life is pointless, and so chooses to hoist the white flag. Dąbrowski, on the other hand, wants to carry on fighting until the last man. The Captain appears hot headed and irrational in response to the reason and logic of his superior, unable to reconcile himself with Sucharski's point of view. Although the audience is left free to make up its own mind about who was making the correct choice, one is drawn to the Major as the capitulation occurs at a time when further deaths would have led to no strategic or moral gains. As a result, Sucharski's resolution, made in spite of objections, meant he was perceived as a celebrated rationalist.⁸⁶ His character represents a peak in the evolution of the Polish war hero, moving from an eager patriotic martyr, to someone who puts the well-being of his men above everything else. It is for this reason that Sucharski was treated with respect by the German officer who takes the surrender and is congratulated on the bravery of the defence. The argument between the Major and his Captain also takes on a class dimension. Sucharski came from a proletarian family, whilst Dąbrowski was a member of the nobility. This was not emphasised by Różewicz in the

⁸³ *ibid*

⁸⁴ Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War* (London, 2012), p.632n.40

⁸⁵ Różewicz, *Było minęło*, p.78

⁸⁶ Jerzy Koenig, 'Westerplatte', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, (15 October 1967)

film; he did not make it a significant plot point, but it was a fact that Polish audiences knew well.

The Film Assessment Commission Meeting for *Westerplatte* was extensive, with a very large number of attendees. There was a lengthy debate about elements of Różewicz's realistic picture, and ways in which it should be adjusted to be more ideologically acceptable. The party functionaries at the meeting recognised that for many young Poles, *Westerplatte* would be the main source of information about events of which they had no first-hand knowledge. The tension between those who appreciated Różewicz's authenticity, and those who wanted changes is best shown by the difficulty some participants had with the portrayal of German attitudes at the end of the film, and the respectful treatment of Major Sucharski. Despite statements by veterans saying Różewicz's depiction of the surrender was true to life, Ludwik Starski argued that the Germans were portrayed as 'too noble', and suggested that they should be shown in ways that would shock and disgust the audience. Others concurred, such as Colonel Zbigniew Załuski, who stated that the picture presented by *Westerplatte* was much more important than the historical reality. For Załuski this meant highlighting the importance of the fight and defence, and emphasising the cruelty of the Nazi forces. In contrast, Różewicz stood his ground, and stressed the need to remain historically accurate, which included showing the handshake between Sucharski and his German counterpart as well as Wehrmacht soldiers referring to their opponents as Polish bandits. Ultimately, the only change to the epilogue was that they were called common bandits instead of Polish ones. The objection to the word bandit was because it suggested that they were not professional soldiers. Removing the word 'Polish' was designed to make it less demeaning to the Polish Army, although it seems like an overreaction. Another heated discussion arose about Sucharski's lack of response to the German General's question of whether it was worth fighting for so long. Wincenty Kraśko claimed that Sucharski's silence was an indication that he had doubts; otherwise he would just

have answered in the affirmative. Kraśko was concerned that this ambiguity would lead to audiences discussing their own views on the subject. Różewicz defended his decision and took full responsibility for its execution on the screen. Initially, Szczepański had wanted Sucharski to respond; however, when the finished product was put together, he realised that they had made the right choice. Jerzy Bossak proposed a compromise: Sucharski's answer could be appropriately interpreted in newspaper columns, speeches and interviews.⁸⁷

It is clear from the minutes of the Film Assessment Commission that the PZPR intended to use *Westerplatte* to serve their own agenda. Their primary goal was to try and make *Westerplatte* appear like a victory rather than a defeat, in which they were not successful. More significantly, there was a clear attempt to put a stronger anti-German message into *Westerplatte*. This is no surprise, as Germanophobia was a core component of Gomułka's national communism. Różewicz, however, was able to resist these attempts, and the German characters in the film are not evil stereotypes. The fact that the PZPR had their own ideas about Różewicz's movie was also reflected in the fact there was no mention during the Assessment Commission about the roles of Sucharski and Dąbrowski during the defence. It suited the party functionaries present better to have the working class Sucharski as the hero. On 6 February 1967 the Central Committee of the PZPR held a meeting with representatives of cinema authorities where Vice Minister of Culture Tadeusz Zaorski gave a lecture. He argued that in the war films of the early 1960s there was an absence of 'positive heroes', and that *Westerplatte* went some way to rectifying this.⁸⁸ Różewicz was able to prevent the communist authorities from making significant changes to *Westerplatte*, despite an obvious effort to do so. While aspects of the movie certainly suited their narrative, this does not appear to have been Różewicz's intention,

⁸⁷ 'Protokół z kolaudacji filmu fabularnego *Westerplatte*'

⁸⁸ FN, A-208 poz.18 'Stenogram z obrad konferencji z przedstawicielami Filmu Polskiego odbytej w KC PZPR w dniu 6 lutego 1967 r.'

as he was not motivated by a desire to win the approval of the PZPR, or to perpetuate their ideas about the Second World War.

Despite the heated discussions during the Film Assessment Commission, *Westerplatte* was very well received by those present. Trepczyński argued that Różewicz's film would be excellent in reminding people that the Poles were the first victims of the war and that *Westerplatte* would be a moral stand against German policies.⁸⁹ Jan Gerhard made a similar statement claiming that *Westerplatte* was one of the best films in the world at the time, while K.T. Toeplitz stated that it was so excellent that everyone would like to be able to say they played a part in how well it turned out.⁹⁰ This praise was echoed by critics, party officials, audiences and veterans. Agreeing with Gerhard and Toeplitz, Kazimierz Kochański wrote that it was an 'outstanding achievement' by Różewicz, and was a natural continuation of trends in his work.⁹¹ The film was shown to a panel of men, some of whom had survived the defence of *Westerplatte*. They drew attention to its exceptional realism, and how it was consistent with accounts of participants, and primarily with those of Major Sucharski, who recounted his experiences once the war was over.⁹² Other veterans highly praised the film and saw it as an excellent history lesson and an important part of the patriotic education of the younger generation.⁹³ As far as reviewers were concerned the movie's greatest asset was the way in which it was able to break down the legend of *Westerplatte* and the image of its soldiers as desperate heroes filled with romantic ideals and unaware of the practical consequences of their actions, without demeaning those who sacrificed their lives in its defence.⁹⁴ This was seen as a consequence of Różewicz's adherence to the facts, his simple style and the way he portrayed

⁸⁹ 'Protokół z kolaudacji filmu fabularnego *Westerplatte*'

⁹⁰ *ibid*

⁹¹ Kazimierz Kochański, 'Westerplatte', *Tygodnik Kulturalny*, (3 September 1967)

⁹² Andrzej Wernic, 'O filmie *Westerplatte*', *Słowo Powszechne*, (16 October 1967)

⁹³ *ibid*

⁹⁴ Rafał Marszałek, 'Klęski Ojcowe', *Współczesność*, (12-26 September 1967)

the soldiers and commanders as ordinary combatants trying to do the job with which they have been entrusted to the best of their ability.⁹⁵ The fact that Różewicz made no conclusions in the film and did not verbally side with either Sucharski or Dąbrowski, leaving the audience open to make their own interpretations, also drew him applause in the newspapers, for giving them greater control.⁹⁶ In fact, *Westerplatte* was held in such high esteem that, two years later, the same journalists brought it up in their glowing reviews of Passendorfer's *Kierunek Berlin (Heading for Berlin)* 1969 and *Ostatnie Dni (The Last Days)* 1969.

Westerplatte was able to find a middle ground between the doomed romanticism, or cynicism of the Polish School, and the firm friends of the Red Army found in Passendorfer's films. As *Free City* had done nine years earlier, *Westerplatte* provided a more balanced view of September 1939, avoiding any Stalinist propaganda tropes, that blamed the defeat on incompetent leaders and internal chaos.⁹⁷ Instead Różewicz showed the defence for what it was: a gallant, but ultimately unsuccessful action, in which a highly skilled, but small group, held out for as long as they could. Różewicz asked questions of the audience, allowing room for discussion, and for people to form their own conclusion, which was rare for a war film of the 1960s. Most importantly, the film was seen as a fitting tribute to the one hundred and eighty-two men who bravely fought for the peninsula. As Marek Hendrykowski described, *Westerplatte* is a war film in the best sense of the word, reminiscent of a British or American classic, because it is an excellent combat drama.⁹⁸

Conclusion

Stanisław Różewicz was, in many ways, an outlier in Polish cinema during the Gomułka era, as he was unconnected to any wider cinematic trends. While his work was nearly always

⁹⁵ Tomasz Hellen, 'Próba rekonstrukcji', *Pomorze*, (16-30 September 1967)

⁹⁶ Piotr Kajewski, 'Westerplatte', *Odra*, (October 1967)

⁹⁷ 'Westerplatte', *Głos Koszaliński*, (9-10 September 1967)

⁹⁸ Hendrykowski, *Stanisław Różewicz*, p.75.

looked upon favourably by reviewers, it struggled to find a domestic audience. His often introspective look at people's wartime actions, and the questions he asked about the long term consequences of the conflict, made some viewers uneasy. In his more combat centric films, Różewicz did not look at military victories, but rather moral ones, in which the soldiers may have been defeated, but held out for as long as the loss of life was justifiable to the commanders. This was not as uplifting as the battle epics that became synonymous with Jerzy Passendorfer. More recently, however, Różewicz's contribution to Polish cinema has been widely recognised, at least in Poland, and *Birth Certificate* is rightfully acknowledged as one of the great war films of the Gomułka era. Różewicz was respected by the Communist Party, and they did not exert irresistible pressure on him. As a consequence, he was given the responsibility of heading a film unit that was able to nurture the career of others.

Różewicz's war films had a very distinctive style, and covered very similar themes. His movies are small and intimate, even those that were centred around military action. His characters are relatable, and are largely driven by pragmatism, rather than romanticism. Różewicz showed that there was an alternative to fighting to the death with no hope of victory, that the equally brave choice was to save your life. By explaining the actions of his protagonists as the rational response to their situation, Różewicz was careful, however, not to belittle any moments of genuine heroism. As Marek Hendrykowski states: 'the protagonists of his stories are people like us, who live in danger, struggling with their own existence and generally defenceless against the cruel world in which they live'.⁹⁹ Różewicz was not interested in contributing to legends, nor was he a cynic. Barbara Hollender summed it up best when she wrote: 'Stanisław Różewicz was a real moral authority when values were in ruins'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Hendrykowski, *Stanisław Różewicz*, p.12.

¹⁰⁰ Barbara Hollender, 'Podobny do swoich filmów', *Rzeczpospolita*, (16 July 2004)

Chapter 6: ‘New Memory’ Cinema: Jerzy Passendorfer and Czesław and Ewa Petelski

Introduction

While the directors of the Polish School were making attempts to create their own narratives of the Second World War, and were concerned with making films of high artistic value, there were others who were more interested in making genre cinema. Jerzy Passendorfer and Ewa and Czesław Petelski were just as fascinated with the Second World War as their peers, but their image of it was, at times, very different. Instead of asking questions of the prevailing war narrative, on the whole their work helped to promote the myths of victory over fascism; unity of the Polish resistance and innocence, around which the public memory of the Second World War was organised, in particular during the 1960s. These movies, therefore, played an important role in the creation of People’s Poland, by showing a patriotic founding myth that was based on a triumphant image of national unity against the Nazis and a belief in the uniqueness of the Polish war experience.¹ This focus on ideology, sometimes to the detriment of artistic merit, meant that while Passendorfer and the Petelskis were popular with high ranking party officials and domestic audiences, they never garnered the international success of their peers.

In June 1960 the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Party passed a Resolution which defined the political framework for the functioning of the Polish film industry: and lasted for the entire decade. The Resolution was an indicator that Gomułka and his team were disappointed by the ideological and educational level of filmmaking in the second half of the 1950s. It condemned artists and critics views which were, allegedly, excessively influenced by Western culture. The critical evaluation of filmmakers’ achievements was accompanied by recommendations illustrating the thematic preferences of the party leadership. Film was to

¹ Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.325

remain one of the main instruments of propaganda and education, aimed at explaining the working of party politics to the masses, thereby gaining their support and encouraging people to shape their thinking according to socialist principles.² The Party was becoming more interested in using methods of influencing the politics of history rather than direct, open propaganda. The green light was, therefore, given for all different types of Polish film, in the hope that a large number of domestic productions would turn the public's attention away from the shortcomings of daily life, and create effective competition for increasingly popular Western films.

The Resolution, and subsequent 13th Plenary of the KC PZPR of July 1963, in which Gomułka criticised the 'excessive elitism of art', claimed that there was a need for work that would show the correct image of the country.³ In relation to war films this meant making movies about Polish communists and the victory of soldiers of the Soviet-commanded First Polish Army from their baptism of fire at Lenino to the fall of Berlin. The Resolution claimed that prior to the 1960s there had been very little mention of left-wing partisans, *A Generation* being the notable exception, and almost every film focused on defeat rather than triumph.⁴ This shift, which some directors embraced more than others, results in a far more uplifting image of the Second World War. Their inspiration, rather than coming from neo-realism, New Wave and other artistic movements, came from more mainstream genres such as Westerns, heist films, American war films and Soviet epics.⁵

The Party, in its quest to rewrite the history of the Second World War, magnified the role of the domestic communists and that of the Soviet controlled Polish Army in the liberation of

² 'Uchwała sekretariatu KC w sprawie kinematografii'

³ Gębicka, 'Obcinanie kantów, czyli PZPR i państwa wobec kinematografii lat sześćdziesiątych', p.37.

⁴ 'Uchwała sekretariatu KC w sprawie kinematografii'

⁵ Mikołaj Kunicki, 'History, *Rasion d'etat* and National Communism: Red Nationalism in the Cinema of People's Poland', *Journal of Contemporary European History*, (Vol.21, Issue 2, May 2012), p.238.

Poland, while linking the guerrillas with Berling's Army and highlighting their contributions. In addition to emphasizing the role of the leftist resistance, the image of the Second World War projected by both the regime and filmmakers, contained a number of other elements. There was a strong anti-German resentment, based on a long-standing hostility towards an, historically, aggressive German foreign policy and a belief that Poland had a true claim to the lands it acquired in the West at the end of the war.⁶ Finally, there is a strong pro-Soviet bias, pointing to the Polish-Soviet brotherhood-in-arms, along with an underlying suggestion that the only way to guarantee the existence of Poland on the map, in the face of danger from West Germany and the imperialist hostility of the West, was with the support of the USSR.⁷ This all came together to form a patriotic founding myth of the whole of Poland united in the struggle against the Nazi oppressor.⁸

The most forceful advocates of the blend of communism and nationalism were Mieczysław Moczar and his 'Partisans' faction. During the Second World War Moczar organised guerrilla units in the Lublin, Łódź and Kielce areas.⁹ After the conflict ended, he was head of the Public Security Office in Łódź. Politically marginalised after the fall of Gomułka in 1948, he returned to the centre of power in 1956. Moczar argued that the contribution of the AL had been reduced in the postwar period and advocated the revision of history to correct this.¹⁰ The position of Moczar's faction of partisans greatly improved when he was appointed minister of internal affairs and chairman of the ZBoWiD. By the late 1960s the ZBoWiD had almost three hundred thousand members, including sixty thousand Home Army veterans.¹¹ The influx of former AK soldiers reflected their rehabilitation after 1956, but was also an attempt by the ZBoWiD to

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Łukasz Polniak, *Patriotyzm wojskowy w PRL w latach 1956-1970* (Warsaw, 2011), pp. 31-32

⁸ Mikołaj Kunicki, 'History, *Raison d'etat* and National Communism', p.235.

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD*, p.220

gain popularity amongst non-communists and to promote the image of national unity in the face of the struggle against the Nazi occupiers.¹² In the second half of the 1960s representatives of the ZBoWiD became more active within the film industry, particularly as members of the Film Assessment Commission.¹³ They admonished any work that was considered to be anti-heroic and asked that films create new heroes, without complexes, who were worthy of admiration and imitation.¹⁴ Increasingly they began to complain about filmmakers, with their opinions not just expressed during meetings, but also printed in the journal *Za Wolność i Lud*.¹⁵ Their views, however, did not always relate to their long-standing affiliation to military and political formations. Moczar and his faction were most critical of the Polish School and launched some vicious attacks against their work. Colonel Zbigniew Załuski, who was an historian and essayist and very close to Moczar, attacked Wajda for the way in which he mocked the Polish insurrectionary tradition.¹⁶ He argued that the group as a whole, in their role as educators, were ‘contributing to the moral disarmament of the nation and the alienation of young people’.¹⁷ Jan Srebrzyński described Munk and Wajda’s work as nihilistic, anti-heroic and detached from historical truth.¹⁸

Within the film industry, Jerzy Passendorfer and the Petelskis were some of the staunchest supporters of the PZPR, and were regular attendees of Script and Film Assessment Commission meetings. While there are clear similarities between their work, there are also significant differences, which will be explored in this chapter. While Passendorfer was the pioneer and consistent exponent of Polish war epics, the Petelskis made a wide variety of different movies, covering a number of subjects.

¹² Mikołaj Kunicki, ‘History, *Rasion d’etat* and National Communism’, p.235

¹³ Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD*, p. 268

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.265

¹⁶ Mikołaj Kunicki, ‘History, *Rasion d’etat* and National Communism’, p.235

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ *ibid*

Jerzy Passendorfer

Biography

Jerzy Passendorfer was born in Vilnius in 1923, the son of a lieutenant colonel who fought in the Polish-Bolshevik war and served in General Anders' 2nd Polish Corps between 1943 and 1945. He returned to Poland in 1947.¹⁹ Although Passendorfer excelled in war films, he did not have any combat experience. He stated that his youth coincided with the turbulent years of war; he watched it with his own eyes and as a result he regularly went back to it.²⁰ After illicitly completing secondary school under Nazi occupation, and avoiding Nazi slave labour, he first worked in a travelling circus, but from 1943 until liberation he was part of the underground theatre in Kraków.²¹ Following the end of the war Vilnius became part of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. Passendorfer initially settled in Kraków, undertaking an introductory training course as a cameraman. In 1947 he enrolled in the Film School in Łódź and the following year was offered a scholarship to study film directing at the famous Prague Film School of the Academy of Fine Art in Prague, (FAMU) and was among the first graduates of this legendary school.²² While in Czechoslovakia he was involved in creating a number of Czech short films, including educational ones. On his return to Poland in 1951, like many of his contemporaries, he worked with a more established director, Leon Buczkowski, as his assistant on the first full-colour Polish film comedy, *Przygoda na Mariensztacie* (*Adventure in Marienstadt*, 1954). Passendorfer's solo debut was *Skarb kapitana Martensa* (*The Treasure of Captain Martens*), released in 1957.

Passendorfer's career was dominated by his war films, even more so than Andrzej Wajda. Unlike Wajda, however, Passendorfer was a regime favourite and worked with it much more

¹⁹ Kunicki, 'Optimism Against All Odds', p.3

²⁰ Ludmiła Gutkowska, 'Jerzy Passendorfer', *Zołnierz Polski*, (26 January 1964)

²¹ Jadwiga Radomińska, 'Wojna i współczesność', *Kulisy*, (24 October 1965)

²² *ibid*

than other directors of his generation: he is a perfect example of a filmmaker of the Gomułka era. At the same time, he was described as a sympathetic, loyal and dependable colleague for those outside the haven of state control.²³ His two favourite scriptwriters, Wojciech Żukrowski and Roman Bratny were stalwart regime supporters who were Home Army veterans and became involved in the Partisans.²⁴ They were popular authors and film scriptwriters. Passendorfer had a particularly successful relationship with Żukrowski, whose writing he liked because it was tailor-made for film adaptation.²⁵ His films won numerous national awards and were spoken of very highly by Party members and the print media. Passendorfer was a PZPR member until its dissolution in 1990.

The main driving force behind Passendorfer's continued interest in war was a desire to show the younger generations images of a conflict they had only second hand knowledge of. He saw film as a key medium for this, as it was often more palatable for young minds than literature. In an interview in *Walka Młodych* following the release of *Battle Colours*, he discussed the notion of 'unnecessary' heroism, that so many films were criticised for showing. He argued that while many may have seen people's sacrifices as reckless decisions, what would have happened if everyone decided someone else would fight fascism for them? The point of the war was to end it as soon as possible, given the daily loss of life. These 'unnecessary' acts of heroism, Passendorfer suggested, helped to bring the war to an earlier close, saving huge number of lives. He was, therefore, convinced that every military effort during the Second World War, which aimed to beat the enemy as early as possible, deserved the highest praise, and should be covered by authors in all forms of art.²⁶ It is important to note, however, that

²³ Nina Taylor-Terlecka, 'Jerzy Passendorfer', *The Independent*, (27 May 2003).

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ 'Widzenie świata', *Życie*, (27 August 2000)

²⁶ Włodimierz Stępiński, 'Bohaterowie są potrzebni', *Walka Młodych*, (1 November 1964)

this interview was published in a heavily pro-regime newspaper, so he may have presented their views, rather than his own, although both scenarios are equally revealing.

Battle Colours

Passendorfer's 1964 film *Battle Colours* was his most interesting and significant film. As Piotr Zwierzchowski claims it is a key example of creating a new understanding of patriotism and national memory.²⁷ The script was written by Wojciech Żukrowski, continuing their successful collaboration, which began with *Fire Bath* (*Skąpani w Ogniu*, 1963) and was adapted from Mieczysław Moczar's wartime memoirs of the same title. The book glorified the communist partisans, magnifying their role in the conflict, and acknowledged the limited co-operation between the People's Army and the Home Army. It went through many editions and eventually became mandatory reading in Polish schools and was also published in most other communist states. The film of *Battle Colours* won state prizes for the director, screenwriter and cinematographer and was highly praised by the party.

Battle Colours is set in the autumn of 1944 in the Kielce region and focuses on guerrillas fighting against the Nazis. The central characters are members of the AL, led by Lieutenant Kołacz, who are tasked with delivering a communist delegate. The film opens with the successful derailment of a train carrying armaments and the viewers are introduced to the central characters of the film, the AL partisans who are consistently successful in their actions right from the film's opening moments. The next sequence presents the antagonists, the faceless German Army, depicted as unnecessarily cruel, shooting dogs and children with no justification. Although it is the AL who are shown immediately as the key figures in the resistance against the Nazis, they are very quickly joined in the action by the Peasant Battalions (Bataliony Chłopskie, BCh) and the Home Army. There is a very convivial atmosphere

²⁷ Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.88

between the different partisan units from opposing ends of the political spectrum and there is no suggestion that they are unwilling to work together. There are, however, villains in the story: the nationalist underground, NSZ, who nearly murder several Kołacz's men and deliver the communist delegate to the Nazis.²⁸ The story's main driving force is a series of skirmishes between the partisans in the forest, with some Soviet assistance, and the Germans. The Poles win a series of small victories, taking prisoners, ammunition and weapons and save defenceless villagers from the occupying forces' cruelty. All the while emphasising that it was a combined effort of several guerrilla groups, but keeping the AL as the leaders, *Battle Colours* culminates with another big action against the Germans with all the units fighting together. As the various units go their separate ways, Kołacz's deputy comments on the departing AK troops: 'These boys are swell; too bad they are not going with us.'²⁹

Battle Colours was, in many ways, the perfect convergence of various strands of the mythology of the Second World War, that so heavily contributed to the legitimisation of the communist regime. The first was the regime's myth of victory over fascism. This was used to explain, and justify, communist rule in Poland, as a necessary outcome of Cold War international relations.³⁰ The communists, labelled 'fighters for peace', were allegedly the only true victors over Nazi Germany. By placing the AL unit at the story's centre, Passendorfer contributed to this narrative, by making it appear that the left-wing partisans were the largest underground group. *Battle Colours* also suggests that only the AL had orders from a higher political authority, while the AK and BCh were acting without direction. As the movie ends and the AK soldiers walk away towards the West, there is no offer that the roles be reversed and the *March of the People's Army (Marsz Gwardii Ludowej)* is playing in the background. This

²⁸ Kunicki, 'History, *Rasion d'etat* and National Communism', p.241

²⁹ *Battle Colours*, dir. Jerzy Passendorfer (Film, 1964), 1.25.53, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvDSnldSLAo> (20 February 2014)

³⁰ Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD*, p.114

further creates the impression that the communist partisans were on the correct side of the ideological divide and the best hope for the future of Poland.³¹ In conversations between the two guerrilla units, the moral and military superiority is always with the People's Army.

In *Battle Colours* all the partisan units work together towards a common goal, seemingly putting aside any political differences. This fit very well with the myth of unity of the resistance movement. This was particularly noticeable in the veteran's union the ZBoWiD, which after 1956 welcomed all former underground fighters, therefore subsuming all individuals into one organisation. While *Battle Colours* does very much paint a picture of unity, it makes sure to maintain the superiority of the AL, and makes a negative assessment of the Home Army's leadership. The AK unit deputy commander, code name 'Klinga', senselessly incriminates AL commanders. He has no direction from any higher authority, although he does rehabilitate himself throughout the movie, proving to be a brave soldier. The figure of the Home Army leader represents a time that has long since passed.³²

The only underground group that was not included in this unity of action was the *National Armed Units (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne, NSZ)*. During the war, the NSZ had been loyal to the aims of the right-wing National Party. They were violently antisemitic, and were the main culprit in attacks on Jewish partisan bands during the occupation. More significantly for the PZPR however, the NSZ were anti-communist, and continued the fight against the Soviets after 1944. As a result, the NSZ were viewed by the communist regime as traitors. While the myth of unity denied the existence of collaborators, the NSZ were exempt from this. Janusz Zarzycki, the chairman of the ZBoWiD from 1956 to 1964, claimed: 'We did not have a Quisling, but there was the NSZ, which worked with the Gestapo murdering patriots from other

³¹ Kunicki, 'History, *Rasion d'etat* and National Communism', p.241

³² Jerzy Eisler, Prawda czasów, prawda ekranu, *pamięć.pl* <http://polska1918-89.pl/pdf/barwy-walki,1752.pdf> (8 November 2017)

divisions.³³ As such, former NSZ members were the only people who were prohibited from joining the ZBoWiD. In *Battle Colours*, the NSZ are the villains of the story, along with the Germans, and are shown trying to kill AL members and co-operating with the Nazis. Passendorfer's depiction of the NSZ as on a par with the German occupiers, was very much in keeping with organisation's contemporary prevailing image.

Given that *Battle Colours* was an adaption of Moczar's memoir it is no surprise it was highly valued by the PZPR. Moczar and his faction, in particular, recognised that cinema could play an important role in influencing public opinion, especially the younger generation. During the Film Assessment Commission meeting those present referred to the movie's educational value, and the importance of its final message. Those in attendance were highly complimentary about Passendorfer's work and praised his ability to make an engaging war film that was engaging. Both Tadeusz Zaorski, the chairman and Minister of Culture, and Wincenty Kraśko, the head of the Cultural Department of the Central Committee, complimented *Battle Colours* for focusing on the left-wing underground. Kraśko stated that the film showed a significant chapter of the nation's 'drama and tragedy, including the issue of the Home Army', while Zaorski emphasised that until the production of *Battle Colours* Polish cinema lacked a film about the partisan's struggle and the communist resistance, conveniently ignoring Wajda's *A Generation* which had been released ten years earlier.³⁴

There was some disagreement, however, over the final line of the original script, which had Kołacz's deputy watching the AK unit departing and saying 'I hope our paths cross again.' Zaorski, Trepczyński and Tadeusz Karpowski, another government official and film critic, all objected to this sentence, Trepczyński argued that it 'distorted the logic of history' which

³³ Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD*, p.160

³⁴ FN A-216 poz.39 'Stenogram z dyskusji po kolaudacji filmu pt. *Barwy walki* w dniu 3.XIII.1964.r'

should have prompted the AK members to stay.³⁵ Both Passendorfer and Żukrowski defended their positions by stating that the scene constituted the film's main conclusion and that above all these men shared the same experiences and had a common struggle, which caused them to realise that above all they were patriotic Poles.³⁶ Ultimately, however, Zaorski upheld his objection and so the wording was changed to the line seen in the approved version, which was suggested by Czesław Petelski, another example of how involved the Petelskis were in Polish cinematography.³⁷ This is one of the rare examples where a director was overruled, although Passendorfer did have his say in the discussion over the change. Passendorfer's ending suggested Kołacz had some admiration for the men of the AK, despite their politics, and that he did not dismiss them because of it. The adjusted line led to a subtle change in the movie's message, implying that the comradeship between the AL and the AK was a temporary means to an end, but that their fundamental differences would prevent any future co-operation, and that this was the fault of the AK rather than the AL. It also drove home one of the central theses of *Battle Colours*: that the AL were on the correct side of the ideological divide.

The fact that *Battle Colours* was based on Moczar's memoirs which inevitably meant critics and reviewers asked the question: 'Who in the film was Moczar'? There is seemingly a simple answer: the AL leader Kołacz, after all he is the model character, loyal to the Communist Party and Soviet leadership. The other two central protagonists Kruk and Klinga, however, also have characteristics that Moczar wanted to claim as his own. Kruk becomes a true hero at the end of *Battle Colours*, which Moczar never was, but Kruk represented the romantic legend of an independent guerrilla commander, which Moczar created around himself.³⁸ Even Klinga, with his seemingly anachronistic appearance and mannerisms was who Moczar aspired to be. These

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ Kunicki, 'History, *Rasion d'etat* and National Communism', p.242

³⁸ Eisler, 'Prawda czasów, prawda ekranu'

three leaders' characteristics are a clear example of how Moczar used cinema to create an image of himself.³⁹ The timing of the release of *Battle Colours* is significant. In 1964 Moczar became both head of the ZBoWiD, and the Minister of Internal Affairs. This was a result of an ideological conflict between the liberal and nationalist wings within the Communist Party. Creating a public discussion about the positive merits of *Battle Colours* key figures, and how these might correspond to Moczar, helped to cement his persona as the great partisan hero, which was particularly important given his new found leadership of the veteran's union.

Battle Colours was one of the first Polish films to share a great deal in common with western war films and Soviet battle epics. During the Film Assessment Commission meeting Jan Gerhard likened it to Darryl Zanuck's *The Longest Day* (1962), and the opening scene is reminiscent of René Clair's *Battle of the Rails* (*Bataille du rail*, 1946).⁴⁰ Unlike a number of previous Polish films about the Second World War, which made a point of telling individuals' stories, their motivations, and the impact of events on the lives of the central characters, Passendorfer focuses on the collective struggle avoiding any emotional backstories or personal information about the protagonists. Passendorfer did this to produce a more uplifting picture, one of glorious victory, not physical or psychological defeat. To further reinforce this message, Passendorfer does not show any of the rigours of guerrilla life: there are no tense, nervous moments, and there is no complaining about missing loved ones. The days are almost always sunny, and the whole film takes place in a picturesque landscape. This is in stark contrast to the works of the Polish School.

Unsurprisingly the press reacted very favourably to *Battle Colours*, particularly in the pro-regime publications: almost every article, from *Film* magazine to local newspapers, was overwhelmingly positive, praising both the content and the artistry. They played up the fact

³⁹ 'Stenogram z dyskusji po kolaudacji filmu pt. *Barwy walki*'

⁴⁰ *ibid*

that the film was based on Moczar's memoirs, suggesting that gave the film greater legitimacy. Critics perpetuated the film's message, that all the underground branches worked together, regardless of ideology, to defeat a common enemy. *Żołnierz Wolności* and *Walka Młodych* were the most hyperbolic in their praise, extolling the virtues of *Battle Colours* for educating the younger generation about the realities of partisan warfare and how the fighters were a symbol of courage, fortitude and strength of character.⁴¹ *Walka Młodych* also suggested that *Battle Colours* helped to counteract the 'falseness' of the main themes in many other Polish occupation films such as the fatalism, failure and hopelessness that dominated Polish war cinema.⁴² The views of these two publications are hardly surprising, given that they were both the press organs of the military. It was not just the particularly hard-line publications, however, that praised *Battle Colours*, although other publications were at times more measured. In *Kierunki* Kazimierz Lubelski wrote that the film 'showed the naked truth' and that it was a 'true story, one of many recorded in the pages of diaries.'⁴³ *Ekran* described *Battle Colours* as Passendorfer's 'most cohesive work',⁴⁴ while *Film* claimed that it 'showed a true picture of life as a partisan.'⁴⁵ Such universal praise for *Battle Colours* suggests some state control over the reviews being produced, as it was extremely rare to find a movie that did not have any criticism levelled at it.

Heading for Berlin & The Last Days

Heading for Berlin and its de facto sequel *The Last Days* were both released in 1969 and celebrated a company of the 1st Polish Army which successfully crossed the Oder River and then continued on to Berlin in 1945. The films were seen by their creators as the prequels to

⁴¹ Halma Szypulska, 'Barwy walki', *Żołnierz Wolności*, (19 January 1965)

⁴² Alina Reutt, 'Partyzancki Fresk', *Walka Młodych*, (14 March 1965)

⁴³ Kazimierz Lubelski, 'Pamięć i Refleksja', *Kierunki*, (24 January 1965)

⁴⁴ Janusz Zaremba, 'Wojenne Drogi i Bezdroża', *Ekran*, (28 February 1965)

⁴⁵ Stanisław Janicki, 'Partyzancka Kronika', *Film*, (28 February 1965)

Fire Bath, which was also written by Wojciech Żukrowski. *Fire Bath* focused on former soldiers of Berling's Army, who helped in the settlement of the Western Territories just after the war. *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days*, showed the battles they fought before they moved there. The films were released on 17 January and 9 May to celebrate the anniversary of the liberation of Warsaw and Victory Day. They were designed to be propaganda epics in the wake of the anti-Zionist campaign of 1968 and the Polish involvement in the Warsaw Treaty Organisation invasion of Czechoslovakia.⁴⁶

Heading for Berlin and *The Last Days* followed the fate of a company of soldiers in the 1st Polish Army led by General Stanislaw Poplawsky as they participated in the victorious offensive in the spring of 1945. The central character is Corporal Naróg, played by Wojciech Siemion. There is very little in the way of an overarching plotline in either film; the drive of the narrative is the march towards Berlin. There are small pockets of dialogue placed in between the battle scenes. In *Heading for Berlin* Naróg's company are involved in the campaign for the Oder River. The audience is left under no illusions that the battle was hard fought, with significant casualties along the way, but they are left with a 'happy' ending: Berlin is just thirty-eight kilometres away. *The Last Days* sees Naróg and his company advancing towards Berlin. This second film in the sequence contains more human elements. Naróg is temporarily separated from his unit as he is transporting important documents. He strikes up a fleeting comradeship with a German prisoner of war, Kurt, who he puts to work as his chauffeur. Along the way Naróg finds his father, who has survived the war, and learns that his whole family are alive. Passendorfer injects a small amount of humour into Naróg and Kurt's relationship, as they drunkenly crash their car after swerving to avoid a tank. This levity, however, is brief, as Naróg watches Kurt murdered by fellow German soldiers. The retreating German Army play a greater role in *The Last Days*, as Passendorfer shows their cruelty even when all hope of winning the

⁴⁶ Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.36

war was lost. The film's climax moves from real life footage back to fiction as the Polish Army storms through small German villages, where they learn that Berlin has capitulated. *The Last Days* ends with an iconic image, the Polish flag, flying alongside the Soviet one, on the top of the Brandenburg Gate, the most recognisable landmark in Berlin.

Passendorfer had two main aims with *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days*: to show the younger generation it was possible to fight for the fatherland without dying; and to remind viewers of the contribution made by the 1st Polish Army to the liberation of Berlin.⁴⁷ At the Film Assessment Commission Meeting, Minister of Culture Wincenty Kraśko claimed that people knew very little about the battle for the Oder River and the subsequent march into Germany, while knowledge about the Battle of Monte Cassino, and the Polish 2nd Corps was much greater.⁴⁸ Passendorfer and his team intended to reverse this, and portray the Polish Army as a vital part of the campaign in the East, using the powerful image of soldiers in Polish uniforms, armed with heavy machinery, crossing the Oder River and marching towards Berlin. The scripts for both *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days* were created using archival materials, memoirs, diaries and some stories Cezary Leżeński and Ryszard Lisowacki's novels, both of whom had served in the Polish Army. The films were then produced with the help of the Ministry of National Defence and Polish Army soldiers. Zbigniew Załuski, one of the main ideologues of the Partisans faction, who had been deeply scathing about the Polish School, acted as a consultant. The amount of research, and source diversity, was intended to give *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days* a high level of credibility, but although there were some advisors from academia, the majority were former or current soldiers.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ FN A-344 poz. 452 'Stenogram z posiedzenia Komisji Kolaudacyjnej w dni 18.IX.1968 r.'

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.184

Given that there were those within the PZPR who were heavily invested in the production of *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days*, it is no surprise that the mood of the Film Assessment Commission meeting was overwhelmingly positive, with most government functionaries and industry professionals alike praising Passendorfer's work. K.T. Toeplitz and Stanisław Wohl admired the way in which Passendorfer was able to seamlessly move between great battle scenes and human affairs. Wincenty Kraśko claimed that 'this is a film that can be described as a monument to the fallen, as a piece of history and a work of art.' Jerzy Gonczarski, who had been involved in the campaign for the Oder, commented on the realistic picture that Passendorfer created: both the atmosphere and the small details like uniforms, equipment and weapons. A debate did break out during the meeting, however, about the fact that the Red Army were not shown in great numbers, and that there was a lack of Soviet characters. This issue was raised by Jerzy Pomianowski, who suggested that it was not a good idea to give the impression to young people that only Poles were participating. Ignoring the Soviet Army's contribution, he argued, distorted the truth that the film was supposed to be presenting. Pomianowski was not supported by other committee members, who all thought that *Heading for Berlin* was a film about Polish affairs, that it was focused on an area of territory that was entrusted to the Polish Army, so the ratio of Polish to Soviet soldiers was appropriate. The meeting's chairman made no recommendations that Passendorfer make any changes. The Film Assessment Commission meeting for *Heading for Berlin* shows the extent to which Polish cinema was committed to carving out a role for the 1st Polish Army in the liberation of Europe, separate from that of the Red Army.⁵⁰

Heading for Berlin and *The Last Days* were even more optimistic than *Battle Colours*. As Piotr Zwierzchowski states, they are 'glorious images of the Polish soldier, who came to Berlin

⁵⁰ 'Stenogram z posiedzenia Komisji Kolaudacyjnej w dni 18.IX.1968 r.'

and won a final victory'.⁵¹ Showing the Polish Army involved in such an overwhelming success, and playing a vital role in the defeat of Nazi Germany, brought some of the key narratives of the Second World War back to the fore, in particular the victory myth. The only way in which this narrative changed, is that in *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days*, there is no emphasis on Polish-Soviet friendship and co-operation. Given that the Polish government was trying to re-establish its legitimacy in the wake of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, it is unsurprising that there was an attempt to distance themselves from the Soviet Army. Placing *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days* in an informal trilogy with *Fire Bath*, and following the fortunes of Corporal Naróg throughout, provided a sense of historical continuity, inscribing the campaigns of the 1st Polish Army into a long tradition of the Polish armed forces. This put an emphasis on the continuity of Polish statehood and identity, therefore providing legitimacy to the Gomułka regime.

The positive imagery in *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days* are overwhelming and almost give the films a kitsch feel. There are some small anachronisms which contribute to this, and distract from the realism. The most striking is the marking of the Polish border on the Oder river, as Poland's western borders were not officially confirmed until the Potsdam conference. West Germany's lack of recognition of this border still remained a significant feature in anti-German propaganda, so this scene showed audiences the border's historical legitimacy.⁵² The Polish flag was raised over the Brandenburg Gate, but as a propaganda statement, well after the hostilities were over, not as a spontaneous gesture, as shown in *The Last Days*.⁵³ Even the scene between Naróg and his father feels false, especially when the audience learns that his

⁵¹ Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.108

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ *ibid.* p.110

whole family has survived, which seems unrealistic, and that his elderly father was drafted into the Polish Army.

Heading for Berlin and *The Last Days* had a great deal in common with both Passendorfer's other films, and battle epics by other Polish directors, like the Petelskis. These movies were characterised by a focus on the collective effort and a lack of overarching storyline, Corporal Naróg being the notable exception to a general avoidance of individual stories and character development. In these more battle heavy war films the hero is almost always the military, in this case the 1st Polish Army. Łukasz Polniak described *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days* as Passendorfer's crowning directorial achievements, and the peak of military cinema.⁵⁴ The one central protagonist does make *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days* more compelling than other movies of the same ilk. There are some spectacular scenes and iconic images in the two films, in particular the final moment of *The Last Days*, as the Polish flag flies high above the Brandenburg Gate.

Just as with his previous films Passendorfer received a great deal of praise from critics for both *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days*. Several reviewers, such as Danuta Karcz in *Kultura*, discussed how Polish audiences had been waiting for a film showing the war from the perspective of victory for a number of years. She further argued that *Heading for Berlin*, as opposed to the works of the Polish School, showed the war in a more optimistic, less one sided and more truthful way.⁵⁵ Konrad Eberhardt claimed that Passendorfer's intended purpose was to create an intuitive portrait of the unknown, nameless, soldier of the First Army and that this portrait seemed to be the most reliable.⁵⁶ The critics' general consensus, was that both *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days* contained very impressive battle scenes, but they also suffered

⁵⁴ Polniak, *Patriotyzm wojskowy*, p. 253

⁵⁵ Danuta Karcz, 'O filmie nie stanowi temat', *Kultura*, (18 May 1969)

⁵⁶ Konrad Eberhardt, 'W dwadzieścia trzy lata później', *Ekran*, (19 January 1969)

from having very little human drama. Zbigniew Klaczyński wrote that the weakness of *Heading for Berlin* was the lack of a personal side, and that Naróg as the central character represented the collective, and, as a consequence, there was no real discussion of human affairs.⁵⁷

In the 1970s Passendorfer stopped making war films. While it was partly a personal choice there were also political factors. After the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia and Gomułka's decision to deploy army units against striking workers on the Baltic Coast, killing dozens and wounding many more, the image of the Polish army as the symbol of national pride was gone. The signing of the Mutual Recognition Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and People's Poland also had an impact, as it removed Germanophobia as a key tool of mass mobilisation, a theme that Passendorfer used in his war films.⁵⁸

Czesław and Ewa Petelski

Biographies

Czesław Petelski was born on 5 November 1922 in Białystok. During the war he had fought in the Home Army, but from 1948 was a member of the ZMP, and was even chairman of the branch at the Film School.⁵⁹ He was faithful to the Communist Party until the end and co-founded the Society of Polish-Soviet Friendship. Ewa Petelska was born on December 24th 1920 in Pызdry and was one of only a handful of female directors in Poland. Czesław and Ewa Petelski met at the Łódź Film School, where they both started in 1948, the school's inaugural year.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Zbigniew Klaczyński, 'W Berlinie', *Trybuna Ludu*, (14 May 1969)

⁵⁸ Mikołaj Kunicki, 'Optimism Against All Odds', p.12

⁵⁹ Krzysztof Kornacki, 'Ewa i Czesław Petelscy', p.44

⁶⁰ *ibid*

In many ways, Czesław and Ewa Petelski had similar wartime experiences, which shaped their attitudes towards the Soviet Union, and thus the PZPR. Both were involved in underground organisations. Czesław reported to the first guerrilla unit he encountered, and was a member of the 3rd Infantry Regiment of the Home Army, based in the forests of Włoszczów in Lower Silesia. Their intention was to march and rescue Warsaw, but this never happened. After the company disbanded and dispersed into the countryside around Opoczno, the Gestapo arrested and imprisoned him in December 1944, but the January offensive prevented his execution. The first man Petelski saw after leaving the prison was a Soviet soldier, which left a lasting impression on Petelski, as he realised, they were responsible for saving his life. This prompted a decision to become a Communist Party member.⁶¹ This is almost certainly an oversimplification of the drivers behind his decision to join the PZPR, but it would also be wrong to completely dismiss the feeling that the USSR saved his life as a factor. Ewa fought in the Peasant Battalions and helped a number of Jews. She too was arrested by the Gestapo, but once again her execution did not happen thanks to the Soviets.⁶² The January Offensive also clearly had a significant impact on Ewa as she prepared several authors' scripts that showed scenes of the first meeting between local Polish populations and Soviet soldiers arriving from the East. It was an interesting coincidence that the husband and wife had very similar memories of 1945. Krzysztof Kornacki argues that this event was imprinted on the Petelskis' psyche.⁶³

Both Czesław and Ewa Petelski were very active within the film industry, taking on various roles besides directing. They were regular participants in the Script and Film Assessment Commission meetings. Czesław was particularly active in the Communist Party cell of Polish filmmakers (Podstawowa Organizacja Partyjna, POP) and even participated in the congresses

⁶¹ *ibid.* p.45

⁶² Marek Haltof, *Polish Cinema and the Holocaust*, p.112n.43

⁶³ Krzysztof Kornacki, 'Ewa i Czesław Petelscy – w krainie PRL-U', p.46

of the PZPR as a delegate; he was also artistic director of the Iluzjon film unit from 1963 to 1980 and between 1982 and 1987. As previously noted, Czesław was responsible for the rewording of the final line in *Battle Colours*. Piotr Zwierzchowski argues that they were very consistent with their opinions, and often relied on their own memories to help them judge films they were required to assess. Zwierzchowski further claims that this can be applied to their own works, which were not just literary prototypes, but reflections of their personal experiences. They were, like many others, significantly affected by the war of survival that a number of Poles fought during the Second World War.⁶⁴ This meant they had a lot in common with their Polish School counterparts, in many ways more than with Passendorfer. The Petelskis, therefore, were an interesting pair, and while they were devoted PZPR members, their war movies did not always perpetuate the narrative of the three myths. In fact, some of their films, such as *Kamienne niebo* (*Stone Sky*, 1959) and *Ogniomistrz Kaleń* (*Sergeant Kaleń*, 1961), are considered by some scholars to be part of the Polish School.

Sergeant Kaleń

Sergeant Kaleń was released on 12 October 1961. It was based on Jan Gerhard's novel *Łuny w Bieszczadach* (*Moonlight in the Bieszczady*), which depicted the fighting that took place in Eastern Poland from 1944 to 1947, between Polish forces and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiya, UPA). This conflict was a subject that had previously been untouched by filmmakers. The film won prizes for direction from the Ministry of Culture for both Czesław and Ewa, was very well received in the domestic press, and had a record turnout in the cinema.⁶⁵ Andrzej Werner argues that *Sergeant Kaleń* was the first in a series of films that both entertained and effectively carried out its propaganda job.⁶⁶ While it is true that

⁶⁴ Piotr Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.194

⁶⁵ Tomasz Markiewicz, 'Zakaż kłamliwe dzieło prawdziwie świadczy o czasie w jakim powstało', *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, (30 June 1992)

⁶⁶ Andrzej Werner, 'Prawda z Nieprawdy', *Film*, (2 August 1992)

Sergeant Kaleń was the first of the Petelskis' war films to contain certain aspects of the PZPR's ideology, it was not simply a propaganda. In fact, Kaleń shared many characteristics with the heroes of the Polish School. Since the fall of Communism, however, *Sergeant Kaleń* has been criticised for its portrayal of the UPA and Polish underground organisations.

Sergeant Kaleń is set in 1946 and follows the story of Hippolytus Kaleń, a sergeant serving in the Polish People's Army. All Kaleń dreams of is becoming a civilian and finding somewhere in the recovered territories to settle down. During one mission Kaleń is captured by a branch of the underground, Freedom and Independence (Wolność i Niezawisłość, WiN), commanded by Major Żubryd. Kaleń becomes a witness to crimes committed by Żubryd and is subjected to torture. To save his own skin Kaleń joins the unit, posing as a defector, but his situation remains dangerous and he narrowly avoids being executed on the orders of an unstable commander. Kaleń finds a chance to escape, and together with another detainee he flees. Along the way they come across an outpost, full of women and children, who are still bravely defending against attacks from partisans. Ultimately Kaleń returns to the army unit. The following scene takes place in winter, somewhere in the Bieszczady Mountains: Kaleń's army unit is on the road. Stragglers from the group are ambushed by the UPA. A small group of soldiers give chase, among them Kaleń, but the weather and their ignorance of the terrain cause them to lose the trail. The UPA once again strike at the Polish soldiers, and most of the group are killed; the others, including Kaleń are captured. The few who are able to escape are ultimately all caught, and, in full view of the prisoners, are executed with an axe. Kaleń once again finds good fortune and facing death he is able to break from his shackles and get away. After hours walking in the snow Kaleń comes across a hut with people under the care of some Ukrainian women, including the wife of the UPA commander and a number of children. A fight breaks out once again between the UPA and Polish Army: Kaleń is killed by his own comrades, sacrificing himself while protecting a Ukrainian child.

The choice of Jan Gerhard's story, and the portrayal of the fight in the Bieszczady raised a number of complex issues, most notably the relationship between Poland and Ukraine. Tensions between the two countries pre-dated the war, due to conflict over the borderlands; the treatment of Ukrainians in the Polish Second Republic and the increasing use of terrorism by Ukrainian nationalists, resulting in vicious reprisals from the Polish authorities. During the Second World War initially the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) felt Nazi Germany was the best hope for Ukrainian independence, and so around 100,000 Ukrainians served with German forces.⁶⁷ Two years later, with the German army retreating from the USSR, the OUN leadership recognised the future of Ukraine would not be determined by Germany.⁶⁸ Across the eastern borderlands between Poland and Ukraine the Home Army was fighting the Nazis and Ukrainians simultaneously, while Soviet partisans were also operating. In the confusion, the UPA was ordered to attack Polish civilians.⁶⁹ The mass murder of Polish civilians by the UPA in Volhynia and Galicia in 1943 and 1944 respectively was one of the most terrible episodes of the war; its aim was nothing less than the extermination of all Poles living in these areas.⁷⁰ Many Ukrainians from outside the OUN-UPA structures took part, and in some cases those who refused were killed. News of the events in Volhynia led to reprisals from Polish partisans, who attacked the UPA, assassinated prominent Ukrainian civilians and burned Ukrainian villages.⁷¹ The border question was not resolved by Poles or Ukrainians, but the Allies at Yalta.⁷² Soviet Ukraine acquired Volhynia and Eastern Galicia, and 1.5 million

⁶⁷ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven, 2003), p.204

⁶⁸ Nathaniel Copsey, 'Remembrance of Things past: The Lingering Impact of History on Contemporary Polish-Ukrainian Relations', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.60, No.4, (June, 2008), p.538

⁶⁹ *ibid.* p.540

⁷⁰ Jared McBride, 'Peasants into Perpetrators: The OUN-UPA and the Ethnic Cleansing of Volhynia', 1943-1944, *Slavic Review*, Vol.75, Issue 53, (Autumn 2016), p.632

⁷¹ Timothy Snyder, *Memory of sovereignty and sovereignty over memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1939-1999*, p.44

https://shron1.chtyvo.org.ua/Timothy_David_Snyder/Memory_of_Sovereignty_and_Sovereignty_over_Memory_Poland_Lithuania_and_Ukraine_1939_1999_anhl.pdf?PHPSESSID=61439a1d8720570d445869ba948ebc2d (4 January 2019)

⁷² Copsey, 'Remembrance of Things past', p.539

Poles and Ukrainians who were caught on the wrong side of the Polish-Soviet border were forcibly moved at war's end.⁷³ The UPA fought a guerrilla campaign in the Carpathian Mountain region until 1947, when they were put down by Soviet, Polish and Czech forces.

As a result of the difficult relationship between the two countries negative stereotypes of Ukrainians were pervasive in Polish cultural output. Rafał Wnuk identifies Gerhard, Edward Prus and the Petelskis as some of the key culprits of this.⁷⁴ In the mass media of the PRL two stereotypes of Ukrainians existed: the 'good' Ukrainian, Red Army veteran and enthusiastic supporter of the USSR; and the 'bad' Ukrainian, an ally of Nazi Germany, engaged in a bitter struggle against Poles, Jews and socialism.⁷⁵ The PZPR periodically used negative media coverage of Ukrainian nationalists to stir up popular resentment. This propaganda was aimed at those people who already considered Ukrainians to be enemies as a result of their involvement in the ethnic cleansing.⁷⁶ *Sergeant Kaleń* perpetuated deeply negative stereotypes of Ukrainians. The Petelskis portrayed Ukrainian partisans as torturers and murderers, who were driven by a desire for a Greater Ukraine, that would take territory from Poland. This image was used to legitimise the PZPR as the only guarantor of Poland's borders.⁷⁷ With Volhynia and Eastern Galicia in the territory of Soviet Ukraine postwar, discussion of the massacres was forbidden, so as a result in Polish popular remembrance the site of the murders was moved to Bieszczady and Eastern Lubelszczyzna.⁷⁸ Grzegorz Motyka argues that: 'exaggerating the success of the UPA in Bieszczady and playing up their brutality could serve as a form of emotional satisfaction for the Poles, in the face of official communist silence on

⁷³ *ibid*

⁷⁴ Rafał Wnuk, *Recent Polish Historiography on Polish-Ukrainian Relations during World War II and its Aftermath*, p.1
https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/bfd8/b90d14b0b468fc3ca8e49ab739508631a817.pdf?_ga=2.39275427.1442773814.1599238958-1261654609.1599238958 (6 May 2019)

⁷⁵ Copsey, 'Remembrance of Things past', p.542

⁷⁶ *ibid*

⁷⁷ *ibid*

⁷⁸ Wnuk, *Recent Polish Historiography on Polish-Ukrainian Relations*, p.1

the massacre in Volhynia.’⁷⁹ The UPA rebels in south eastern Poland were a proxy for those responsible for Volhynia. While the Petelskis’ portrayal of Ukrainians is not surprising it was also irresponsible. Ukrainians were an easy target: there was nothing to prevent filmmakers from passing brutal judgement on the actions of the UPA, while they could not do the same about the Red Army. *Sergeant Kaleń* provides no balance, and missed showing the complicated fight for Ukrainian independence, perpetuating the idea that only the People’s Army were the true bringers of peace.

Along with the negative portrayal of Ukrainians, and the image of the People’s Army as the only force of ‘good’ in the region, there are other elements of regime propaganda present in *Sergeant Kaleń*. The WiN and NSZ are both shown as brutal murderers, no better than the Ukrainians they are fighting. This is achieved, through the character of Major Żubryd, leader of the NSZ unit ‘Zuch’, and incorrectly identified in the movie as in command of the WiN. Żubryd was a staunch anti-communist, and fought against them between 1945 and 1946. He was responsible for providing protection to civilians against UPA forces in the absence of a co-ordinated response from the authorities, which earned him the local’s loyalty and respect.⁸⁰ As a result, Żubryd used his leadership skills to persuade other smaller branches of the underground to fall under his command.⁸¹ This is all turned on its head in both *Sergeant Kaleń* and *Moonlight in the Bieszczady*. Żubryd is shown as a man who lacks authority, is perfectly willing to commit crimes and is antisemitic. While the NSZ are known to have been involved in the murder of Jews there is no evidence Żubryd was antisemitic.⁸² Rather than helping the inhabitants of the surrounding area he terrorises them, which leads them to have strong feelings

⁷⁹ Paweł Przychodzeń, ‘Odklamujemy polskie kino dziś Ogniomistrz Kaleń nowy cykl’, *W politce.pl*, (6 December 2012), <https://wpolityce.pl/kultura/246847-odklamujemy-polskie-kino-dzis-ogniomistrz-kalen-nowy-cykl-wnaspl> (10 November 2017)

⁸⁰ Przychodzeń, ‘Odklamujemy polskie kino dziś Ogniomistrz Kaleń nowy cykl’

⁸¹ *ibid*

⁸² Grzegorz Motyka and Rafał Wnuk, *Pany i rezuny: Współpraca AK-WiN i UPA 1945-1947* (Warsaw, 1997), p.197

of hatred towards him. Even Żubryd's death is misrepresented in the film: he was murdered by a security service agent, not a subordinate as a result of infighting.⁸³ As seen in *Battle Colours*, and the policy of the ZBoWiD, the NSZ were vilified by the PZPR, much more for their role in the fight against the communist authorities than their antisemitism. The WiN, as a nationalist underground unit, were also treated with suspicion.

While aspects of *Sergeant Kaleń* undoubtedly espoused the image of the Second World War that was promoted by the PZPR, Kaleń himself shared some similarities with the heroes of the Polish School. He had served his time, and was looking for a quieter, civilian life, a theme that regularly appeared in the war films of the period. It was a wish expressed by Maciek Chełmicki in *Ashes and Diamonds*, and was a feeling that many viewers identified with. Piotr Zwierzchowski argues that in the war films of the 1960s folk heroes like Kaleń had a greater role to play, as a counterweight to the intellectual central characters of the Polish School.⁸⁴ In this analysis, however, Zwierzchowski leaves out Kutz's protagonists, who bear a strong resemblance to Kaleń. Where Kaleń's story is truly reminiscent of the Polish School is his ending, when despite all his attempts to emerge from the conflict unscathed, Kaleń sacrifices himself to save Ukrainian women and children. Irrational acts of heroism were not commonplace in battle epics, but were a constant feature the Polish School war films. Kaleń's actions are particularly out of character, given he spends the entire movie trying to survive by any means. Kaleń's decision to sacrifice himself is a familiar one, and is reminiscent of Maciek Chełmicki, Zadra and Dzidzius.

It comes as no surprise that on the whole the domestic press and audiences reacted very favourably to *Sergeant Kaleń*. The majority of reviewers gushed disproportionately to the quality of the film. The greatest praise was given to the way in which the Petelskis moved

⁸³ *ibid*

⁸⁴ Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.109

beyond pessimistic conclusions about Polish heroism, showing Kaleń's sacrifice not as an ideological choice.⁸⁵ The scale of appreciation by both the regime and veterans of the People's Army is reflected in the glowing review it received in *Żołnierz Wolności*, which claimed that the film became a symbol of the soldiers' battle during a harsh war and that it was highly valuable as an educational tool for the younger generation.⁸⁶ As is to be expected there is very little allusion in the press to the historical falsities in the film, in fact quite the opposite. The newspapers considered it to be an accurate picture of the conflict. Reviewers argued that *Sergeant Kaleń* took some of its inspiration from American Westerns, with Kaleń in the role of a Polish cowboy. The Bieszczady region was a frontier area in the first years after the war, just like the Wild West. Czesław and Ewa Petelski categorically denied, however, that American cinema was where they got ideas for *Sergeant Kaleń*, and claimed that if you had to look for a model it would be closest to the Soviet classics, such as *Chapaev* (Vasilyev brothers, 1934). They further claimed that they wanted to show the character of the people who formed the Polish People's Army and had no interest in creating a film that was in opposition to works by the Polish School.⁸⁷ There were some dissenting voices, which were scathing in their criticism of both *Sergeant Kaleń* and the Petelskis. Konrad Eberhardt claimed that *Sergeant Kaleń* was a bad film based on Gerhard's passionate novel about the little-known fight with the UPA, and that the Petelskis tried to deal with all of the facts and issues raised in the novel, but unfortunately did so without success. Eberhardt concluded that Kaleń's death was an expression of an eternal complex and had an absurd aura of tragedy, which aligned *Sergeant Kaleń* with *Eroica* and *Lotna*. Eberhardt considered *Sergeant Kaleń* to be a step backwards as a consequence of its affiliation with the Polish School.⁸⁸ This divide between reviewers is indicative of the fact that *Sergeant Kaleń* has numerous influences and sends out several

⁸⁵ Ewa Ostrowska, 'Kaleń', *Odgłosy*, (5 November 1961)

⁸⁶ Jerzy Rakowski, 'Ogniomistrz Kaleń', *Żołnierz Wolności*, (14-15 October 1961)

⁸⁷ Aleksander Ledóchowski, 'Okrutna ballada', *Film*, (5 May 1974)

⁸⁸ Konrad Eberhardt, 'Samosierra leży w Bieszczadach', *Film*, (22 October 1961)

messages. It reinforced the regime's views of the Polish nationalist underground and the UPA, but it also contained elements of the Polish School.

Sergeant Kaleń has the Petelskis' trademark impressive cinematography, and Kaleń arouses a great deal of sympathy from the audience. While scholars such as Zwierzchowski and Kunicki have identified *Sergeant Kaleń* as one of the films that helped to create a new memory of the Second World War, and promote Gomułka's national communism, which in a number of ways it did, what makes Kaleń more interesting is that his tale was one that cinema audiences in the country knew all too well. Kaleń was simultaneously the folk hero that the Petelskis became known for, and a tragic victim of the war.

Manhunter

Produced by the Film Unit 'Kamera', *Manhunter* premiered on 10 January 1964. It received several awards, including a state award for directors, and the FIPRESCI and Special Jury Award at the International Film Festival in Locarno. Roman Bratny wrote the script which was taken from his own short story. *Manhunter* is barely known outside of Poland, and was greatly underestimated by domestic critics; it is overlooked in Annette Insdorf's seminal work *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, but it is another interesting portrayal of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War, and the question of Polish complicity in the Holocaust.

Manhunter is set in provincial Poland before the final Soviet offensive in January 1945: it opens with a scene of German soldiers killing three Jews who were trying to escape from a concentration camp transport. The audience then sees the setting of the film: a country manor surrounded by outbuildings. It is in the manor's storeroom that Michał, *Manhunter's* reluctant hero, finds temporary shelter. Michał initially refuses to join an underground unit, but later changes his mind and attempts to meet the fighters in the gamekeeper's lodge but is

unsuccessful. On his way home he encounters a young Hungarian Jewish girl, who is looking for food to give a group of Hungarian Jews who have escaped a transport and are hiding in the forest. She is not able to understand Michał and so follows him to his home, where he gives her whatever food he can and helps to carry a pot of potatoes to feed her compatriots. The climax of *Manhunter* is a hunting sequence. SS officers organise a hunt near the manor with Michał and other villagers, led by the forester Jaworek, forced to participate as beaters. The pursuit of rabbits and foxes quickly turns into a massacre of the Jews, who startled by the shots and the beaters, leave the safety of their hiding place and run. In the carnage the audience only hears the sounds of bullets and the dying moans of animals and people, making it all the more terrifying. Jaworek, who was earlier portrayed as a collaborator, tries to rescue a Jewish child, and is killed by the Germans. At the end of the hunt the dead animals are shown lying on the ground near the manor; the bodies of the Jews are left abandoned. The Hungarian Jewish woman that Michał protected survives the massacre and after the Germans depart is left wandering among the dead, blaming her Polish rescuer for the murder of her fellow citizens. Michał is not able to tell her what really happened. The following morning, she is asleep in his room as the Germans are fleeing through the village. A hungry German soldier appears in Michał's room begging for food, paying no attention to the Jewish woman. In a strange twist, the German fighter eats boiled potatoes from the same pot that Michał used to feed the Hungarian Jews.

Marek Haltof argues that the climactic hunting sequence could be considered to be symbolic of the occupation in Poland. The German hunters are portrayed as both the architects of the massacre and the executioners, while the Polish beaters serve as unwilling participants in the obligatory hunt that takes place on their land.⁸⁹ This analysis holds true, but *Manhunter* does not say anything remarkable about the Holocaust. The story of Jews in hiding, being assisted

⁸⁹ Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust*, p.112

by Poles, had been shown in cinema before, most notably *Samson*. The real danger that Poles faced for helping Jews had also been explored on a number of occasions. *Manhunter* said nothing new in fact, the film avoids asking deep philosophical questions, as *The Passenger* had done just a year earlier. In *Film* magazine Jerzy Płażewski claimed that the subject of the occupation in Polish cinema had gone through three distinct phases by the time *Manhunter* was released. The first, he argued, was a descriptive period, characterised by *The Last Stage* and *Unvanquished City*. The second, opened up ardent discussion, particularly about ideas of traditional honour and heroic sacrifice, like *Kanal* and *Eroica*. Płażewski, however, noted that several films had been made which attempted some psychological analysis, and used the war as an excuse to describe more effectively characters and their motivation. Płażewski concluded that *Manhunter*, with its authentic description of events driving the narrative, fell into the first category.⁹⁰ Instead of raising important questions, *Manhunter* makes a strong visual statement, highlighting in a very visceral way what the Nazis thought of the Jews, considering them as nothing more than vermin, that can be chased for sport. The hunting scene is particularly brutal and haunting, and should be considered an iconic moment of Holocaust cinema. Like so many Polish Holocaust films, however, the central focus of the story was not just the plight of the Jews, but also the impact their presence had on Michał's life. Ewa Petelska claimed that the movie was about the way in which people make difficult decisions at times of great stress.⁹¹ This assessment refers to the Polish characters, rather than the Jewish ones. The Petelskis made the interesting decision not to provide subtitles for the Hungarian dialogue, so the audience, just like Michał, are unable to understand the Jews. It is not clear from existing documents why the Petelskis chose to have the Jews come from Hungary rather than Poland. The most likely explanation is that the directors felt, given the mass deportation of Hungarian Jews in

⁹⁰ Jerzy Płażewski, 'Historia pewnego polowania', *Film*, (19 January 1964)

⁹¹ FN, A-216 poz. 4 'Protokół z kolaudacji filmu pt. Naganiacz w dniu 29.VI.1963 r.'

1944, that they were the most likely nationality to be found hiding. It is also possible that they did not choose Polish Jews to steer very clear of the subject of Polish Jews hiding in the countryside, given that, as Jan Grabowski shows, Poles sometimes helped the German police search for Jewish refugees who escaped from the liquidation of ghettos and hid in the countryside.⁹² This means that it is difficult for viewers to get to know them, and we are told very little about them, whereas Michał is a fully fleshed out protagonist. At outset, the Petelskis explain he fought in the Warsaw Uprising, and now wishes to just live out the war quietly. This was a familiar story that the Polish audience empathised with.

Piotr Zwierzchowski argues that *Manhunter* is characteristic of the 1960s, portrayals of Polish-Jewish relations, showing a desire by the Poles to help the Jews, but at the same time removing the Poles from any responsibility for their fate.⁹³ In many ways *Manhunter* was representative of Holocaust scholarship from the time of its release. The story shows Poles helping Jews, despite the potential dangers. The film's end even shows Jaworek being shot as he tries to help a Jewish child. As discussed in previous chapters, by the mid 1960s, Jewish victimhood had been subsumed into a wider Polish one, and *Manhunter* perpetuates this. Along with an ideologically correct image of the Holocaust, the Petelskis also managed to shoehorn the Red Army into the movie as the saviours of the village. They were not included in Bratny's original short story. Krzysztof Kornacki notes that in *Manhunter* the scene incorporating the Red Army was added at the last minute. It was not in the script nor the storyboard; therefore, Kornacki posits that the decision must have been driven by a true desire to include the Soviets in the film.⁹⁴ During the Film Assessment Commission for the television series *Last Day, First Day*, Ewa Petelska stated that Soviet soldiers were genuine heroes and representatives of the world's

⁹² Jan Grabowski, *Hunt For The Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Bloomington, 2013), p.8

⁹³ Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.60

⁹⁴ Kornacki, 'Ewa i Czesław Petelscy', p.44-5

most beautiful army.⁹⁵ Kornacki, therefore, may be correct; there is certainly no evidence to suggest the authorities pressured the Petelskis to make the addition.

Manhunter was well received at the Final Assessment Commission meeting held on 29 July 1963. It was praised by a number of the filmmakers present: Jerzy Kawalerowicz described it as a ‘terrifying and moving experience’ and went as far as to suggest it was the best film the Petelskis had made to date. Jerzy Bossak claimed that it served ‘as a reminder and a warning’, while Jan Rybkowski stated that *Manhunter* was a film loaded with emotions. Rybkowski further argued that *Manhunter* captured the wartime atmosphere by demonstrating the reluctance to help Jews because Poles were putting their own lives in danger. It is unsurprising how complimentary those present were towards *Manhunter*, given Petelskis’ status within the Polish film industry, but many of the positive comments came from their fellow directors, rather than party functionaries. This gives a better indication of the perceived quality of the movie by those who were best qualified to judge its merits. Kawalerowicz, Bossak and Rybkowski were not wrong in their assessments: *Manhunter* was the most powerful work the Petelskis had created so far and recreated the mood of the time.⁹⁶

Press reaction to *Manhunter* was lukewarm: it certainly did not reflect Film Assessment Commission’s enthusiasm. Kazimierz Kochański wrote that *Manhunter* would long remain in the audience’s memory thanks to the tragic hunting scene which defined the nature of fascism, showing the desperate situation of those doomed to total extermination as well as the tragic fate of the civilians of a defeated nation.⁹⁷ Kochański also claimed, however, that *Manhunter* contained ‘cheap optimism’ and was inconsistent in its quality.⁹⁸ Stanisław Grzelecki agreed

⁹⁵ *ibid*

⁹⁶ ‘Protokół z kolaudacji filmu pt. *Naganiacz*’

⁹⁷ Kazimierz Kochanski, ‘Naganiacz’, *Tygodnik Kulturalny*, (26 January 1964)

⁹⁸ *ibid*

on the film's significant visual impact arguing it resembled a nightmare.⁹⁹ Grzelecki also claimed that it was clear that the audience was watching an image of the truth, the unbearable climate of forced passivity and helplessness that characterised the occupation of Poland. For Grzelecki, however, the film had a major weakness: rather than focusing on the vision of Nazi cruelty and the victim's vulnerability, which Grzelecki saw as the important meaning of the film, the Petelskis made the error of giving *Manhunter* a positive message, that out of the defeat of war came a nation that had saved human dignity and moral strength.¹⁰⁰ Only *Trybuna Ludu* offered an overwhelmingly positive analysis of *Manhunter*. Zbigniew Klaczyński stated that it was an outstanding film that showed the indivisibility of human rights, by making it clear that no group could be targeted without it affecting the overall moral structure of societies.¹⁰¹ *Manhunter* is another example of a film that was received well by the party functionaries and yet was not universally praised by the press. This further suggests that the PZPR were not able to fully exert control over critics.

Manhunter recycles some recurring themes from Holocaust cinema: the images of Jews hiding, reliant on others to protect and assist them; as well as sadistic German functionaries taking pleasure in mass murder. The image of a wartime Pole who was reluctant to help the Jews was a more realistic depiction of the relationship between the two groups. The final scene is very memorable: it does not go to extreme lengths to be shocking, but by showing Jews being treated with less reverence than animals deserves to be a more recognised image of Holocaust cinema.

Red Rowan

Jarzębina czerwona (Red Rowan) was released on 17 January 1970, to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Warsaw. It was based on Waldemar Kotowicz's novel

⁹⁹ Stanisław Grzelecki, 'Naganiacz?', *Życie Warszawy*, (14 January 1964)

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

¹⁰¹ Zbigniew Klaczyński, 'Opowieść z mroku', *Trybuna Ludu*, (12 January 1964)

Frontowe drogi (Front Roads); Kotowicz also wrote the screenplay. *Red Rowan* was produced by the Film Unit Iluzjon, of which Czesław Petelski was artistic director and shared a historical consultant, Stanisław Komornicki, with *Heading for Berlin* and *The Last Days*. The movie won the Award of the Minister of National Defence and was very well received by audiences and critics alike. *Red Rowan*, for the first time, showed the battle of Kołobrzeg, one of the most intense city battles for Polish Army during the Second World War, with an estimated one thousand two hundred killed or missing and three thousand wounded.

Red Rowan follows the Polish 1st Army as they took part in the battle of Kołobrzeg in March 1945. The title Rowan (Jarzębina) is a codename given to a specific company and the central characters are Wiktor, a young officer who is a veteran of the Battle of Lenino and his friend Lieutenant Kręcki. After the platoon's commander is killed Wiktor takes on his role. The storyline is dominated by fighting rather than personal stories. There are just enough quiet moments, however, to draw the audience in and build empathy for the soldiers. The battle is fierce and there are several losses but eventually the Polish Army breaks through to the sea. In a moment of pure joy, they all run to the water and plant a Polish flag, but Kręcki is not with them: he has been killed in the last moments of the fighting.

Waldemar Kotowicz fought in the Peasant Battalions and then joined the Polish Army and fought on the front from Wrocław into Germany, experiences that were put into this novel *Front Road*. From 1948 he was a member of the PZPR and like the Petelskis was a committed communist.¹⁰² Kotowitz, along with writing *Front Road* and the screenplay of *Red Rowan*, also contributed to the popular series *Biblioteka Żółtego Tygrysa (Library of Golden Tiger)*, which was published between 1957 and 1989, by the Ministry of Defence. These volumes showed the reader the events of the Second World War in accordance with the view of the state

¹⁰² Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.172

authorities and, above all, the Army. It was an important piece of communist propaganda, aimed particularly at young people.¹⁰³ As Tomasz Strzyżewski states: ‘The ideology presented in the series is simplified, consolidating the type of knowledge contained in school textbooks.’¹⁰⁴ Just as they had with *Sergeant Kaleń* the Petelskis used a novel popular with the regime and semi-autobiographical, although this was the first time they had a writer adapt their own work. Both the Petelskis and Passendorfer relied heavily on literature and there was an abundance of pro-regime novels to choose from in the 1950s and 1960s, many of which, such as *Battle Colours* and *Moonlight in the Bieszczady* were compulsory reading in schools meaning that their ideas and themes were already familiar to young people.

Red Rowan is the most ideologically correct film the Petelskis made during this period. It containing several elements of the PZPR’s narrative of the Second World War. There are friendly interactions between the Polish and Red Armies, who are clearly shown as defenders against German barbarism, however, the Soviet soldiers’ battle roles are played down. It gives the impression that the victory was almost exclusively Polish, which is not too far from the truth, as by the end of the fighting on 17 March it was mostly Polish forces taking part. The Petelskis praised the military might of the Polish troops arriving from the East, showing them fighting their way towards Berlin, well equipped, smartly dressed and marching to triumph. Another striking feature of *Red Rowan* is its very strong anti-German sentiment, with several moments where the German Army is shown in an excessively negative light. While a Polish nurse takes pity on a Nazi soldier, and runs out into the gunfire to try and save him, the Germans are shown heading into a Polish hospital, weapons drawn. The audience is left to guess what happened next. As the Polish soldiers call on German civilians to surrender, and women and children emerge, German snipers are shown gunning down their own people. Their conduct is

¹⁰³ *ibid*

¹⁰⁴ Tomasz Strzyżewski, *Wielka księga cenzury PRL w dokumentach* (Warsaw, 2015), p.91

starkly contrasted with the compassion and heroism shown by the Polish characters. The treatment of the Germans in *Red Rowan* is almost cliché, with ominous music playing as they enter the hospital, and they are portrayed as either sinister, dazed or vaguely comical, which is in line with Gomułka's use of anti-German rhetoric to confirm his own legitimacy.¹⁰⁵

At the time of production there were several references made to *Red Rowan's* educational value. Ewa Petelska claimed that *Red Rowan* was addressed to everyone, but particularly young people, who wanted to relive or experience the difficult war days of their fathers and brothers.¹⁰⁶ During the Film Assessment Commission meeting, the Minister of Culture Wiśniewski, who was chairing the meeting, stated that it was important to show the contemporary generation not just the blood spilled during the war, but also the political and social changes in Poland, something that he claimed *Red Rowan* did.¹⁰⁷ Focusing on the youth was important for filmmakers and the government, because they had no direct involvement in the conflict, and so were easier to influence. Wiśniewski's comments also show the regime considered film as an important way of disseminating their vision of the war to a new cohort, to then be passed down. To drive home that *Red Rowan* presented an accurate picture of the Battle of Kołobrzeg, and therefore could be taken as the correct image of the war, there were references to its authenticity both at the Film Assessment and in the pro-regime press. Ewa Nurczyńska, for example, in *Odgłosy*, claimed that *Red Rowan* showed images that did not feel staged, and that there were moments that were almost like a documentary.¹⁰⁸ At the Film Assessment meeting Wincenty Kraśko argued *Red Rowan* showed war as the 'hell it was.'¹⁰⁹ Claims that war films were faithful recreations of the events they portrayed were common, but they were particularly prevalent in regard to *Red Rowan*. Using the Battle of Kołobrzeg to

¹⁰⁵ Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD*, p.168

¹⁰⁶ Aleksander Jackiewicz, 'Kroniki wojenne', *Życie Literackie*, (25 January 1970)

¹⁰⁷ FN A-344 poz. 469, 'Stenogram z posiedzenia Komisji Kolaudacyjnej w dniu 29.IX.69 r.'

¹⁰⁸ Ewa Nurczyńska, 'O filmach dobrze i źle', *Odgłosy*, (1 February 1970)

¹⁰⁹ 'Stenogram z posiedzenia Komisji Kolaudacyjnej w dniu 29.IX.69 r.'

show a great German defeat, however, was disingenuous, as they had evacuated most of the defenders and civilians, which rather negates assertions that *Red Rowan* was a truthful depiction of the battle.

It comes as no surprise that *Red Rowan* was very well received at the Film Assessment Commission. There was a very heavy Party presence at the meeting, with the Petelskis and Wanda Jakubowska the only filmmakers. Praise for *Red Rowan* was hyperbolic, with everyone present admiring every aspect of the movie. The film critic Janusz Gazda was effusive, stating that not enough words had been said to commend the huge efforts made in reconstructing the battle of Kołobrzeg and that there had been no other recreation like it in Polish cinema. Gazda went further and claimed that *Red Rowan* not only perfectly showed conditions for soldiers, but also had a poetic tone. The only criticism was the film's length. Petelski defended his choices and pointed out that *The Longest Day* was 4,200m of film and yet was still very popular with audiences, and that removing any sections of *Red Rowan* would be to its detriment.¹¹⁰ It is interesting that Petelski clearly liked to compare his work to those produced in Hollywood and Western Europe, despite his suggestions otherwise.

This high level of praise was unsurprisingly reflected in the press and the Petelskis came off very favourably in comparisons with Passendorfer. Reviewers Jacek Fuksiewicz, Stanisław Grzelecki, Konrad Eberhardt and Aleksander Jackiewicz all noted that *Red Rowan* represented the battle epic genre, with its lack of personal stories and central character, but stated it as fact, rather than as a major flaw, although all suggested that the film could benefit from a more private angle. Eberhardt argued that while the battles were superbly executed, they faded into a rather monotonous string but concluded that *Red Rowan* was a great reconstruction of the battle of Kołobrzeg and that he expected it would be as popular as Różewicz's *Westerplatte*.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ 'Stenogram z posiedzenia Komisji Kolaudacyjnej w dniu 29.IX.69 r.'

¹¹¹ Konrad Eberhardt, 'Siła faktów, słabość literatury', *Ekran*, (25 January 1970)

Aleksander Jackiewicz wrote that, although you need to have heroes in war movies, *Red Rowan* was a step forward from Passendorfer's films and that the Petelskis managed to show a great collective effort; the next step would be to fill this community with people.¹¹² The reviewers' general consensus was that *Red Rowan* was an accurate portrayal of the battle of Kołobrzeg that did not sugar coat the huge sacrifice required by Polish troops and accurately captured the atmosphere of the time. That reviewers did pick up on one of the key flaws of such a regime favourite film, is further evidence that there was some freedom in the press reporting of cinema.

Red Rowan contained many of the elements that set the Petelskis' work apart from other films in the battle epic genre. It contained a greater human story, which made it more compelling to viewers than Passendorfer's work, and had some very impressive cinematography that was a hallmark of their films. This ending of *Red Rowan* was reminiscent of both *Sergeant Kaleń* and *Manhunter* where the protagonists dreaming of a quiet life after the war were never able to fulfil their dreams. *Red Rowan* was, on the whole, more subtle propaganda: the Petelskis showed a great victory, but also how difficult it was to achieve. As a result, *Red Rowan* has greater depth than Passendorfer's battle epics.

Conclusion

Most discussion of the Petelskis focuses on how their war films propagated the myths the PZPR developed to legitimise their authority. This focus, however, somewhat does them a disservice, as they were more varied and nuanced than just regime mouthpieces. Like so many of their contemporaries, the Petelskis used elements of their own experiences in their movies. With the key theme of their pieces being a concerted effort to create a positive image of the Red Army, and emphasise the significant benefits of Polish-Soviet co-operation. As shown in this chapter there is strong evidence to suggest this was due to their own respect and gratitude

¹¹² Aleksander Jackiewicz, 'Kroniki wojenne', *Życie Literackie*, (25 January 1970)

towards the Soviet Army. Czesław and Ewa followed the same pattern as the majority of their colleagues and created the image of the Second World War that they wanted to. They were able to do this, for the most part, while following the guidelines set out by the 1960 Resolution, and because they were Party members.

Jerzy Passendorfer is an unusual case among contemporaneous Polish directors, as he was very guarded about his wartime experiences. It is clear, however, that the conflict impacted him, as he was fixated on issues of war and occupation. Unlike most of his colleagues, Passendorfer showed heroism as a positive phenomenon, that did not always have to lead to a tragic death. He recognised that making battle epics, with upbeat images of Polish escapades was a way to draw in viewers, and make his work appealing to wider audiences which aligned with government ideas. Passendorfer created a place for himself in Polish cinema. No other director was so loved by the Gomułka regime.

As pieces of art, the battle epics made by Passendorfer and the Petelskis did not measure up to the works of the Polish School, or their Western and Soviet equivalents. As such, their appeal to current audiences is negligible and they have little resonance with international viewers. Passendorfer's work, however, does show that Gomułka's regime did try to seize on the broad appeal of cinema, and used it, in a limited way, to perpetuate the idea of the Second World War as the founding myth of People's Poland. The Home Army and Polish forces' role in the West were played down, putting the focus on the People's Army, thereby attempting to shift collective memory of the war in a more ideologically acceptable direction. This, however, once again highlights the lack of influence that the PZPR had over the portrayal of the conflict in cinema. Both Passendorfer, the only director who faithfully stuck to this particular interpretation, and Czesław Petelski were heads of film units, and yet they were able to produce no protégés.

New Memory cinema was necessary because the Polish School had so successfully created their own images of the Second World War. There were no films being made that confirmed a glorious victory in co-operation with their Soviet friends. This had to be created from nowhere once Gomułka had consolidated his position, and in the face of his battle with Moczar. Only Passendorfer did this faithfully. The PZPR were not able to persuade Polish School directors to take up the cause, and they continued to question the dominant narrative, and encouraged audiences to confront their own uncomfortable experiences. The only shift was that they did it with greater frequency than they had done in the 1950s.

Conclusion

This thesis has analysed the complex relationship between the central government and filmmakers and the significant number of factors that influenced the portrayal of the Second World War onscreen between 1945 and 1970. It has explored the structure of the film industry, and the impact of decentralisation and the film units on production, in particular, this gave some level of independence to directors during this period. It has looked at the diverse picture of the Second World War that emerged from cinema, and the many different questions that were raised and viewpoints provided.

Findings and Summary

This thesis sought to answer three key questions: how the structure of the film industry impacted the relationship between the central government and filmmakers; what images of the Second World War were being portrayed onscreen; and what factors influenced directorial decisions. It is clear the decentralisation of the film industry into the unit system, had a profound impact on the development of cinema in Poland, and thus the portrayal of the Second World War.

Structure of the film industry

Decentralisation of the film industry, had a major impact on the development of cinema in Poland. The film units fostered a sense of community and collaboration, that placed artistic merit above ideology. Their heads not only provided mentorship to their younger colleagues, but also some protection from the worst excesses of censorship. There are countless examples of, particularly literary directors, coming to the defence of directors at Script and Film Assessment meetings. These tight knit groups made it more difficult for the PZPR to infiltrate the units that were not led by loyal party members. It also meant that there was little incentive

for filmmakers to join the PZPR, because they were able to find work regardless. This was significant for the image of the Second World War that was presented by directors, as the PZPR failed to develop a pool of filmmakers that were willing to advance the mythology of the war they developed. While the units were overseen by the Main Office of Cinematography, and there was a cultural section of the KC PZPR, in which they discussed matters of cinema, in reality they had very little to do with the day to day running of the film industry. There were spaces reserved at the Script and Film Assessment Commission meetings for members of the KC PZPR, but as this thesis has shown, when it came to war films, they did not successfully effect any desired changes either at script level, or to a finished product. The majority of the units judged artistry over ideology when deciding which films to put into production, which meant this is what directors had to take into account.

Another key feature of the film industry in Poland, which contributed to its very particular development, and gave directors a somewhat elevated status, is the fact that they were involved with the rebuilding of production right from the very beginning. A number of them returned to Poland with the Red Army, as part of the Czołówka film unit, and were, therefore, part of the structures of power from 1944. Ford, Bossak, and others were instrumental in nationalisation, and were responsible for the running of Film Polski in its early years, making the operating decisions. Jakubowska and Ford pushed for the establishment of the early prototype of the film units, and were vocal in their criticism when they disbanded. This gave directors a place at the decision-making table and a say in how cinema was run, and valuable organisational experience. Although directors were somewhat side lined during the Stalinist period, they returned to key positions in 1955 as heads of the units.

The organisation of the film industry in Poland had to be a delicate balance. The 1949 Wisła Conference concluded that cinema had not been fulfilling its propaganda role, and there had not been enough films that met the PZPR's ideological requirements. As a result, socialist

realism was enforced and the organisation placed in the hands of the central authorities. This, however, almost completely stalled film production. The decision to create the film units was, in part, designed to reinvigorate the industry as there were concerns about what movies would fill the void left by the lack of domestic products. Audiences were not rushing to watch Soviet productions, and as such there was concern among the KC PZPR that Western cinema would move in. This also meant that there was a strong incentive to try and create an environment that encouraged directors to stay in Poland, rather than attempting to emigrate. This may go some way to explaining why directors were allowed a certain amount of leeway, as long as they did not push the boundaries too far.

The lack of professional scriptwriters during this period meant that it was often directors who approached writers to create screenplays for them. In some cases, such as Konwicki with Kadr, the literary directors of the units facilitated working relationships between authors and filmmakers, but the evidence gathered for this thesis shows that overwhelmingly directors were responsible for choosing their own projects and making the decision of what topics they wished to cover. This came as a direct result of the way the film industry was structured.

The image of war

This thesis has shown that Polish cinema presented a very diverse picture of the Second World War between 1945 and 1970. Directors chose a wide variety of stories, that showed the conflict from a number of different viewpoints. The vast majority of movies showed Poland as a defeated nation, rather than a victorious one, highlighting both the physical and psychological destruction that took place. This reflected the contemporary political reality of Poland as a Soviet satellite state. It was, however, largely portrayed as a noble defeat. There were also filmmakers who chose to focus on Poland's contribution to the Allied victory, and showed the Polish Army marching towards Berlin. While movies about the war may have raised questions

about the conduct of those making the military decisions, they were always careful never to question those fighting. There may have been those directors that tried to show soldiers as ordinary men, not legends, but this was not intended as criticism.

In the 19th century, the romantic Polish nationalists viewed their past, present and future as conscious martyrdom, not only for the cause of Poland, but also Europe. They understood Polish history as a series of sacrificial uprisings and battles against any power that would conquer her people. Mickiewicz wrote; ‘As the Resurrection of Christ has ended blood sacrifices on earth, so the resurrection of the Polish nation will terminate wars in Christendom’.¹ The Romantic notions of martyrdom and heroism were particularly active in memory of the Second World War. Poles saw themselves as the war’s first official victims, laid on the altar to be slaughtered as they fought against two totalitarianisms. They were the purest and noblest of heroes as the only nation which did not collaborate or formally surrender.² On the whole, Polish war cinema of this period questioned this narrative. It is true to say that Wajda, like Norwid before him, used religious symbolism and iconography in his work, but also leaves viewers questioning what dying for a doomed cause really achieves. As previously discussed, this was a key theme of the Polish School. Directors like Różewicz and Kutz also quietly rewrote the war as a story of regular Poles, soldiers and citizens simply doing their duty and attempting to survive. This was an attempt to present the war in a way that was more representative of the experiences of ordinary people. The films of the Polish School, in particular, did not shy away from showing events in Poland as tragic, but tried to provide a different explanation than it was an inevitability of Polish history. The more nationalist communist films also adjusted the narrative, showing glorious victory, and showing acts of heroism that ended in success rather than failure.

¹ Eile, *Literature and Nationalism*, p.56

² Orla-Bukowska, ‘New Threads in an Old Loom’, p.179

On a number of occasions films opened up debate on topics for the first time, or showed events that had previously not been debated in the public sphere. Movies about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Warsaw Uprising, allowed for discussion about these key moments, and raised a number of questions that had not previously been asked. Ford, Wajda and Munk, made attempts to remove some of the stereotypes that existed and paint a picture that was more representative of the realities. That is not to say, however, that they were always successful. On the whole, the press reaction helped to facilitate these debates, by providing differing interpretations, which gave audiences a range of perspectives. Cinema was instrumental in counteracting the Stalinist propaganda that had developed in the early years after the war: this was particularly noticeable in relation to the September Campaign and the Warsaw Uprising. War films also sometimes asked difficult questions, and encouraged audiences to reflect on their own experiences and conduct. This was not always welcomed, but it shows that filmmakers were willing to touch on uncomfortable subjects and try to provide some kind of cultural working through of difficult events.

Although one of the founding myths of the People's Republic under Gomułka was that of national unity, this was not always the impression that was given by cinema. Films made during this period acknowledged that there were ideological differences in both Polish society and the various underground units, and showed that these different groups were not always working towards the same goal. In some cases, any organisation that did not share the same political views was shown to be as much an enemy as the Germans. Even *Battle Colours*, which showed a number of partisan units fighting together, portrayed the NSZ as the enemy. In other instances, when the film centred around one particular group, the contribution, however minor, of other participants was entirely ignored. Far from showing a united Poland, this instead suggested a nation that could not work together due to political divisions.

The topic of the Holocaust, Polish-Jewish relations and the concentration camp universe was a very complex one, and this was reflected in cinema. Movies about the camps were almost always told from the perspective of Polish political prisoners, and in every case the murder of the Jews went on in the background. Jewish deaths, however, were not seen as less important and having Polish characters that survived showed that it was only Jews who were routinely sent to the gas chambers. Film did not shy away from difficult and painful topics, but Polish-Jewish relations, and how some Poles benefitted from the deportation of their Jewish neighbours, were not examined in depth. There were references to Polish antisemitism, and Munk made some effort to show it as a more widespread phenomenon; but no other directors made similar observations. However, a consistent theme ran through all the movies about the concentration camps, and that was one of prisoner solidarity. Contrary to the writings of Borowski, Munk and Jakubowska, in particular, showed inmates banding together against the camp guards, and being willing to sacrifice themselves to protect each other.

There was one topic that was not touched upon at all in Polish cinema during this period: the Soviet invasion and occupation of Poland, and their subsequent crimes against Polish people. These were not even alluded to. Only the fact that the Red Army stood by and watched the Warsaw Uprising be crushed was referred to in cinema. This meant that the experiences of a whole group of Poles were effectively erased from the cinematic landscape. The other subject that was generally avoided was the contribution of Polish forces in the West, although there were some mentions of it. The most notable was the use of the song *The Poppies on Monte Cassino*, in *Ashes and Diamonds*. The vast majority of movies made during this period were set either in the General Government or areas annexed by the Reich, meaning that the picture of the war presented between 1945 and 1970 was very much the fight for Poland: its territory and the people living on it.

The diverse picture of the war that emerged during this period, with many subjects covered, and different conclusions drawn, and the fact that press reviews rarely agreed, shows that numerous different narratives of the war available in the public sphere at this time. There was, as Joanna Wawrzyniak very definitely identifies, an official narrative of the Second World War, that created a number of myths about the conflict, designed to legitimise communist rule, but it was by no means the only account.³ This thesis has shown that the fact that these films were released without significant changes, and that the PZPR did not use the press to push their own analysis of the movies, reveals that there was a much wider range of topics and interpretations that were permissible to be shown in public than has previously been suggested. At times, such as with *Kanal* and *Ashes and Diamonds*, party members within the film industry and in the hierarchy of the Ministry of Culture and Main Office of Cinematography, put up a fight against the way in which the war was being presented, but on other occasions, there was little, or no objection to movies that provided another point of view. As Zwierzchowski argues, the authorities did not intend for filmmakers to create an alternative image of the war,⁴ but the evidence gathered in this thesis shows that they did not work exceptionally hard to stop it happening.

Factors that influenced the content and release of war films

This thesis has shown the impact of the experiences of individual directors on their portrayal of the Second World War. While it was not the only factor that influenced filmmakers, it is clear that a number of them turned to stories that they recognised from their own lives, or with a message that matched with their own philosophy. Each director had a distinctive story to

³ Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD*, p.105

⁴ Zwierzchowski, *Kino nowej pamięci*, p.324

tell, often shaped by their own experiences. Consequently, often despite the political changes that took place throughout the period, a director's view of the war rarely altered. Several filmmakers studied in this thesis had careers spanning decades; they made war films throughout, and yet there was very little deviation from their central theses: their styles simply matured. Although every director making movies about the Second World War in Poland between 1945 and 1970 had been involved in the conflict in some way, the impact of this has been systematically investigated. At no point before, or since, has a topic been so personal to those who chose to make films about it. Commentaries on trauma and cinema propose that trauma films have the potential to provide a 'cultural working through' of traumatic memories, that might enable some remembrance of events that, due to their shocking nature, have left only scars rather than memories.⁵ This analysis is primarily about audiences, but it is clear that it applies to some filmmakers from this period as well, as Stanisław Różewicz explicitly stated, the war never truly left him.⁶ This theory, and their personal involvement in the war, is a significant explanation as to why certain directors returned to the topic time and time again. For those filmmakers that began their careers post 1945, the war had been the defining moment of their lives, and as shown in this thesis, this stayed with the directors for the rest of their lives. While the wider public may not have gained any comfort from the cultural working through of painful memories, for filmmakers, their work provided an outlet for their experiences.

Analysis of the existing Script and Film Assessment Commission minutes has shown that on several occasions, the party members who were not part of the film community had real concerns about the movies they were discussing. In some cases, this went as far as suggesting changes. What this thesis has also concluded, however, is that in almost every case the director was able to withstand any pressure and defend their work. There was real concern that films

⁵ Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema and Memory', in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (eds), *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York, 2010), p.334

⁶ Banaszkievicz, 'Nie lubię krzyżeć'

such as *Kanal* and *Ashes and Diamonds* would be subversive, and yet they were released unchanged. There were occasions where changes were made, the most notable example being *Border Street*; but Ford's message remained although it may have been diluted somewhat. This may be another example of compromises that the PZPR made to keep directors in Poland, and promote the idea that artistic expression was permitted, up to a point.

The sense of community that was created within the film units meant that strong relationships developed: directors were able to use their connections to help get their films released. This meant gaining cultural figures' support who were also PZPR members, who were then able to petition others to provide their backing. A notable example of someone who was always willing to use his position to help others was Tadeusz Konwicki. His name came up time and time again in Script and Film Assessment Meetings. In his role as literary director of the Kadr he regularly defended directors from the unit, but he could also be found praising the work of other filmmakers, and disagreeing with those who argued for changes to films. While it is difficult to quantify the impact that Konwicki's actions had on film production, there were very few changes ever made to war films, which would suggest that his words had some resonance. There were others who were also willing to stand up for certain movies, including Jerzy Andrzejewski, Wanda Wasilewska and Leonard Borkowicz. Having allies who were members of the PZPR, and were in favour with the party leadership, undoubtedly helped some directors smooth the path to their films being released. In many ways, the film units can be viewed as similar to the networks of professors that John Connelly identifies in his work.⁷

The PZPR were aware of the propaganda power of cinema, and yet when it came to the Second World War, they were only partially able to harness it. While there were directors who propagated Gomułka's nationalist communist myths about the conflict, they were in the

⁷ Connelly, *Captive University*, p.165

minority. While the 1960 Resolution encouraged the development of ‘new memory cinema’, it did not stop other filmmakers from continuing to make their own judgments and arguments about the conflict. These directors did not directly counteract the PZPR mythology, but they did provide an alternative narrative, giving viewers a wider ranging perspective on the conflict.

Analysis of the way films were reviewed in the media provide an interesting insight into the degree to which there was press freedom. Prior to 1953 reviews of movies were fairly standardised, and documents surrounding *Border Street* show that the government intended to control the way it was covered in the press, and to promote their own interpretation of the film. Post 1956, however, what becomes noticeable is the fact that there was a great deal of diversity of opinion when it came to cinema. It was very rare to find a movie that was viewed in the same way by every critic, and there were often extremely divergent opinions. This was true of almost all war movies, whether they be those that had raised concerns at Film Assessment Commissions, or those that were based on pro regime literature. It was even unusual for the KC PZPR to try and push their own interpretation of the film through newspapers and magazines. This was put forward as an idea at the Film Assessment Commission meeting for *Westerplatte*, but an analysis of the articles written about *Westerplatte* shows that in fact, viewers were not told how to interpret the movie. This would suggest that the PZPR were willing to allow debates about cinema in the press, and that they also did not use targeted attacks in the press as a way to discredit movies that addressed sensitive issues and asked difficult questions.

Other findings

John Connelly states that the general view in Poland is that the intelligentsia was supportive of the communist regime, and that they were enticed either by ideology or opportunism.⁸ He then

⁸ Connelly, *Captive University*, p.12

proceeds to argue that Polish university professors stood firm in their opposition to communism.⁹ He attributes this to several factors, but the most significant is that they were a cohesive group, which stemmed from their strong sense of identity, and that during the war they had been forced underground, and developed a whole network of conspiratorial activities, designed to defend 'Polishness' and Polish culture. Communism was seen as yet another attack on Polish identity.¹⁰ As David Tompkins notes, opportunism was a key reason for the early support that musicians gave to the PZPR, as they were given financial incentives and had a desire for recognition.¹¹ Like professors, however, Polish composers also had a sense of solidarity and autonomy after they banded together to weather the Nazi occupation.¹² As a result, the PZPR were never fully able to master the musical realm, and as the majority of composers pushed for increased professional autonomy, by 1956 they had reached near total independence.¹³ Czesław Miłosz wrote in *The Captive Mind*: 'The pressure of the state machine is nothing compared with the pressure of a convincing argument'.¹⁴ This very effectively summed up the reasons why many writers were drawn to communist ideology in the immediate postwar years. Miłosz, himself was one of them, along with Borowski, Andrzejewski and Konwicki, among many others. Like their musician colleagues they were initially happy to co-operate and the PZPR were much more successful in continuing to find authors that were willing to work with them.¹⁵

The relationship between directors and the PZPR was slightly different to all of the other cultural media. They did not form a cohesive group during the war, as there was effectively no industry. The directors who made films in the immediate postwar years had enjoyed limited

⁹ *ibid.* p.73

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Tompkins, *Composing the Party Line*, p.248

¹² *ibid.* p.250

¹³ *ibid.* p.251

¹⁴ Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* (London, 2001), p.12

¹⁵ Bikont and Szczęsna, *Lawina i kamienie*, p.13

careers in the interwar period, and had almost all had communist leanings. When it came to their war films, however, they were not willing to submit to party demands, and felt torn between politics and their own experiences. For the new directors who emerged, moreover, who had often been involved in underground activities during the war, whether it be education or resistance, communism held no appeal. Of all the arts the PZPR gained the least ground in cinema. This is due to the fact that the generation of directors that emerged after the war were able to find a great deal of common ground, and, thanks in large part to the film units, like Polish professors and musicians they formed a tight cluster and were able to work together to carve out a semblance of independence.

As previously stated, the constant fascination with the Second World War exhibited by Polish directors was replicated in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, but not the other countries in East Central Europe. In Czechoslovakia the only aspect of the war that had regular treatment in cinema between 1945 and 1970 was the Holocaust. Peter Hames claims that the portrayal of the Holocaust in postwar Czechoslovakia has unparalleled range and persistence. The subject was revisited far more in Czechoslovakia than Poland, and had more variety.¹⁶ This was particularly noticeable in the 1960s, when several of the most significant works were released. The Holocaust was used in a number of different genres in Czech cinema, including black comedy and horror. There were some similarities to Poland, as Czechoslovak directors, like their Polish counterparts, were in many ways reluctant to look beneath the surface and often made deliberate attempts to universalise the subject. The most famous Czechoslovak Holocaust film, Ján Kadar's *Obchod na korze* (*The Shop on the High Street*, 1965), however, portrayed a grim moral fable, and developed the idea of 'everyday fascism', the small ways in which people in the 'independent' Slovak state during the war inadvertently and unconsciously

¹⁶ Peter Hames, *Czech and Slovak Cinema: Theme and Tradition* (Edinburgh, 2009), p.95

collaborated.¹⁷ Apart from Félix Máriássy's 1955 film *Budapesti tavasz* (*Springtime in Budapest*), all of Hungary's war films came in the 1960s, and there were only a small number. Zoltán Fábri's *Húsz óra* (*Twenty Hours*, 1965); István Szabó's *Apa* (*Father*, 1966) and András Kovács's *Hideg napok* (*Cold Days*, 1966) all invited Hungarian audiences to think and question their own troubled history.¹⁸ These films were much more probing than the Polish films from the same era, but these Hungarian directors had been influenced by Munk and Wajda: the Hungarian participants in the 1957 Cannes Film Festival all saw *Kanal*.¹⁹ This is a reflection of the importance that the Second World War had to Polish national identity, and its political significance as a founding myth of the PRL.

Polish war cinema post 1970

The period 1945 to 1970 was a seminal period of war film production in Poland. At no other time has the Second World War held such significance for society, filmmakers and the central government. A brief analysis of the genre post 1970 shows that there was a substantial reduction in both the quality, and quantity, of movies produced, for a number of different reasons. It took the end of communism, and years of adjustment to being a free enterprise, for Polish movies about the conflict to once again garner international interest and acclaim.

Edward Gierek's ascension to power in 1970 was significant for war film production. The Second World War did not hold the same importance for Gierek as it had for Gomułka, and thus he had no use for it as a subject in cinema. Concurrently, not just in Poland, but throughout the world, television was replacing film as the dominant visual art. While the war was losing its importance for politicians, a whole new generation of filmmakers were starting their career, who had no personal experience of the conflict. Stanisław Różewicz claimed that he advised

¹⁷ *ibid.* p.104

¹⁸ John Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema: from coffee house to multiplex* (London, 2004), p.107

¹⁹ *ibid*

young directors not to make films about the war, because it was harder and harder for them to convey the reality.²⁰ With increasing political unrest through the 1970s and 1980s, debunking myths about the war took second place to exposing the brutality of the communist system. There were few war films of note during this period, and the most significant ones released in the first half of the 1970s. Stanisław Różewicz's 1975 film *Opadły liście z drzew* (*The Leaves Have Fallen*), was described by the director as 'the story of the difficult years of our youth, filled with poverty and fear.'²¹ In 1973 Bohdan Poręba directed *Hubal*, about a legendary figure, Major Dobrzański, known as Hubal, who kept fighting the Germans after the Polish armies were defeated in September 1939, and died in action in the spring of 1940. Andrzej Żuławski's *Trzecia część nocy* (*The Third Part of the Night*, 1972), based on the novel written by the director's father Mirosław Żuławski, is the most memorable piece from this new generation. Its images were shocking, and it was packed with symbolism, but at times *The Third Part of the Night* almost bordered on the kitsch.

As previously discussed, the only topic that had truly been 'off limits' during the communist era was crimes committed by the Soviet Union. This was a painful issue that had left deep wounds, yet in the initial post-communist years there was not the explosion of films on the subject that might be expected. There were, however, a few significant examples of feature films that attempted to reckon with this area of Poland's war history, and most were released in the early 1990s. 1992 saw the first film on the issue of Soviet offences: Robert Gliński's *Wszystko, co najważniejsze* (*All That Really Matters*). Gliński's film was adapted from Ola Watowa's memoirs. Watowa was the wife of Aleksander Wat, a poet and prewar communist. After Wat was arrested by the Soviets in February 1940, Watowa and her son were deported to Kazakhstan. His personal story plays out against an epic about the fate of Polish deportees.²²

²⁰ Różewicz, *Było minęło*, p.125

²¹ *ibid*

²² Haltof, *Polish Cinema. A History*, p.284

Interethnic tensions between Ukrainians and Poles, culminating in the Volhynia Massacre in 1943 were also not explicitly referred to during the communist era, although they were alluded to in *Sergeant Kaleń*, but the Petelskis avoided direct reference to the murder of Poles by the UPA, or reprisals carried out by the AK. It took until 2016, and Wojciech Smarzowski's film *Wołyń (Volhynia)*, for this painful area of history to be explored onscreen, partly because after 1989 the priority was uncovering and depicting Soviet and Stalinist crimes, but also because Poland's relationship with its neighbours was delicate following the breakup of the USSR.²³ It was more important to build bridges than investigate a violent shared past. Smarzowski provided a relatively balanced view of events in Volhynia, showing the way Ukrainians were treated as second class citizens in the interwar period, and that the Home Army took part in revenge attacks. Even so, while some in Ukraine praised *Volhynia*, it has not been released in the country, for fear of causing damage to relations between the two nations.²⁴

The quality of Polish war films fell significantly post 1989 and it was not until the 21st century that the most significant postcommunist movies about the Second World War were produced: one for the controversy it caused in Poland, and three for their artistic merit. Władysław Pasikowski's *Pokłosie (Aftermath, 2012)*, was loosely based on, and inspired by Jan Gross' *Neighbours*. In a brutal confrontation with the past, the Kalina brothers uncover a collectively buried secret: their town's Jews were brutally murdered by the Poles, who then appropriated their land and property. This discovery is so explosive, that one of the brothers is murdered by his angry neighbours. *Aftermath's* direct approach, and the way it showed the vicious reprisals against the Kalinas, provoked enormous criticism, and in some small towns screenings were cancelled due to protests by nationalist politicians and organisations.²⁵ Rather than being anti-

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ *ibid.* p.285

²⁵ Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, *Locked Doors and Hidden Graves Searching the Past in Pokłosie, Sarah's Key and Ida*, in Oleksandr Kobrynsky and Gerd Bayer (eds), *Holocaust Cinema in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 2015), p.150

Polish, Pasikowski aimed to start a therapeutic process of facing the nation's past.²⁶ Andrzej Wajda's *Katyń* (2007); Agnieszka Holland's *W ciemności* (*In Darkness*, 2011) and Paweł Pawlikowski's *Ida* (2013) all not only raised thought-provoking topics, but also garnered attention internationally and were nominated for Academy Awards. The directors represented three generations, where the personal connection to the war became progressively less tangible. Agnieszka Holland was born in 1948; her mother fought in the Warsaw Uprising. Paweł Pawlikowski learned as a teenager that his paternal grandmother was Jewish, and had died at Auschwitz. *Katyń* was, for Wajda, his most important film, and it covered many of the themes that he introduced in his 1950s trilogy. It was the only Polish film about Katyń, until the Polish-British production *Katyń – The Last Witness* (*Katyń – ostatni świadek*, 2018). Holland started her career as an assistant to Wajda, and *In Darkness* contains a nod to *Kanal*, as two of the characters look out longingly through a grate in the sewers. *In Darkness* is, in many ways, a study of human nature, as Holland shows the range of emotions and motivations that come with a life of constant danger, both from a Polish and Jewish perspective. As referred to in the introduction, *Ida* caused some controversy in Poland, because it took a probing look at Polish-Jewish relations. *Ida* became the first Polish film to win the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar. These three films from the 21st century, were the closest in both artistic merit, and significance of subject matter, to the movies of the Polish School.

The war films made between 1945 and 1970 remain some of the most impressive, both thematically and artistically. They show the impact that a personal stake in the subject had on the quality of production. A key feature of the most significant postcommunist movies about the Second World War is that they were, in many ways, deeply personal. Pawlikowski made *Ida*, a film at its core about a young girl questioning who she is, at a time when he had recently returned to the country of his birth, and was rediscovering his own identity. *Katyń* was the film

²⁶ *ibid*

that Wajda spent his whole career wanting to make, and was the realisation of a long-held ambition to tell the wartime story of both his father and mother. Holland's father was Jewish and lost his parents in the Warsaw Ghetto, while her mother received a Righteous Among Nations Medal from Yad Vashem. Holland is at her very best when discussing the tense wartime relationship between Jews and Poles.

During the writing of this thesis, government historical policy in Poland has changed and developed a more nationalist focus. There is increased government intervention in the writing, and public memory of the Second World War, and there are several notable instances. A number of state-supported institutions and organisations have been created to promote this interpretation, including the Polish National Foundation (Polska Fundacja Narodowa), and the Council of Historical Diplomacy (Rada Dyplomacji Historycznej). In commemorating the Warsaw Uprising, the current PiS government have elevated the cursed soldiers (żołnierze wylęci) over Home Army fighters. These 'cursed soldiers' were nationalist partisans who fought the communist state well into the 1950s, and were noteworthy because of their dogged adherence to ideology rather than actual military successes. President Andrzej Duda described them as role models for today's Polish youth. This ignores these soldiers' dubious moral conduct.²⁷ The new Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, designed to show Poland's wartime experience against a broad European background, was criticised for not being patriotic enough. As a consequence, the Ministry of Culture decided to merge it with another museum, which allowed the Ministry to appoint a new director, and change the museum's narrative.²⁸ 24 March 2018 was the first National Day of Remembrance for Poles Rescuing Jews, which

²⁷ 'Wystąpienie prezydenta na uroczystościach pogrzebowych płk. Zygmunta Szendzielarza "Łupaszki"', *prezydent.pl*, (24 April 2016), <http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wystapienia/art.39,wystapienie-prezydenta-na-uroczystosciach-pogrzebowych-plk-zygmunta-szendzielarza-lupaszki.html> (4 March 2018)

²⁸ Julia Szyndzielorz, 'Dispute over "patriotism" delays opening of Gdańsk's new war museum', *The Guardian*, (28 January 2017)

was passed through legislation initiated by Duda. The culmination of this state intervention is PiS's 2018 anti-defamation law on 'The Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation'.

The key passage from the bill stated:

“Whoever accuses, publicly and against the facts, the Polish nation, or the Polish state, of being responsible or complicit in the Nazi crimes committed by the Third German Reich . . . or other crimes against peace and humanity, or war crimes, or otherwise grossly diminishes the actual perpetrators thereof, shall be subject to a fine or a penalty of imprisonment of up to three years.”²⁹

After concerns were raised by the Israeli and United States governments, the law was changed, so that people would no longer face possible fines or imprisonment for using the phrase 'Polish death camps', or suggesting Poland as a nation was complicit in the Holocaust, and any objection to historical inaccuracies and defamation would have to go through civil, and not criminal courts.³⁰ This state reinterpretation of the history of the Second World War, which has been taking place since 2015, and the controversy surrounding the release of *Ida* and government attempts to subvert its message, have once again highlighted the important contribution of culture to historical debates. Perhaps directors and their films are once again to become the bastions of truth in Poland.

²⁹ Patrycja Grzebyk, Amendments of January 2018 of the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Light of International Law, pp.287-301, in XXXVII Polish Yearbook of International Law 2017, (Warsaw, 2018), p.291

³⁰ *ibid*

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Director: Aleksander Ford

Ulica brzoźowa, (Birch Street, 1947)

Director: Wojciech Has

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Director: István Szabó

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Director: René Clément

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Director: Eugeniusz Cękalski

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Director: Andrzej Munk

Budapesti tavasz, (Springtime in Budapest, 1955)

Director: Félix Máriássy

Cien, (Shadow, 1956)

Director: Jerzy Kawalerowicz

Człowiek na torze, (Man on the Tracks, 1956)

Director: Andrzej Munk

Daleká cesta, (The Long Journey, 1949)

Director: Alfréd Radok

Démanty noci, (Diamonds of the Night, 1964)

Director: Jan Němec

Domek z kart, (House of Cards, 1953)

Director: Erwin Axer

**Echo (1964)*

Director: Stanisław Różewicz

**Eroica (1958)*

Director: Andrzej Munk

Giuseppe w Warszawie, (Giuseppe in Warsaw, 1964)

Director: Stanisław Lenartowicz

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Director: András Kovács

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Director: Zoltán Fábri

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**Ludzie z pociągu, (People from the Train, 1961)*

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Director: Jerzy Zarzycki

**Naganiacz, (Manhunter, 1964)*

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Nad Niemnem, (On the Niemen, 1939)

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**Nikt nie woła, (Nobody's Calling, 1960)*

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Obchod na korze, (The Shop on Main Street, 1965)

Director: Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos

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Director: Konrad Wolf

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Director: Guy Hamilton

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Director: John Sturges

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Director: Zbyněk Brynych

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Director: Andrzej Żuławski

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Director: Stanisław Różewicz

**Ulica graniczna, (Border Street, 1949)*

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Wielki tydzień, (Holy Week, 1995)

Director: Andrzej Wajda

**Wolne miasto, (Free City, 1958)*

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Director: Wojciech Smarzowski

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Director: Robert Gliński

Zaduszki, (All Souls Day, 1961)

Director: Tadeusz Konwicki

Zakazane piosenki, (Forbidden Songs, 1946)

Director: Leonard Buczkowski

Zamach, (Answer to Violence, 1959)

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Director: Wanda Jakubowska

Zdradzieckie serce, (Treacherous Heart, 1947)

Director: Jerzy Zarzycki

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