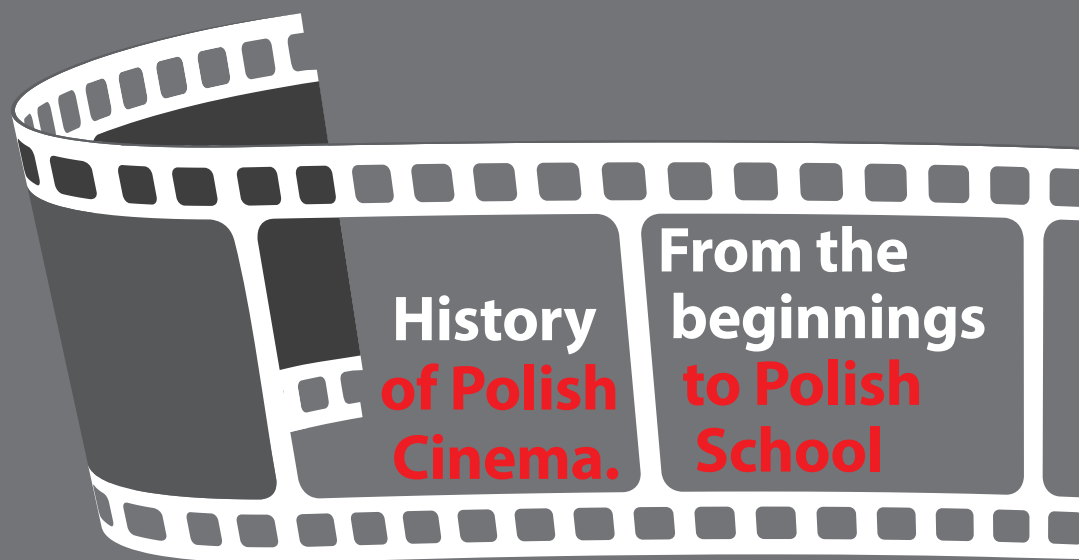


Joanna Preizner



History  
of Polish  
Cinema.

From the  
beginnings  
to Polish  
School



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# Chapter I.

## The beginnings of cinema on Polish lands. 1895-1918

The tale of Polish cinema should start from its beginnings. These cannot be discussed without the context in which Poles watched the first films and created them themselves. The second half of the 19th century was a period when many inventions were made. Thanks to them, the distances began to seem smaller, and the possibilities opening for mankind, but also for the individual human beings - greater. This also applied to contemporary Poland, which was a poor and enslaved country - for over a hundred years it was under annexation; divided and administered by three countries: Russia, Austria and Prussia. However, exactly the same demographic, civilizational, cultural and social changes took place as in Western Europe and in the United States. The population was growing, emancipation movements appeared, more and more people was learning to read and write, and technical achievements were reaching them. Growing number of people also began to consciously seek contact with culture and entertainment, even if it was low culture. Earlier, access to culture was reserved only for a well-born, wealthy and educated recipients - only such people had enough time, opportunities and money to do something more than only earning a living. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, a phenomenon called the "intelligent crowd" appeared (Bronisław Chrzanowski's term).

"Intelligent crowd" is a unified and very undemanding mass of people who were looking for unsophisticated and uncomplicated entertainment. Most often they took part in it collectively, in the company of a large group of other people. They were mainly workers and servants - emigrants from villages to cities. In the city they were looking for work in a rapidly growing industry and services. Here, however, they encountered a completely different life than the one they knew from their homeland, and completely different forms of entertainment. The way they dressed, as well as their behaviour, dreams and aspirations changed. What was unimaginable in the countryside, proved to be available in the city. There were so many of them, that they forced the creation of forms of entertainment addressed exclusively to them. Those were amusement parks, shooting galleries, parades, processions, circus, performances given by street singers and artists, and finally the street organ shows. "Intelligent crowd" was also interested in sport and

was an avid reader of tabloid magazines, dream-books, and illustrated calendars. One of its favourite pastimes were so-called "optical phenomena", like panoramas, photoplasticons or magic lanterns. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the final massification of culture took place on Polish lands.

But in high art, so far addressed to the demanding and educated recipients, there were also changes undergoing. The most important - from the perspective of the history of cinema - was the desire to imitate reality. Very realistic, photo-like illustrations began to appear in the books. In theatrical performances, the actors ate real meals on the stage, and real animals appeared. Finally, we were dealing with the flowering of monumental realistic painting - large, colourful paintings were created, depicting dynamic scenes from mythology, history or literature, in which characters were of life size figures, and the illusion of realism was so strong, that the image appeared to be three-dimensional. Examples of such art can be *Nero's Torches (Pochodnie Nerona, 1876)* by Henryk Siemiardzki and *The Raclawice Panorama (Panorama Raclawicka, 1894)* by Jan Styka and Wojciech Kossak. Photography was also developing very quickly - not only portrait photography, but also landscape and ethnographic. Albums with photographs from distant places began to be published, because people were more and more interested in world and life other than their own. Unable to travel to distant places, they wanted to see what they looked like. From the seventies of the nineteenth century, more and more amateurs began to take photos and document their and their families lives - although of course it was still entertainment for the chosen ones.

In such a situation, a place appeared for the cinematograph, which revolutionized the concept of culture. Until then, we had the dominance of the word culture - to be able to use it, one had to be able to read and understand the content delivered this way (and thus, being intellectually sufficiently capable). The cinematograph started the culture of the image, dominating up to today - to use it, one just need to look. On December 28th, 1895, the brothers August and Louis Lumière, owners of a factory producing photographic plates in Lyon, presented their invention in Paris. They showed 12 short films made mostly in their surroundings. They also made „live images" popular in Europe.

However, the film reached Poland - or rather Polish lands - thanks to Thomas Edison. The Lumière brothers, encouraged by the success of their invention, organized its shows in all major European cities. They also tried to do it in Warsaw, but they did not find anyone to communicate with: the offices issuing the necessary permits were closed, officials did not fulfil their promises. The discouraged Lumières



finally gave up and drove on. Representatives of the Thomas Edison company were apparently more persistent and managed to obtain permission for the show of Kinetoscope (this was the name of his device), which took place on July 18th, 1896, in Warsaw. At that time, several short films shot by Edison's co-workers were shown, but Polish viewers were not delighted with them. The image was flickering and vibrating, and the themes of the films were probably too frivolous for the taste of Polish, quite conservative viewers. In the end, however, it was the invention of the Lumière brothers that was accepted in Poland - the Cinematograph was more perfect than Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope, and the films shot by Lumières and their collaborators mainly depicted true-life and sightseeing scenes.

The first screening of the cinematograph in Poland took place in Cracow on November 14th, 1896 at the Municipal Theater (today's Juliusz Słowacki Theater). A classic set of films was shown then, among others: *Baby's Breakfast*, *Arrival of a Train at a Station*, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*. At first, it was planned that the screenings would last four days only, but the interest was so high, that the films were being screened for two weeks. It is estimated that every eighth inhabitant of Cracow saw the invention of the Lumières then. After this success, the Lumières sent to Cracow subsequent sets of films and each time they were screened longer than it was originally planned. The cinematograph became so popular, that it was presented to the viewers in all major cities of all three annexations by the end of the century.

## **The first Polish inventors and film theoreticians**

When we read the accounts of the first "live images" shows, we notice that almost from the very beginning of this very imperfect invention, it was treated as both entertainment and a source of information about the world. On the one hand, contemporary films showed true-life scenes well known to viewers, but on the other hand, the opportunity to see large, unknown cities, exotic animals and plants, important events and people of power were extremely significant to them.

Bolesław Matuszewski (1856-1943) saw the potential of the new invention as one of the first in the world. He was the son of a French teacher, thanks to that, he mastered French perfectly. He worked professionally for many years as a photographer. In the late 1880s, he emigrated to Paris, where he founded his own photographic atelier. He became acquainted with the invention of the Lumière brothers there. He quickly learned how to use this device and began making

short films himself: reports from political events, medical and ethnographic films. Unfortunately, most of them have not survived to our times.

Most important, however, were not his film "works", but two small books he published in 1898: *Une nouvelle source de l'histoire* (*New source of history*) and *La photographie animée, ce qu'elle est, ce qu'elle doit être* (*Lively photography, what it is, what it should be*). These are the first outlines of film theory in the world. Matuszewski tried to predict the future of "moving images" and suggested ways of using them. He believed that the existence of the film gives extraordinary, because undistorted, possibilities of documenting historical events - he thought that retouching of thousands of frames was not possible, and therefore the film is credible proof of what happened. Today it may seem funny, but Matuszewski was not yet aware of the possibilities that film editing would bring (we ought to remember that when he wrote his brochures, the cinema was only three years old and was technically very imperfect).

Matuszewski also postulated the creation of "cinematographic museums", or film archives - then the films were treated in a very utilitarian way. Worn, scratched tapes were thrown away and that is why today we have so little materials from this period. Matuszewski knew that they were an invaluable document of their time and therefore should be as carefully stored and catalogued as books in libraries. He also believed that the film could be used in teaching at all levels. He also tried to describe the types of documentary films depending on the subject. He did not see cinema as art itself - it certainly wasn't it then. But he was the first theoretician of the film in the world and time has shown that many of his suggestions were valuable and right.

At the same time as the Lumière brothers, many inventors in the world tried to make static photographs alive. There were also Poles among them. The most important one was Kazimierz Prószyński (1875-1945). He graduated from the Polytechnic in Liège, and when he returned to Warsaw with his diploma, he began to build his own cinematographic apparatus. He finished it in 1895 (at the same time as the Lumière brothers tested their invention) and called it a Pleograph. However, he did not patent his device before the authors of the cinematograph. The Pleograph was not as perfect as the cinematograph, although it had a built-in device for moving the film tape. Prószyński began making his first films using the Pleograph - unfortunately none of them survived to the present days. We know them only from descriptions - they were everyday scenes: playing children and a slide in the park.

In 1902, Kazimierz Prószyński founded the Pleograph Share Company in Warsaw - it was the first Polish production company. He also continued making more films, which were divided into two types: news (i.e. news, newsreel) and the first staged, feature films. In 1902, two films (non-existent) were made: *The Return of a Merry Fellow* (*Powrót birbanta*) and *The Cabman's Adventure* (*Przygoda dorożkarza*). In both films played, young at that time, and later one of the greatest Polish actors, Kazimierz Junosza-Stępowski. *The Return of a Merry Fellow* is a story about a young man who returns home after the ball but is so drunk that he cannot reach the tenement's gate alone. The janitor and the cab driver must help him with this. *The Cabman's Adventure* showed a cabman who was being joked of - when the cabman slept in his cab waiting for the client, someone exchanged his horse for a donkey. The cabman woke up and couldn't believe his eyes.

Prószyński was involved in photography and film until the end of his life. He invented several devices in this field: obturator (device that eliminates image shake), aeroscope (first hand-held camera) and the "Eye" camera designed for projection and taking pictures. Until the outbreak of World War II, he tried to get the camera into mass production. He wanted it to be cheap so that everyone could make amateur movies. Unfortunately, this did not happen.

It is also worth remembering the names of Piotr Lebiedziński (1860-1934) and Jan Szczepanik (1872-1926). Piotr Lebiedziński was a photographer, constructor and producer of cameras. Together with brothers Jan and Józef Popławski, he made an attempt to invent a camera and film projector. He probably made his first movies as early as 1895 - there was a dance scene and an erotic movie (!). However, these films have not survived to these days. Apparently, they were of very good quality, but they were made on glass, fragile and heavy plates. So, they had no chance against the light celluloid tape of the Lumière brothers. In turn, Jan Szczepanik was extremely technically talented - he invented about 90 devices from various fields. Among them was also the colour film, which was made in 1899 and was based on exactly the same assumptions as 29 years later the Kodak film. However, the colour tape was much more expensive than black and white, which is why the invention did not take up then.

## **The first Polish cinemas and film screenings**

Probably you have already heard the term "fair cinema", which film historians often use in reference to the first years of cinematography. It is not entirely right

because it has a lot of contempt and disregard. It came from the fact that the first shows of “moving pictures” were often organized at fairs, in tents or rented halls. Often there were terrible conditions – those places were dirty, ugly and crowded. However, the popularity of the film quickly made entrepreneurial people aware of the fact that it is worth investing in places dedicated solely to displaying films.

As the first in Poland brothers Władysław and Antoni Krzemiński came up with it, and in December 1899 they founded the first permanent cinema in Poland. It was called “Illusion Cabinet” and was located in Łódź. As the idea caught on, they started to set up more cinemas - in Łódź and other Polish cities. They also organized traveling cinema shows. They realized that to make money on film, first, one needed to take care of the comfort of the viewers. So, they rented more and more elegant halls, they employed a pianist who was playing during the shows (remember that the films at that time were silent). The film screenings were hosted by a conferencier - there were no Polish films yet, so the Krzemiński family bought films mainly in France. Someone had to translate French subtitles and explain to the viewers what was happening on the screen. All this caused that “moving images” ceased to be perceived as primitive entertainment and started to become an event enthusiastically perceived by the viewers who were willing to pay well for it. So, the brothers went further, and set up more permanent cinemas. In 1903 they founded the first permanent cinema in Warsaw - it was called “Bioskop” and was a very elegant place.

Józef Kleinberger, a Jewish clock dealer, took an interesting place in the history of Cracow cinemas. In the spring of 1906, he tried to organize film screenings “for men only” - or simply speaking - pornographic sessions - at the Royal Hotel near Wawel’s castle. However, the idea was considered an insult to morality and the show was not allowed. A few months later, Kleinberger founded the cinema called “Circus Edison” - it was located at the intersection of Starowiślna and Wielopole streets. However, the repertoire was completely different - Kleinberger provided the most outstanding films made in the world at that time and presented them to the Polish viewers. His cinema existed for several years. Shortly afterwards, the “Wanda” cinema was opened at St. Gertrude Street - it existed for almost a hundred years, and today it houses a supermarket... Around the same time, a beautiful, very elegant and with Art Nouveau interiors, cinema “Uciecha” was opened at Starowiślna Street - where was present for also almost a century. Later our university used it - our first lectures took place there, when our university campus was not ready yet :). The repertoire in these cinemas was changed weekly, and the cinemas

themselves were called movie theatres, as the name “cinema” became widely used only after the First World War.

## **The first Polish films**

If we look back at the history of the first years of cinematography in Poland, we will notice that the first Polish films were made mainly by inventors, fascinated by the possibilities of the Lumière device or similar devices that they themselves constructed: Prószyński, Lebedziński and Matuszewski. This situation lasted up to around 1905. Then there was a few years break, and finally the production started again (around 1907-1909), but this time the films were made by cinema owners. Films imported to Poland from abroad were not enough for them - they were very often badly damaged, they were also in foreign languages, so they had to be translated. So, the cinema owners decided to take matters into their own hands.

The first Polish films are, like all around the world, so-called news - that is current news about important events: visits and meetings of famous people, funerals of famous people (especially the report of the Stanisław Wyspiański's funeral in 1907 was well known), unveiling of monuments, sports competitions, cultural events, disasters, fires, and openings of new buildings. But there is also a second type - the first Polish feature films, meaning staged and script-based stories.

The oldest preserved Polish feature film is *Prussian culture* (1908) produced by the Jewish producer Mordechaj (Mordka) Towbin. Towbin was the owner of the illusion “Siła” (or cinema “Siła” – in means “the strength” in Polish), and in 1911 he founded the company “Siła” - the first company in Poland producing Yiddish films (in Jewish language and for the Jewish audience). *Prussian culture* is a patriotic film based on authentic events from the Prussian Annexation. In 1901-1902, Polish children from a school in Września struck against Germanization and religious education in German, as well as physical punishment. The children were supported by their parents who were punished by Prussian authorities with fines and imprisonment. The film made in the Russian Annexation turned out to be so dangerous that the annexationists forbade showing it on Polish lands. It was taken to France and probably that's why it survived, and in 2000 Polish professors of film science found it in Paris film library.

An important set of films from this period are comedic stories about Antoś, played by Antoni Fertner (1874-1959). A chubby actor with a good-natured appearance always played the role of a wimp - a nice unlucky person who always

gets into trouble. So, he built a character that he, like Charlie Chaplin, transferred from film to film. In 1908, the film *Antoś for the First Time in Warsaw* (*Antoś pierwszy raz w Warszawie*, dir. Jerzy Meyer), in 1911 *Antek Klawisz, Hero of the Vistula* (*Antek klawisz, bohater Powiśla*, dir. Józef Ostoja-Sulnicki) and *The marriage scandal at Szopena Street* (*Skandal małżeński przy ulicy Szopena*, dir. Julian Krzewiński) were made.

At the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, a trend appeared in Polish cinema that became characteristic for our cinematography and still holds an important place in it. I am talking about adaptations of Polish literary classics. Much of this is due to Alexander Hertz (1879-1928) - a banker from an assimilated Jewish family. Hertz had clear left-wing views - he belonged to the Polish Socialist Party and took part in the 1905 revolution. He was arrested but released from lack of evidence. He went to the West for a few years, and when he returned, he decided to work professionally in cinematography. In 1909, together with his friends, he founded the "Sfinks" (*Sphinx* in English) share company, and in the same year he opened a very elegant "Sfinks" cinema at Marszałkowska Street in Warsaw. The same name - "Sfinks" was adopted by a film production company founded two years later in 1911. It was the largest and the most professional Polish film studio, which thrived until 1939.

Aleksander Hertz began producing feature films as early as 1911. Earlier he mainly dealt with "the news", but he recognized that real money and recognition lie in more ambitious projects. Among others, he intended to bring *Sir Thaddeus* by Adam Mickiewicz to the screen and although this idea failed, it shows how far Hertz's plans were reaching. However, *Meir Ezofowicz* was made (1911, dir. Józef Ostoja - Sulnicki - although the legend says that the director was Hertz himself) based on the novel by Eliza Orzeszkowa. *The Story of Sin* (*Dzieje grzechu*, 1911) by Antoni Bednarczyk was also made, based on the novel by Stefan Żeromski, and *The Judges* (*Sędziowie*, 1911) by Stanisław Knake-Zawadzki, based on the drama by Stanisław Wyspiański. The literary prototypes were very valuable works, but what they had in common were also threads of bad love, jealousy, crime, infanticide, murder, and punishment. This theme attracted viewers and forced the creation of subsequent films with similar threads - and thus the Polish version of melodrama.

In the earliest period of Polish cinema, Pola Negri (1897-1987) was the unquestioned star of this genre. Her real name was Apolonia Chałupiec and she came from social lowlands - her father regularly served subsequent sentences for thefts, and the family was supported by her mother, who was a washerwoman.

However, Apolonia stood out thanks to her beauty, talent, happiness and her persistency - with her beauty type and very plastic face, she perfectly matched the time. She gained her education first at the ballet school, and then at the acting school. In 1912 she made her debut on the theater stage in *The Maiden Vows* (*Śluby panieńskie*) by Aleksander Fredro, and then she also used her nickname for the first time. A year later she played in *Sumurum* by Ryszard Ordyński, and it was then, when Aleksander Hertz saw her. After the performance, he visited her in the theatre wardrobe and offered cooperation. Negri agreed and almost overnight became a movie star. For several years she played in Polish films in which she created the characters of femme fatale - a very passionate woman, dying because of a man or causing a man to fall. The titles of the films themselves say what their subject was: *Slave of the Senses* (*Niewolnica zmysłów*, 1914) and *The Wife* (*Żona*, 1915) by Jan Pawłowski, *The Polish Dancer* (*Bestia*, 1917) by Aleksander Hertz. When the German director Ernst Lubitsch offered her a role, she did not hesitate and went to Germany, and from there to Hollywood, where she made a dizzying career as a silent movie star.

### **Polish cinema during the First World War**

In 1914, the First World War broke out and the role of the cinema had to change. The news about war became the main topic of "news" ("current affairs"), as well as the changing situation of Poland and the growing hope for regaining independence. In Cracow, the Supreme National Committee set up a cell whose operators were to immortalize the activities of Józef Piłsudski's Legions. Unfortunately, most of these materials have not survived to our time.

In Warsaw, "Sfinks", very dynamically functioning company, recorded the most important events of that time - *Opening ceremony of the University of Warsaw on October 15, 1915* (*Uroczystość otwarcia Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego w dniu 15 października 1915 roku*, 1915), *Ceremonial entry of the Legions to the Capital* (*Uroczyste wkroczenie Legionów do stolicy*, 1916) and the like. As part of the Hertz company, melodramas with explicit anti-Russian pronouncements were also made: *The Secrets of the Warsaw Police* (*Ochrań warszawska i jej tajemnice*, 1916) and *The Tsarist Regime and its servants* (*Carat i jego sługi*, 1917) by Vitalis Korsak-Głogowski and *Tsar's favourite* (*Carska faworyta*, 1918) by Stanisław Jerzy Kozłowski. These films, although very schematic and kitschy, enjoyed considerable recognition of the audience - showing the Russians as a nation of stupid, bad, cruel people

without honour. allowing the audience work over a century of captivity off. But in a newly, reborn Poland, a completely different cinema was needed.



## **Chapter II.**

# **The first decade after regaining independence – patriotic cinema. 1919-1929**

In a situation of freshly regained independence, Polish cinema had a very important role to play. It was primarily intended to become a unifying factor for the society, which for more than 120 years, was divided into citizens of three different countries. The main foundation on which Polish cinematography was based in the first decade after the Great War was mythology and romantic ideology. Józef Piłsudski, the creator of the Polish Legions and author of Polish independence, was a great supporter of romanticism. Romantic ideology treated the love for the homeland as the greatest value which was worth devoting life. The ideal man was to be a soldier who does not hesitate to go and fight when the homeland is in need. The ideal woman was to become a wife, mother or fiancée, who, without a word of complaint, waits for the struggling beloved one and during his absence takes care of the sustainability of the family and patriotic upbringing of children. The highest sacrifice that could have been suffered for the country was death in its defence. Nationalised romanticism has become something of an official ideology of the state, which at every turn used national symbols, iconography and rhetoric. However, there was no deep reflection associated with it – it was more about ritual, about making behaviours that unites Poles. About using symbols that would speak to everyone, regardless of political views. In a situation where Poland was still threatened by Bolshevik Russia, it was very important to create a sense of unity among people. Cinema could have helped a lot with that, and therefore the genre that dominated during this period were patriotic melodramas. These are the ones that we will primarily deal with in this chapter.

Very few films made between 1919 and 1929 have been preserved. Out of the approximately 120 produced, we only have, whole or in fragments, about 20 titles. Cinema historians must therefore necessarily use not so much of the films themselves, but their descriptions and the documents concerning them. The picture that emerges from them is not positive. It draws attention to the very poor quality of these films, visible especially against the background of the then world production, which is referred to after all as the “golden era of the silent film” (1919-

1929). It is then, when Charlie Chaplin's brilliant and touching comedies are created, German Expressionism and Kammerspiel (Robert Wiene, Friedrich Murnau, Georg Wilhelm Pabst) are born and developed. There is the Swedish School in Sweden (Victor Sjöström, Mauritz Stiller), and there is the Film Impressionism (Luis Delluc, Jean Epstein) in France, and so on. The contrast between the films that were made in Poland at that time was huge. Polish productions were largely unprofessional and produced by dodgy, often assumed only for a while, film companies. In the interwar period as many as 146 (!) film studios were registered in Poland, one third of which produced only one film. Alexander Hertz's "Sfinks" was therefore a glorious exception here. The film critics of the time (Stefania Zahorska, Antoni Słonimski, Karol Irzykowski) complained that Polish films are schematic, flatter the lowest tastes and adapt to the level of very primitive viewers. They were largely right, although when we watch the preserved films from that time today, not all make such a disastrous impression.

The combination of romance, military and patriotic thread dominates the cinema of this period. In 1919, the Central Film Office (CUF) was established at the Supreme Command of the Polish Army. CUF produced frontline news (the Polish-Bolshevik War continued, independence was still under threat) and censored films displayed in cinemas. Shortly after the founding of the CUF, the government commissioned various film companies to make propaganda films that were supposed to tell about Polish history, especially the latest, and to celebrate Polish victories. As a result, the films that were created, had a very similar plot: a Polish soldier is with reciprocity in love with a pious and noble girl, but their love had to give way to the duty to the homeland. The connection of lovers was possible only when the duty towards Poland was fulfilled. The background of the story was very often the Polish-Bolshevik conflict, which still threatened fragile Polish independence. Documentaries depicting Marshal Piłsudski and his Legions were also often added to the feature film in an attempt to tell the viewer: "You've watched a story about fictional characters, but historical events shown on screen have really taken place and you are free only thanks to Józef Piłsudski and his soldiers. Remember it!"

*For you, Poland (Dla Ciebie, Polsko; 1920)* by Antoni Bednarczyk is a film of this kind. Its premiere took place when the fate of the country was still being decided, so it is no wonder that it is a film extremely anti-Russian and anti-Bolshevik. It tells about Hanka and Franek's love. When the war begins, Franek leaves Hanka in her old grandfather care, and he enrolls himself to the army. The Bolsheviks, however, attack the village where Hanka lives – they burn houses, rape women, abuse the

elderly and children, kill the inhabitants. After losing her home Hanka decides to become a sister of mercy and takes care of the injured in the hospital. However, she recognizes that this is not enough – so she cuts her beautiful long hair, puts on a uniform and dressed up for a man decides to join the army. Before that, she goes to the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius to pray in front of the miraculous image of the Holy Mary. By fortune luck, she meets Frank there, who came to the same place to thank for the victory – the war is over, Poland saved its independence. The young recognize one another and hug each other. Only now, they can decide to get married – one can only think of private happiness when the existence of the homeland is assured.

The very strong division between “us” and “them” is worth noting. “We” are the Poles, Catholics, pious people and of pure hearts, respecting traditional values. Polish women are virtuous, faithful and full of sacrifice, and Polish soldiers are brave, obedient and disciplined. “They” are Bolsheviks – violent people, cruel, deprived of any moral norms. They look scary and behave terribly: they murder, rape, destroy everything and get drunk because that’s their nature. This stereotypical image of the Russians was consistent with the then prevailing view of them, and was also expected by the audience and completely understood by it. That also allowed Polish viewers to appreciate and unite against foreign, cruel, threatening force. In the film, the rural community is rescued by the Polish army at the very last moment – which was also consistent with the way of seeing a man in a Polish uniform at that time: as a hero, an idol, a flawless character.

A similar purport has *Miracle on the Vistula* (*Cud nad Wisłą*, 1921) by Ryszard Bolesławski. From the 100-minute original version, about half has been preserved to date. This film – definitely better than the previous and more likely - tells the story of two young couples who, independently of each other, take part in the struggle for the freedom of the homeland. Victory over the Bolsheviks coincides with their personal happiness – only now they can get married. In *Miracle on the Vistula* military success was presented as a success of the whole nation – it was possible to win, because regardless of wealth, origin and social class, all Poles believed in the same thing and engaged in the same matter. They were united by the Catholic faith, respect for tradition and innate hatred of foreign power. It didn’t matter if someone was a gentleman or a peasant – facing the loss of independence, everyone behaved the same way.

The film *Daredevils* (*Szaleńcy*, 1928) by Leonard Buczkowski – the best of these three titles – was also preserved. The title madmen are three friends who join Józef Piłsudski’s Legions. The film covers the years 1914-1920 and tells the story about the

recent history of Poland through the prism of the fate of particular human beings. One of the men dies, the other thankfully survive the war, but they remain soldiers forever and are still at the disposal of the Marshal Piłsudski. There is also an affair thread here – one of the ulans in the finale of the film connects with his beloved. The homeland is free, so one can now think about personal happiness. So in this story we have exactly the same message as in previous films made at the time.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the characteristic feature of Polish cinema have been adaptations of literature. We also find them in the trend of military romanticism and films that had a clear propaganda message. At that time, books were adapted not so much because of their value, but because of the political and propaganda key. There were films such as *Peasants (Chłopi, 1922)* by Eugeniusz Modzelewski, which was an adaptation of Władysław Stanisław Reymont's novel of the same title (the film did not survive, was reportedly very unsuccessful) and *Year 1863 (1922)* by Edward Puchalski according to *Faithful river (Wierna rzeka)* by Stefan Żeromski (a film very badly played, very kitschy, although in accordance with the novel's purport). Henryk Szaro's *Early Spring (Przedwiośnie, 1928)*, according to Stefan Żeromski's novel, was also not preserved. It is unknown whether it was a good or bad film – opinions and reviews were extremely different. The descriptions of the film, however, allow us to lean towards critical ones - the director gave up on a lot of threads, focusing on the romances of Caesar Baryka, and not on his growing up process as a man and a Pole, which in the novel was the most important.

In large fragments, however, the film *Bartek, the Victor (Bartek zwycięzca, 1923)* by Edward Puchalski – an adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz's short story of the same title – was preserved. It was a very successful and realized with a great care story of the ideological maturation of a Polish peasant, Bartek, who in 1870 took part in the Prussian-French War. First, he succumbs to German propaganda, but gradually begins to understand what the partitions are for Poland and becomes a true patriot.

However, the most important adaptations of that time are two films made by Ryszard Ordyński – both almost entirely preserved and available in the version after digital reconstruction. The first is *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (Mogila Nieznanego Żołnierza, 1927)* – an adaptation of Andrzej Strug's novel of the same title. The realization of this work was preceded by the introduction to Warsaw of the Unknown Soldier's ashes and their solemn burial in Piłsudski Square (this tomb is still there today and is being watched 24 hours a day – this place is very symbolic and important to Poles). Ordyński's film was a superproduction at that

time – it was filmed with a huge amount of money, hoping that on the one hand the story would fulfill its propaganda and political function (uniting the nation and strengthening the conviction of the great merits of the Marshal in the restoration of independence), and on the other hand would be a great pastime for the masses due to the complicated and exciting plot, full of melodramatic threads.

The film begins in 1916, when Captain Łazowski sets off from Krakow train station for war. He says goodbye to his wife Wanda and a teenage daughter Nelly. They stay in Krakow and pray for the happy return of their husband and father, while he fights for his homeland. In parallel, we follow the fate of the captain and his family. Nelly loves her father very much, she senses any misfortune that threatens him. With him in mind, she writes a memoir, hoping that when her father returns, he will read about all the events that occurred during his absence. The years, however, pass, but there is no news from his father. The captain's wife is convinced that he died and eventually binds to another man, which causes Nelly's severe collapse. However, the girl is still waiting for her father, who in the meantime got into Russian captivity. As a prisoner of war he witnessed the Bolshevik revolution. He managed to escape from captivity thanks to a peasant woman who was in love with him. He entered into an affair with a Russian princess, he witnessed the Bolshevik attack on her palace and the murder of her daughter. Miraculously, he managed to avoid death. After many adventures, he managed to reach Poland, but as soon as he stood on his native land, he died hit by a stray bullet. At the same time, Nelly sensed his death. The tomb of the Unknown Soldier also became her father's symbolic grave.

The plot of this film is quite kitschy - a work that almost a hundred years ago was supposed to touch the viewer (and touched!), for today's audience may seem rather funny. The tap-up inscriptions are very tiring and annoying, also the thread of spiritual bond between the father and the daughter seems incredible. Critics were reluctant to this picture, but the audience liked it a lot - and that's what it was all about.

Shortly after the completion of *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier*, Ryszard Ordyński began to work on the adaptation of the Polish national epic, *Sir Thaddeus* by Adam Mickiewicz. The director already was well recognised at that time and was an important figure in the film world, which allowed the producer, Alfred Niemiński, to raise funds for the film. It was known that the cost would be quite large – the film *Sir Thaddeus* was supposed to be a costume super production (the action of the story took place in the early nineteenth century), carried out in many locations and with the participation of famous actors and hundreds of extras. However, it

was worth making this effort – *Sir Thaddeus* was a piece of work known to almost all Poles at that time, it was considered “a cult book”, as we would say today (to this day it is on a school reading list, although I guess that students forced to read it, perceive it completely differently...). Written in Polish alexandrine poem, tells about the inhabitants of Sopliców, which symbolizes the whole Poland, with all the shortcomings and advantages of its citizens. In the background of the love story of Tadeusz and Zosia, there is hope for regaining independence with the help of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Ordyński decided to make his film using the poetics of “live images” - that is, the visualization of scenes from literary works, which was a popular pastime in the wealthy houses of the middle class and aristocracy in the late nineteenth century. Then they began to combine these images into cycles, and hence it was very close to silent cinema. However, this entertainment was already quite anachronistic in the late 1920s, but nevertheless it worked to some extent in Ordyński’s film - in any case worked enough well and his work was well received by both critics and viewers. The film was not perfect - especially terribly long subtitles irritated, which were exact quotes from the Mickiewicz epic - but it evoked important and much-needed emotions: a sense of belonging to the nation, identification with its history, pride of Polish tradition and culture. That was the effect the filmmakers were thinking about. The ceremonial premiere of the film took place on November 9, 1928 at the Warsaw Philharmonic and was the centerpiece of the celebration of the decade of independence. Cinema had never before been so ennobled and it was the first time when its role as art and as event worth celebrating such an important anniversary was emphasized. Marshal Józef Piłsudski and his family, the President of the Republic of Poland – Ignacy Mościcki and his spouse, all the most important state dignitaries and the entire diplomatic corps were present at the premiere. Reactions to the film were very lively - every time when General Dąbrowski appeared on the screen, whose character was identified with the figure of Piłsudski, there was applause.

### **Silent entertainment films**

Patriotic-political cinema was by far the strongest trend in Polish cinema of the 1920s, but next to this trend there were also other ones, of which the most visible and valued by the viewers at that time was the entertainment cinema. It was not a homogeneous trend - both in quality and subject matter. In addition to excellent

films, which are watched with great interest to this day, nightmarish romance films were created, probably indigestible for contemporary viewers as well. Outstanding entertainment films were inspired mainly by European cinema, especially German horror movies and expressionism and so-called chamber films (*kammerspiel*). Motifs of personality change, hypnosis, manipulation of the subconscious appeared here. A common theme was the Master's motif, which had a destructive effect on the medium's psyche. The creators were apparently fascinated by topics related to astral bodies, fate, demonism, and yet unknown possibilities of the human psyche. At that time, such positions as *Blanc et noir* (1919) by Eugeniusz Modzelewski (did not survive), *Man of the Blue Soul* (*Człowiek o błękitnej duszy*, 1929) by Michał Machwic and *Destiny* (*Przeznaczenie*, 1927) by Janusz Star were realized. However, the most important among them is *A Strong Man* (*Mocny człowiek*, 1929) by Henryk Szaro.

This is by far the best film in this set and at the same time an adaptation of the novel by Stanisław Przybyszewski of the same title. The hero of the story is Stefan Bielecki (excellent Grzegorz Chmara in this role), an unfulfilled and talentless writer who dreams of fame and wealth. Possessed by this thought, he leads his talented friend to death to take over his manuscript and publish it under his own name. Bielecki's lover knows his secret, so for fear that the woman will betray him, the writer tries to murder her. In the end, however, he meets Nina - a noble and good woman. Under her influence he changes radically. Unable to cope with the awareness of the crimes he has committed, he commits suicide.

*A strong man* turned out to be an excellent adaptation. Its main message was a critique of the pursuit of success at all costs, and a critique of the world that only recognizes wealthy and famous people as valuable. The film in an interesting way referred to German expressionism (the ghosts of Bielecki's victims, the way the main character was created), but above all it was a poignant and credible story of human decline.

However, not all films by authors focused mainly on the entertaining role of the cinema were so outstanding. Cheap melodramas arose much more often, based on a love triangle. The background of the kitschy love story was very often a political, historical or social plot, which was supposed to justify the fragile plot. Hence, these films were often called "the triangle with a background". Aleksander Hertz's film production mainly specialized in this type of movies. Critics perceived them badly, but viewers liked them, especially when the rising star of Polish cinema, Jadwiga Smosarska (1898-1971) played in them - and she played in almost all of them.

In 1920, Smosarska made her debut in the film *The Heroism of the Polish Boy Scout* (*Bohaterstwo polskiego skauta*) by Ryszard Bolesławski (the film did not survive to our times), where she played a charming, decent and beautiful girl, a real patriot (the film was about the Polish-Bolshevik war). With such roles – of beautiful, wise and morally healthy women - we associate her to this day. She was known for them especially in the thirties. At the beginning of her career, however, Smosarska also often played fallen girls and / or selfish and immoral women. The film known at the time was *The Tram Stop Mystery* (*Tajemnica przystanku tramwajowego*, 1922) by Jan Kucharski (the film did not survive), where Smosarska played a girl who succumbs to the courtship of a man met at a tram stop. When she gets into an illegitimate pregnancy, the seducer abandons her, and the desperate girl commits suicide by throwing herself under the wheels of a tram. Her former fiancé – a barber - slits her seducer throat. A similar atmosphere and theme can be found in other movies under the sign of a love triangle. Smosarska starred in all of them, and their titles speak for themselves: *The Slave of Love* (*Niewolnica miłości*, 1923) by Jan Kucharski, Stanisław Szebe and Adam Zagórski, *What is not spoken about* (*O czym się nie mówi*, 1924) by Edward Puchalski, *The Leper* (*Trędowata*, 1926) Edward Puchalski and Józef Węgrzyn, and *Sinful love* (*Grzeszna miłość*, 1929) by Mieczysław Krawicz and Zbigniew Gniazdowski. None of these films have survived to our times.

However, the film entitled *The mystery of the old family* (*Tajemnica starego rodu*, 1928) by Zbigniew Gniazdowski and Emil Chaberski partly survived. Here Smosarska plays a double role - the virtuous daughter of the fisherman and the spoiled daughter of the heir. Both - the fisherman and the heir - are the descendants of two brothers, one of whom during the November Uprising in 1831 fought for independence, and the other took the side of the Russian partitioner. The patriot brother died in Siberia, and the traitor brother took over his property. After several decades, the patriot's grandson lives in poverty, and the traitor's grandson is wealthy. They both have daughters similar to each other as two drops of water, neither of them knows anything about family history. However, the truth finally comes to light and the heir, moved by remorse, shares his property with a poor fisherman. The daughter of the heir, however, goes to the monastery because her fiancé left her, tired of her constant humours and whims. The boy marries the fisherman's daughter, who is the embodiment of goodness and nobility.



## Author's cinema of the twenties

This trend in Polish cinematography of the 1920s is by far the most modest, and a very small percentage of the films made within it have survived. The author's model is one in which the director tries to use their talent, apply original solutions, approach the story in an innovative way. Directors, who thought of themselves as filmmakers, and of film as art, did not treat cinema as a craft, and film as a product that simply needs to be sold. They did not strive - and in any case it was not their priority - to win money, position or fame. They made films because it was simply important to them, because they wanted to convey something important in this way. In the conditions of the then film production - very unprofessional, poor and chaotic - they had no chance to achieve much. But they tried, and their works - although largely non-existent today - have been, however, remembered. So let's say a few words about them.

Wiktor Biegański (1892-1974) was a very important representative of this trend. He was a theatre actor by profession, but he also worked as a screenwriter, a director, a film producer (he produced his films himself) and actor (he also played in them). We know from his own communications and preserved reviews and descriptions that he very consciously approached the language of the film. He especially tried to use various types of editing in his films. He cared for the form of the film work and its aesthetics, which was mainly important as landscapes and sceneries played an important role in his films - he was able to use natural scenery. The downside of his films was the plot - not very ambitious, mainly sensational and romance, as evidenced by the titles: *Jealousy (Zazdrość, 1922)*, *The Abyss of Repentance (Otchłań pokuty, 1922)*, *The Idol (Bożyszcze, 1923)*, *The Vampires of Warsaw (Wampiry Warszawy, 1925)*, *The Young Eagle (Orle, 1926)*, *The Woman who desires sin (Kobieta, która grzechu pragnie, 1929)*. None of these films have survived.

However, Wiktor Biegański's activity was not only directing, producing and playing in films. In 1921 he founded a theatre and film school in Warsaw, combined with a production company. Leonard Buczkowski and Michał Waszyński, among other very famous Polish directors studied there. Biegański was also one of the first to realize that film acting is different from stage acting, and therefore it is worth providing the possibility of professional education in this area. In 1924, he founded the Film Institute in the capital - a high school of acting, whose graduates were, among others, Maria Bogda, Adam Brodzisz, Igo Sym, Nora Ney - great stars of Polish pre-war cinema.

However, the most talented and outstanding Polish film director (of Jewish origin) was Józef Lejtes. His biography is a film script material itself (maybe someone of you will take up the challenge? ... :)). He was well educated: he studied at a music school, then philosophy and chemistry at the Jagiellonian University. He began his career in cinematography in Vienna as an assistant to Robert Wiene. After returning to Poland, he reportedly made a beautiful film (not preserved...) *The Hurricane* (*Huragan*, 1928). He wanted to pay tribute to the January insurgents on the 65th anniversary of the 1863 uprising with it. In the visual aspect, he took inspiration from Artur Grottger's famous painting cycles - *Polonia* and *Lithuania*. *The Hurricane* was a love story of two Polish patriots - the proud and beautiful noblewoman Helena and insurgent Tadeusz Orda. The girl died from the hands of the Russians who attacked her manor house, and Tadeusz, who found her body, swore revenge against the enemies of his beloved woman and also his beloved homeland. Despite the personal tragedy, he decided to continue the fight.

Apparently, Lejtes next film, made a year later, *From day to day* (*Z dnia na dzień*, 1929), was even better and more interesting, and also more credible. And again - we know this movie only from descriptions, documents and memories, because it has not survived to our times. The action took place during World War I and told about the friendship of two soldiers, and their love for the same woman, the wife of one of them. Jan and Jerzy - both Poles - were fighting on both sides of the conflict (the partitioners incorporated Poles into their armies and it happened that people speaking the same language stood at the front line against each other...). By coincidence, they become friends. Soon after, Jerzy escapes from captivity and fate leads him to Jan's cottage, where Marusia, his friend's wife, looks after a seriously wounded man. Jerzy, however, does not know who this woman is and he falls in love with her. When Jan finally returns home, he realizes what kind of relationship is between his wife and his friend. Unwilling to destroy their relationship, he withdraws and decides to live alone.

In this film, apparently, there were no more flaws visible in Lejtes' previous story - a shallow, superficial love story. Here we have a love story, but it is a deep and credible story. Apparently, it was also beautifully filmed, and the subtitles were kept to a minimum. Lejtes also used the latest achievements of film editing, especially the achievements of the Russian school. Therefore, it is a pity that we cannot see this film.

# Chapter III.

## Polish version of classic cinema.

### 1930-1939

#### Sound breakthrough in Polish cinema

The story of this decade of Polish cinematography must start with how its development and shape was influenced by the invention of sound. You probably already know that in 1927 in New York the premiere of *The Jazz Singer* by Alan Crosland - the first sound film in the world - took place. However, the sound breakthrough came to Poland with a few years' delay after many more or less unsuccessful attempts to replace American technology with cheaper solutions. Poland was a poor country - let's remember that it regained independence just a moment before and the consequences of the partitions were still very noticeable. The new technology that allowed recording and reproducing image and sound was very expensive and the Polish film industry simply could not afford it. Silent films were cheap to produce and operate, and sound films were not. Polish filmmakers also hoped that the sound was a novelty that would not be accepted - they did not want and could not switch to a new way of working. While in 1930, sound cinema already dominated around the world, in Poland the members of Lodz Cinema Theatres Association announced a boycott of sound cinema.

Consequently, much later than in the world, sound films began to be produced here. The first to do so was the producer Józef Zagrodzki, who persuaded Michał Waszyński to make the film *The Cult of the Body* (*Kult ciała*, 1930). However, the film was made in Austria, and in Poland it was only shown in silent version. Therefore, we cannot consider this position to be the first Polish sound film, although it was produced by Poles. Another attempt was the adaptation of *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska* (*Moralność pani Dulskiej*, 1930) by Bolesław Niewolin - it was a sound film (with illustrative music and natural sounds), but not spoken - dialogues were given using subtitles. The sound has been recorded on discs that have not survived to our times - so today this movie is watched as silent.

10 days after the premiere of *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska*, the premiere of *The Mystery of the Doctor* (*Tajemnica lekarza*, 1930) by Ryszard Ordyński took place. This film was already fully sounded and spoken in Polish - but it was not a Polish film,

although it was shot by a Polish crew. *The Mystery of the Doctor* was part of the project of the Paramount, which decided to make the same film (according to the same script, but with the participation of different crews) in 10 language versions. Five films were made in this way, all directed by Ordyński. However, the idea turned out to be a failure and it was quickly withdrawn, and due to the inspiration and manner of implementation of this picture, it cannot be considered the first Polish sound film.

However, the question was returning, and Polish producers, filmmakers and cinema owners finally realized that it is impossible to escape from the sound film. However, the costs of implementing such a project were enormous, not for the pockets of Poles during the global crisis. That's why they tried to look for intermediate solutions. As a result, several silent films were made, in which, however, short spoken fragments appeared. The films were made silent and then the sound was recorded on discs, but for some scenes only. This is how the adaptation of the novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz *Janko the Musician* (*Janko Muzykant*, 1930) directed by Ryszard Ordyński was created. Only the image has survived to this day, we have no sound. However, positive reviews of critics have survived, indicating that such a solution could give good results.

We have the original version of the film *To Siberia* (*Na Sybir*, 1930) by Henryk Szaro, made using the same method. This is the first Polish partly sound film - or rather an attempt to create such a film - which sound survived, because a few years after its premiere, the sound was transferred from a record to a tape, and after that the movie was re-introduced to the cinemas. It is a story based on facts about the socialist revolution of 1905, in which Polish patriots also took part. One of them is Ryszard Prawdzic (Adam Brodzisz), who has to hide after the assassination of a tsarist official. He takes a job as a tutor in a small manor near Warsaw and falls in love with his employer's daughter (Jadwiga Smosarska). She loves him too. Shortly thereafter, he is arrested and sent to Siberia. Rena is doing everything to find and release him. Thanks to her courage and help, Ryszard escapes from Siberia to continue the fight for the liberation of his homeland. Several years later, Ryszard and Rena, as a happy marriage and parents of two children, recall old times.

The film was filmed in the poetics of silent cinema, and the dialogues were given using subtitles. But already unique here was a musical illustration, by Henryk Wars, later one of the best and most famous Polish film composers. The music was perfectly matched to what was happening on the screen. Wars used musical motifs

of famous songs and melodies that commented on individual events. Still, we can't talk about a full sound movie here.

We consider *Anybody can love* (*Każdemu wolno kochać*, 1933) by Mieczysław Krawicz and Janusz Warnecki the first Polish fully spoken and sound film. It was realized in Poland, with the participation of the Polish team, featuring illustrative music, dialogues and natural sounds. It tells about the love of Renia (Liliana Zielińska), the daughter of wealthy house tenants, and poor composer Alojzy (Mariusz Maszyński), who lives in the attic in the same house. Because of the financial difference, the girl's parents do not even want to hear about her wedding with Alojzy and want her to marry the old, fat and nasty Baleron, who owns a sausage factory (Baleron means "gammon" in Polish). Desperate Alojzy ends up in a psychiatric hospital, but his friend Hipek (Adolf Dymśza) sells Alojzy's song - the title *Anybody can love* - to the theatre owner. Alojzy gains fame and money, and finally can marry Renia. Meanwhile, Hipek falls in love with a friendly maid - Lodzia (Mira Zimińska).

The film is a funny, light and nice romantic comedy, with a plot pattern typical for this period (we will come back to this thread later). The authors use sound very efficiently - a very important layer of this film consists of songs, music and dance, and all these elements work very well together. Polish cinema waited a long time for the first fully sound movie, but when it finally appeared, it met audience's expectations.

## **Industry cinema as the Polish version of classic cinema**

The 1930s is a decade in which cinematography in different countries around the world accepts the rules of American classical cinema - i.e. solutions typical of Hollywood films. They were as follows: standardised film length (from 90 to 120 minutes), transparent narration, probability of events shown, impact on the viewer's emotions, preservation of plot patterns typical for cinema genres, understandable and unambiguous story. American filmmakers imposed these rules on their viewers who watched their films, because there were simply no others. Despite this, it was often the case that outstanding films were made at the time - and they are still eagerly watched and cited as part of American classical cinema.

In Poland in the thirties, the situation was different - it was not the film studios that imposed their taste on the viewers, but the viewers forced the film industry to produce a certain type of film. Cinema owners knew perfectly well what films are

selling - and the idealized picture of Poland and Poles as well as genre cinema was selling - and such were the films they expected from film studios and filmmakers. As a result, in the last pre-war decade, industry cinema dominated, next to which there were several minor trends: socially useful cinema, avant-garde cinema and Yiddish cinema.

Industry cinema's shape and content are determined not by artists, but by people from the film industry, focused solely on profit: producers, cinema owners, and studio owners. Neither they nor the cinema they co-created had a good opinion. They were criticized for kitschy solutions, superficial and incredible stories, mediocrity, cynicism, lowering the level. Indeed, the vast majority of films made during this period as part of genre cinema are very poor productions. There were, however, movies that may be still enjoyed today. Three genres were the most popular then - in the early 1930s, patriotic-historical cinema dominated, then comedy, and in the last years before the outbreak of World War II, mainly melodramas were created.

### **Industry cinema: patriotic and historical films**

Patriotic and historical films told about such events in the history of Poland that Poles could be proud of. Among them were both reconstructions of authentic events and stories about real heroes, as well as those in which the history was the background of the fate of fictional characters. The task of these productions was to awaken national pride and build unity of the society, as well as to strengthen patriotic feelings and a sense of connection with Polish tradition. However, it was no longer as openly propaganda as in the previous decade, although as often as then, the theme of love was used. This trend of cinema was divided into two sub-trends: the first was about modern history, i.e. one that many viewers still remembered: the 1905 revolution, the First World War or the Polish-Bolshevik war. In those movies care was taken about realism and factual accuracy. The second are films which action was set in ancient times - here the concern for historical realities was definitely smaller, and the story itself often took on an almost fairy-tale, mythical character.

Discussed above *To Siberia* (1930) by Henryk Szaro belongs to the first sub-trend. A similar narrative scheme - a brave Polish patriot assassinates a tsarist official and a woman in love with a hero helps him - also have two other films: *The Ten from the Pawiak Prison* (*Dziesięciu z Pawiaka*, 1931) by Ryszard Ordyński, and

*General Pankratov's daughter* (*Córka generała Pankratowa*, 1934) by Mieczysław Znamierowski. The most important and the best production on the subject of national liberation is, however, *The young forest* (*Młody las*, 1934) by Józef Lejtes. This is the first Polish sound film that referred to a very important myth of Polish history - solidarity and resistance to foreign power imposed by force on our nation. It was also very carefully realized, and also played by a pleiade of Polish actors of that time.

The film is set in 1905, in the environment of high school graduate students and their professors. They represent various attitudes: from completely subordinated to Russian partitioners, through conformist attitude, to firm resistance to Russification and tsarist rule. Two boys stand out among the characters: Janek Walczak (Mieczysław Cybulski) and Stefan Kiernicki (Adam Brodzisz). Janek opposes a Russian professor who offends values important to Polish students. The boy is threatened with dismissal from school for his protest. Stefan, initially accepting the Russification and enslavement of Poland, under the influence of love and friendship undergoes transformation and begins the fight with the invader. Polish youth is the title "young forest", in which beautiful ideas sprout. Their generation will soon win freedom for Poland.

Films set centuries ago constitute the second sub-trend of patriotic and historical cinema. These include, among others, *Abbot Kordecki: The defender of Częstochowa* (*Przeor Kordecki, obrońca Częstochowy*, 1934) by Edward Puchalski, telling about the Swedish Deluge that took place in the 17th century. Swedish troops gradually occupy the whole country, and finally threaten the monastery in Częstochowa, where there is a sacred image of the Holy Mother. The monastery is defended by abbot Kordecki (authentic figure), who together with a handful of defenders, of course has supernatural support - Providence and the Holy Mother help him. Thanks to this help, the monastery and the miraculous image of Jesus' Mother are saved.

A definitely better work is *Love or a Kingdom* (*Barbara Radziwiłówna*, 1936) by Józef Lejtes. The action of the film takes place in the sixteenth century in Cracow (beautiful photos of the Wawel Castle!) and recalls the love story of King Zygmunt August (Witold Zacharewicz) and noblewoman Barbara Radziwiłówna (Jadwiga Smosarska), whom the king married against the will of his mother and the Royal Council. Despite their protest, the king led Barbara to be recognized as his legitimate wife and crowned her the queen of Poland, but soon afterwards the young queen died. In the film, blame is attributed to Queen Bona - the mother of the young king,

who was supposed to lead to the death of her daughter-in-law through magic and poison. In fact, Barbara, portrayed as an innocent young lady in the film, was already a mature and experienced (in many ways...) widow, suggested to Zygmunt August by her brothers. The Council never accepted her on the Polish throne, and Barbara died not because of witchcraft, but probably due to ovarian cancer. Thus, the romantic vision of history has won over the historical truth - but this vision turned out to be very attractive. The film was made by an outstanding artist and well played by excellent actors. It is still a pleasure to watch it today.

### **Industry cinema: comedies**

Until the mid-1930s, comedy as a genre almost did not exist in Polish cinema. There was no tradition of burlesque and pantomime in Poland that dominated in silent cinema. We also didn't have actors who could use these forms, or authors who could write comedy scripts based solely on gags and funny situations. Polish satire was based on words, so it was very difficult to use it in a silent film.

Everything changed when, after the sound breakthrough, Polish cinema learned to speak and sing. The Polish comedy was inspired by cabarets and revue theatres - the most famous of them were the cabaret "Qui pro quo" (1919-1932) and the "Morskie Oko" (1928-1922) revue. It was there that the types of characters were born, which later, almost unchanged, were transferred to the film; and certain comedy conventions, which also worked great in the cinema. "Qui pro quo" is Latin for "one for the other" - it was about a mistake about a person, a misunderstanding about someone's identity, which caused a funny sequence of events. The literary director of this cabaret was Julian Tuwim - an excellent Polish poet. He also wrote songs, and Marian Hemar and Jerzy Jurandot did it with him. The best and the most famous film actors of the 1930s played in this cabaret: Hanka Ordonówna (she created the characters of belles), Adolf Dymsza (Warsaw smarty with a golden heart), Mira Zimińska (a resolute girl who comes out of all situations), Jadwiga Andrzejewska (sensitive, gentle girl who is easy to seduce and hurt), Eugeniusz Bodo (lover), Michał Znicz (lover), Mieczysława Ćwiklińska (matron, mother, aristocrat), Ludwik Sempoliński (mature man, father).

The comedies of that time were extremely schematic. Most often they were romantic comedies, the plot of which concerned problems with the pairing up of main characters. They were often accompanied by a supporting couple of lovers who helped the main couple. A popular motive was dressing up as someone else,



assuming someone else's identity and pretending to be someone else. And so the poor pretended to be rich, the rich pretended to be poor, man pretended to be woman, woman pretended to be man, etc.

The above-mentioned movie *Anybody can love* implements the first scheme - we have a problem with the pairing of lovers, who are helped by friends. *Antek the Police Chief* (*Antek policmajster*, 1935) by Michał Waszyński implements the second scheme - a poor rabbit seller from the Warsaw bazaar disguises himself as a tsarist police officer (the film takes place at the beginning of the 20th century) and brings order to a small town.

*Is Lucy a girl?* (*Czy Lucyna to dziewczyna?*, 1934) by Juliusz Gardan uses both themes - problems in love and the motive of pretending to be someone else. It is indeed a very good and still funny movie, and its quality can be demonstrated by the fact that as one of the few Polish productions it has achieved success also outside our country. The film is about Lucyna (Jadwiga Smosarska), the daughter of a wealthy industrialist, who returns to the country after completing her technical studies (Only on her own! By car! Driving all the way from Paris to Warsaw!). Her father refuses to let her work in his factory, so Lucyna decides to dress up as a young man and under the false identity, as Julek Kwiatkowski, starts working in the family company. However, she falls in love with the chief engineer (Eugeniusz Bodo), but as a young man, of course, she has no chance. So, she decides to take on another identity - this time she pretends to be Julek's sister. The engineer actually falls in love with her, but before they decide to marry each other, all combinations with false identities must be explained. In the background of the main love story are the dilemmas of an elderly pair of friends of the main characters.

Other comedies from this period that can still entertain contemporary viewer are: *His excellency, the Chauffeur* (*Jaśnie pan szofer*, 1935) by Michał Waszyński, *His excellency, the Shop Assistant* (*Jego ekscellencja subiekt*, 1933) by Michał Waszyński, *Twelve chairs* (*Dwanaście krzesel*, 1933) by Michał Waszyński and Martin Fric, *Dodek at the Front* (*Dodek na froncie*, 1936) by Michał Waszyński, *ABC of Love* (*ABC miłości*, 1935) by Michał Waszyński, *Wacusz* (1935) by Michał Waszyński, *Bolek and Lolek* (*Bolek i Lolek*, 1936) by Michał Waszyński, *Jadzia* (1936) by Mieczysław Krawicz, *Forgotten melody* (*Zapomniana melodia*, 1938) by Konrad Tom and Jan Fethke, *Two Joannas* (*Dwie Joasie*, 1935) by Mieczysław Krawicz, *Love manuevres* (*Manewry miłosne*, 1935) by Jan Nowina-Przybylski and Konrad Tom. As you can see, the titles themselves often point to the theme of love and the theme of dressing up.

## Industry cinema: melodrama

In last years before the outbreak of World War II, melodrama became the most popular genre in Polish cinema. We usually associate this term with movies about love, but in fact it is a much broader concept. Whether the film is a melodrama is rather determined by its design features, i.e. a complicated plot full of surprises; pathos; evoking strong emotions of the viewers and persuading them to identify with the characters; strongly emphasized, although quite superficial psychological portraits of the characters; schematic plots; and finally - a tragic ending.

In the first half of the 1930s, the melodrama often appeared in combination with other genres: detective story, spy film, court drama, social cinema, and religious film. *Prosecutor Alicja Horn* (*Prokurator Alicja Horn*, 1933) by Michał Waszyński is a story about a young lawyer (Jadwiga Smosarska) who has to choose between love and a sense of professional duty. *Spy in the mask* (*Szpieg w masce*, 1933) by Mieczysław Krawicz tells of attempts to take over a valuable Polish invention by foreign intelligence. The agent (Hanka Ordonówna), who is to steal the invention, falls in love with the son (Jerzy Pichelski) of its creator and dies (accidentally) from his hand.

*Life sentence* (*Wyrok życia*, 1933) by Juliusz Gardan is an extremely successful combination of melodrama and social cinema. A great and very important (and brave!) film tells the story of a girl convicted of infanticide (Jadwiga Andrzejewska), who in the appeal court is defended by a young, brave lawyer (Irena Eichlerówna), exposing the hypocrisy of Polish society and the judiciary. She uncovers the truth about the child's death (it accidentally died when its mother - lonely, terrified and rejected by everyone - tried to commit suicide) and leads the girl to acquittal.

The Polish specificity was the combination of melodrama and religious film. A beautiful example of this is *Under your protection* (*Pod Twoją obronę*, 1933) by Józef Lejtes and Edward Puchalski. However, if you watch this film, you will notice that only the name Puchalski is in the opening credits. Józef Lejtes was of Jewish origin and the Catholic Church protested that his name - although the film is primarily his work - should be in the movie on the Catholic faith. The film is about a young aviator (Adam Brodzisz), who can't walk any more after an accident caused by foreign intelligence agents. His fiancée (Maria Bogda), a very pious girl, persuades him on a pilgrimage to Częstochowa, to the sacred image of the Holy Mother known from miracles. And indeed - during prayer, the aviator regains the ability to walk. A very cursory summary of the plot may indicate that the film is not valuable, but it is a

wrong impression. It was so brilliant, well-played and suggestive that it aroused very spontaneous reactions of the audience - the viewers even prayed with the characters and knelt on the cinema floor during the screening. The combination of staged scenes and documentary inserts depicting real pilgrims was a very innovative solution.

In 1937, a similar film was made – *You that shine at the Gate of Dawn* (*Ty, co w Ostrej świecisz Bramie*) by Jan Nowina-Przybylski. The young man (Mieczysław Cybulski) is kidnapped by spies, but his fiancée (Maria Bogda again) saves his life thanks to her fervent prayers at the miraculous image of the Mother of God - this time at the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius. However, it was definitely weaker production.

The Polish melodrama was often based on the literary prototype - and therefore we are again dealing with adaptations characteristic of Polish cinema. The trivial, kitsch, schematic novels, and addressed for less demanding readers, as well as more ambitious literature were adapted. The first group includes, among others, Helena Mniszkówna's books, which, however, worked much better on the screen than on paper.

Her most famous book was *The Leper* (*Trędowata*, 1936), which was transferred to the screen by Juliusz Gardan. This is a story about Stefcia Rudecka (Elżbieta Barszczewska) - a young girl who is employed as a governess at the court of a wealthy aristocrat, the ordinate Michorowski (Franciszek Brodniewicz). The young fall in love with each other, but his aristocratic society refuses to accept his relationship with a girl deprived of position and property. Stefcia is mentally harassed by them - they treat her like a leper - and eventually dies.

This film was made with great care and resources to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the "Sphinx" film production company. Interesting and dynamic narration, great acting, careful set design, convincing and credible characters - all this means that today's viewers may still enjoy this story.

*Gehenna* (1938) by Michał Waszyński (1938) is also based on the novel by Helena Mniszek. This is the story of teenage Ania (Lidia Wysocka), who, after the death of her parents, is taken care of by her father's brother. Despite close relationship, girl's uncle intends to marry her. When he realizes that she is in love with her peer, he leads her fiancé to death. When Ania learns about her uncle's intentions, she tries to commit suicide. Uncle's crimes are finally revealed, but Ania's life is broken forever.

There were also adapted the novels of Maria Rodziewiczówna - the author who was close to the ideals of positivism. She honoured and propagated the values of this era: honest, systematic work, responsibility for others, respect for nature, and

finally wise, mature patriotism consisting of working for the homeland, not dying for it. Her most famous novel was *Heather*, transferred to the screen by Juliusz Gardan in 1938. The film is set in the early twentieth century, and the heroine is a young girl Kazia (Stanisława Angel-Engelówna) who lost contact with her fiancé exiled to Siberia. She hasn't heard from him for years, so her father and stepmother have forced Kazia to marry another man (Franciszek Brodniewicz). After the wedding, Kazia goes with her husband – a womanizer and a playboy - to Warsaw, where she deals with charity. Then her fiancé returns, but Kazia, although she doesn't love her husband, is not able to cheat on him and leave with another. Broken, she undergoes illness and dies. Then her husband realizes how important she was to him. Both the people from the so-called "good company" and the poor people she helped cry over her casket. Kazia is the title "heather" - because she was like a delicate, small flower growing close to the ground, which is easy to trample on.

Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz was a very popular author, eagerly adapted in the 1930s. At the end of the decade, seven of his novels were screened. The most famous and also the best one was *The Healer* (*Znachor*, 1937) directed by Michał Waszyński. This is the story of an eminent surgeon (Kazimierz Junosza-Stępowski) whose wife leaves him and takes their little daughter. Professor Wilczur is desperate to get drunk, he is beaten and robbed. Head trauma causes him to lose memory, but he does not lose medical knowledge and treatment skills. As a traveling healer, he helps people. After many years, he accidentally saves life of his daughter, but to perform surgery, he steals surgical instruments. He is brought to trial and only then does his real identity come to light.

*The Healer* turned out to be a beautiful, very well-made film. Kazimierz Junosza-Stępowski created a poignant and credible role of a man who, although deeply experienced by fate, does not lose hope and is still guided by the good of others. Critics, including foreign ones, emphasized in their reviews that Junosza-Stępowski did not play a healer, but he simply was one. He was partnered by Elżbieta Barszczewska, in the dual role of wife and daughter. An important advantage of the film was the use of natural scenery and Shakespeare's highlighting the fate of the characters with events taking place in the world of nature (changing weather emphasized changing emotions). It is no wonder then that a year later the continuation of the healer's story was created - the film *Professor Wilczur* (*Profesor Wilczur*, 1938), also directed by Michał Waszyński.

Two other films were also very valuable adaptations: *Girls of Nowolipki* (*Dziewczęta z Nowolipek*, 1937) by Józef Lejtes according to the novel by Pola

Gojawiczyńska under the same title, and *The Line* (*Granica*, 1938) also by Józef Lejtes, according to the same title by Zofia Nałkowska. Both books and both films based on them were very brave publications in pre-war Poland, because they talked about this “what is not being said”. The theme of both stories is the situation of women whose position and capabilities are determined by the position of their male guardians: fathers, husbands or lovers. A woman, however, does not mean anything herself, she has limited decision-making possibilities, limited access to education. Social hypocrisy, applying double standards for women and men leads to many tragedies caused by unplanned pregnancy, for which only the woman is responsible. However, the same society limits access to any knowledge of sexuality and tacitly accepts male abuse.

Both films were social dramas with clearly outlined love themes, which allowed viewers to identify with the heroines. Watched today, these films seem to be - and were also at the time of creation - testimony of their time, although their action takes place in the beginning of the twentieth century. Unlike many productions of this period, *Girls from Nowolipki* and *The Line* talked about specific problems, they referred to experiences known to almost everyone. And they were brilliantly implemented - as I said earlier, Józef Lejtes was the best director of the pre-war period - and played: in both productions the best Polish actresses appeared: Elżbieta Barszczewska, Jadwiga Andrzejewska, Tamara Wiszniewska, Anna Jaraczówna (*Girls from Nowolipki*) and Elżbieta Barszczewska, Lena Żelichowska and Mieczysława Ćwiklińska (*The Line*).

## **Social Useful Cinema**

The industry cinema discussed above dominated the decade of the 1930s, but in addition to this mainstream there were, at the time, several important trends, which also need to be mentioned in a book (even as small as this one) on the history of Polish cinema. Socially useful cinema was one of those trends, definitely opposing the industry cinema. It was created by a group of young people who were friends and had clear leftist views: Eugeniusz Cękański, Jerzy Toeplitz, Stanisław Wohl, Jerzy Zarzycki, Tadeusz Kowalski and Wanda Jakubowska. In 1930 they founded the Artistic Film Propaganda Association - START. However, the authorities did not like the dangerous word “propaganda”, so the name was changed to the Association of Art Film Lovers. However, its short name remained the same.

START members proclaimed the slogan of “socially useful film”, that is, one that would raise important problems of modern times. Which would break social taboos, expose hypocrisy, but at the same time be an artistic and valuable cinema inspired by the most important achievements of world cinema. The members of the group had very ambitious plans - they dreamed of establishing a film school (and they succeeded! But only after the war - they were the founders and first professors of the famous film school in Łódź. Jerzy Teopltiz even became its rector and held this position for 20 years!). They tried to organize ambitious film screenings combined with discussions. They wanted to bring up a new audience who would be able to appreciate and understand valuable films, not just some love stories and comedies created as part of industry cinema.

They themselves, to the best of their modest possibilities, tried to make short and documentary films, showing in them the reality of pre-war Poland as it really was. And it was a rather scary picture, despite the idyll we see in the mainstream movies (beautiful interiors, beautiful, wealthy people, beautiful, clean cities). Today, we gladly believe in the legend of a wonderful, prosperous, strong country, whose rapid development and happy life of its citizens were brutally interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. The reality, however, was not so rosy - widespread problems were unemployment, poverty, huge social inequalities, anti-Semitism, the disastrous situation of women, and in the last years before the war a clear increase in pro-fascist moods. Today we are not talking about it, but Starters tried to address these problems.

Alexander Ford (1908-1980) was the most prominent and also the most well-known representative of this trend. His real name was Mosze Lifszyc and he was the son of a Jewish tailor from Łódź. He managed to get a secondary education and started studying art history at the University of Warsaw. It was there that, as an eighteen-year-old boy, during a summer student camp organized by one of the professors (Tadeusz Pruszkowski) he became interested in the cinema. He began to make short films - unfortunately they have not survived to our times.

His first feature film – *The Legion of the street* (*Legion ulicy*, 1932) - apparently excellent (it won the plebiscite of the magazine “Cinema” for the best film of 1932), did not survive too. It was a story about Warsaw newsboys - kids who supported themselves, and sometimes their whole families, selling newspapers on the street. In the film, the newsboys played themselves, all shots were also made in authentic interiors and locations. It was then a very innovative method - real life recorded on celluloid tape, with a minimal number of staged scenes. It

was rare then for the film to be very well received by both viewers and critics - but this was the case with this film.

*Sabra* (1933) - a story about Jewish settlers in Palestine - turned out to be much weaker, as well as *The awakening* (*Przebudzenie*, 1934), a story about three high school graduates entering adult life. But the film *Children must laugh* (*Mir kumen on/Droga młodych*, 1936) – is an outstanding fictionalized documentary about children staying in the Jewish tuberculosis sanatorium in Miedzeszyn, built from contributions of Jewish workers. This place was extraordinary - children were not only cured there, but also brought up, taught the principles of democracy, tolerance, respect for other people regardless of their race, religion or nationality. They came to Miedzeszyn disturbed, scared, sick, dirty - and flourished in this place, learned what human dignity is. Those children who managed to survive the Holocaust remembered staying in the sanatorium as the most beautiful moment of their childhood.

It would seem that the values that were passed on to the children in the sanatorium are universal and nobody can undermine them. Meanwhile, the authorities banned the distribution of the film because of its subversive significance. There were two things - first, Ford showed in the film the monstrous poverty of the workers' districts of Warsaw, which means that he accused the state of the conditions in which its citizens live. The second flashpoint was the topic of the workers' strike – during the workers' strike in Zagłębie district, Jewish children suggested that each of them donate part of their stay in the sanatorium to allow the starving children of Polish workers to come there. The theme of this childish friendship beyond religious and racial divisions was also unacceptable, in a country where there were already a bench ghetto, *numerus nullus* and *numerus clausus* at Polish universities, where windows were broken in Jewish stores and pogroms were organized. Thus, Ford's film was watched at closed screenings among friends, and then sent to Denmark, and perhaps thanks to this it has survived to our times.

In 1935, as a result of financial problems, START was liquidated. Two years later, in 1937, instead of START, SAF - Film Cooperative led by Wanda Jakubowska was established. The two most important films made by this institution are *Over the Nemunas River* (*Nad Niemnem*, 1939) by Wanda Jakubowska based on the novel by Eliza Orzeszkowa, and *Spooks* (*Strachy*, 1938) by Eugeniusz Cękałski and Konrad Szolowski, based on the novel by Maria Ukniewska. The first title was to premiere in September 1939, but due to the outbreak of the war it did not happen. Shortly thereafter, information reached the director of the film that the Germans were

going to re-edit her work to make it a Nazi propaganda movie, so she hid the copies. After the destruction of Warsaw, they were never found.

However, there is a second film made by SAF. This is the story of two poor girls who dream of love, fame and financial security. They think they will find it while dancing in a cabaret, but their hopes have no chance to come true. They are too decent to behave in a wicked way, and too naive to defend against temptations and men who only want to use them. Betrayal and abandonment, abortion, poverty, blackmail - become their experience. On the one hand, *Spooks* is a very good and bold social drama, and on the other - an epoque document. The film talks about what the possibilities of girls from the social lowlands looked like in the late 1930s - the only thing they could do to improve their livelihood was to marry a man who was wealthier than them (and usually much older, meaning just sell themselves) or become someone's kept woman. The title "spooks" are all the dangers that the heroines have to face simply because they are women and that they are poor.

We should also mention *People of the Vistula* (*Ludzie Wisły*, 1938) by Aleksander Ford. It is a movie about people living and working on the boats on Vistula river, struggling with poverty and dreaming of better live.

## **Avant-garde Cinema**

This trend was by far the modest in the discussed decade of Polish cinema. Avant-garde cinema is ahead of its time, inspired by other arts, not obvious and often not easy to read. Avant-garde filmmakers often use metaphors, symbols, don't tell linear stories, they look for new means of expression. In Poland, in which viewers adored industry films, it was hard to find an audience interested in a completely different type of cinema.

However, Franciszka and Stefan Themersonowie - a painter and a writer - tried to create this kind of cinema. They decided to use their talent in making short film forms. But even for the very progressive members of the START group, Themersons' attempts were difficult to perceive. A short animation *Pharmacy* (*Apteka*, 1930) was created at that time, an adaptation of the poem by Anatol Stern *Europe* (*Europa*, 1932 - the film was lost), and film experiments: *Melodious Trifle* (*Drobiazg melodyjny*, 1933) and *The circuits* (*Zwarcia*, 1935). Contemporary viewers should, however, see *The Adventure of a Good Citizen* (*Przygoda człowieka poczciwego*, 1937) - a film derived from the grotesque tradition and inspired by Dadaist painting. It is praise of the lifestyle known today as "slow life" - an encouragement to look around us, to



give up conformist attitudes, to take action for others perhaps incomprehensible, but in effect giving the people internal freedom.

## **Yiddish cinema**

Yiddish cinema are films about topics related to Jewish culture, tradition and customs, made by Jewish producers and film makers for Jewish viewers and in Yiddish. The first film of this kind shot in Poland was *Der Wilder foter* (*The cruel father*, 1911) by Marek Arnsztein. So, it was made at the same time as the first Polish feature films. Such productions were made around the end of the 1920s - there were about three million Jewish people in Poland, so members of this community were attractive and numerous recipients of Yiddish films.

After a break of several years, in the mid-1930s, Jewish films began to be produced again, but according to slightly different patterns than those used so far. New producers appeared - Saul Goskind, Józef Green, Fejga and Leon Fenikstein - who were aware of the risk of such productions (fear of rising anti-Semitic sentiment was one of the most important factors). However, they also knew that the Jewish diaspora in the world is huge and that it is worth preparing a separate product for it. The reason for doing it in Poland was the fact that Jewish shtetls still existed here - that is, small towns mostly inhabited by Jews. So, the perfect set design was ready, and the cost of making such film was much lower in Poland than in Western Europe or in the United States. Here too, many filmmakers who worked in the mainstream cinema, had Jewish roots and knew Yiddish - they were also good professionals, who could make films for both Polish and Jewish viewers. The same applied to the actors and film crew members.

In the years 1936-1939, 9 full-length films in Yiddish and many documentaries about the Jewish community were made in Poland. These three years, just before the outbreak of World War II, we today call the "golden age of Yiddish cinema." It would not have been without the films produced and partly directed by Józef Green (1900-1996), whose biography is the material for an extraordinary feature film itself. His real name was Józef Grinberg. He was an actor who in 1924 decided to go to New York. He was there when *The Jazz Singer* was produced - he was one of the extras in this film. He was delighted with the possibilities of sound cinema and at the same time saw interest in it. He earned little capital on the sounding of European Yiddish films, and then returned with this money to Poland. The sum, which was quite modest in the United States, turned out to be a huge asset here

and enabled Green to produce Jewish films that were later watched by Jewish diaspora around the world.

His greatest artistic and financial success was the romantic musical comedy *Judeł plays the violin* (*Jidl mit'n fidl/Judeł gra na skrzypcach* 1936), co-directed with Jan Nowina-Przybylski. The famous Jewish actress Molly Picon (actually - Małka Piekun) played in this movie. She, out of affection for Green, agreed to take the role for the sum of \$ 10,000. In the United States it was small money, especially for the actress with her position, and in Poland it was an unimaginable sum. Picon portrayed Jitke - a young girl who, together with her father Arie (Symcha Fostel), after losing their small flat (they could not afford to pay the rent), wanders around the villages and towns to earn for bread by playing the violin. However, because it is dangerous for a young girl, Jitke disguises herself as a boy and takes the name Judeł (we already know this motif from Polish comedies). During the journey, Jitke and her father meet another pair of traveling musicians with whom they decide to create a quartet. Soon they are joined by the singer Tajbele - a fiancée who escaped from her own wedding, forced to marry an old and ugly man. Jitke, still disguised as a boy, falls in love with Froim (Samuel Landau), one of the band's members. When, finally, after many dilemmas, she reveals her true identity to him, Froim realizes that he has been looking for her all his life. Together they sail to America.

The film had a very simple but funny plot, it was brilliantly directed and played. Its great value was very well captured the folklore of Jewish towns and beautiful portraits of shtetls - in the film staged photos are intertwined with documentary fragments. No wonder that viewers from around the world fell in love with this story. The authors of *Judeł plays the violin* could not know it, but they recorded the Jewish world on film tape just before the Holocaust. A few years after the film was made, there was no trace left of this world, and a large part of the crew that made it - including the actor playing Froim - died in ghettos, concentration camps, during escapes or hiding.

It is worth remembering about other films produced and co-directed by Józef Green. They are: *A Purim clown* (*Der Purimszpiler / Błazen purymowy*, 1937) - together with Jan Nowina-Przybylski; *Letter to mother* (*A briwele der mamen / List do matki*, 1938) - together with Leon Trystan; *Mommy* (*Mamele / Mateczka*, 1938) - together with Konrad Tom. They did not achieve such success as *Judeł*, but they also won the hearts of the viewers thanks to the successful combination of contemporary themes with Jewish folklore.

Michał Waszyński's *The Dibbuk* (*Der Dybuk/ Dybuk*, 1937) proved to be the greatest success of Yiddish cinema. You already know the name of this artist - he appeared many times during our lectures. Michał Waszyński - a popular director of Polish industry melodramas and comedies - was a Jew, his real name was Mosze Waks. However, he hid his origin, to the extent that during the production of *The Dibbuk* - a film in Yiddish - he pretended that he did not speak the language and hired a translator who was to help him during the shooting...

*The Dibbuk* was produced by "Feniks" Film Production Company, owned by Fejga and Leon Fenikstein - an interesting fact may be that in the same year the same company also produced *The Healer*, which was the biggest hit of Polish cinema in 1937. And both films were directed by the same person. "Feniks" was on the verge of bankruptcy at the time, so all funds were invested in titles that gave hope to avoid financial ruin. The plan was successful because the best professionals were involved in both productions, and every detail was carefully thought out and implemented. This way two great works were created, and though for two different audiences - they were talking about the same emotions, common to people at all latitudes, regardless of their culture, religion or origin.

*The Dibbuk* is an adaptation of Szymon An-ski's 1914 play - a drama based on belief deeply rooted in Jewish religion and culture. Dibbuk is the soul of a man who died suddenly, tragically, not reconciled with his death, who incarnates in the body of a living man and coexists in it with his soul. The love story in which this thread appeared was very often staged on the stage. The same actors who previously played the main roles in the theatre, also appeared in film version of the story.

It is a story of two friends, Nissen and Sender, who vow to each other that when their pregnant wives give birth to children of different sexes, they will lead to their wedding. And indeed - one has a son and the other has a daughter. Shortly afterwards Nissen sinks in the river. 18 years pass - Sender has become a rich man, only money counts for him. He wants his daughter Lea (Lili Liana) to marry a rich man, he doesn't care about the girl's feelings. Meanwhile, Chonen (Leon Liebgold) gets to Sender's house by accident, and the young fall in love. Chonen, however, is poor, so even though Sender finally realizes that he is the son of a friend whom he once promised, he does not intend to keep the promise. A desperate boy tries to get gold using the forbidden spell and dies. On Lea's wedding day, his soul enters her body. The girl cannot be married until Chonen's soul leaves her. So, the famous tzadik is called to cast out the ghost. Lea, however, dies after this ritual. Lovers can reunite only in the afterlife.

The film was made for 5 weeks, which was exceptionally long for the production conditions of the time. It was created in Warsaw and in Kazimierz Dolny, which was then a Jewish shtetl. The movie watched today still makes a colossal impression - it is a beautiful love story, a very credible one, also because it was played by a real young couple (Leon Liebgold and Lili Liana were married to each other) and the emotions between them can be seen on the screen. But it is primarily a metaphysical drama, saturated with anxiety and premonition of the coming Holocaust. The world recorded on a film tape, was brutally annihilated a few years later. And the souls of those who died then are probably such dibbuks for Poles, constantly reminding of their presence ...

The last Yiddish film - an epilogue for extraordinary stories that appeared so recently, but in a completely different era - was made in Poland after the war, in 1948. It is *Our children (Unsere kindern/ Nasze dzieci 1948)* directed by Nathan Gross and produced by Saul Goskind. It was played by Jewish actors and comedians, Dżigan and Szumacher, who survived the war in the Soviet Union and then returned to Poland. The main plot of the film is their meeting with Jewish children, Holocaust survivors, who live in an orphanage near Warsaw. The children tell them about the events they witnessed and the stories of their survival. We see their tales on the screen. This record of authentic events - the first (and the only one ...) made such shortly after the war - is absolutely shocking.

In Poland, this film was shown only once, at a closed screening. Shortly afterwards, almost everyone involved in its production decided to emigrate.

# Chapter IV.

## Polish filmmakers during the Second World War

The fate of Polish filmmakers during World War II was very different, but almost always depended on the decision that was taken at the very beginning of the war. Some people decided to stay in Poland, others decided to flee from the Nazis to the Soviet Union, others saw rescue and the possibility of continuing their work in going to the West. The capricious fate offered some satisfying job, forced others to change their profession, while many others - were killed. The most difficult challenges and situations awaited those who did not leave the country.

### **The fate of Polish filmmakers in occupied Poland**

In September 1939, it turned out that not only the Polish army was completely unprepared for war. Nobody had thought about establishing a team that would record historical events on tape - thus creating a document of German crimes. Today, however, we have many photos from the siege of Warsaw and activities carried out in other regions of Poland. Photographs taken outside of Warsaw were taken from a German initiative - the Nazis in love with film art proudly documented the victorious "blitzkrieg", not suspecting that soon their films would become evidence in the trials against the Third Reich. But the films documenting Warsaw defending against Germany were made by Polish operators and directors. They asked President Stefan Starzyński to set up an official film service that would have the right to move freely in the streets of Warsaw and film anything they consider important. The president responded positively to the appeal and in this way "Starzyński's crew" was created - formed among others by: Roman Banach, Jerzy Gabryelski, Henryk Vlassak, Jerzy Zarzycki.

They filmed burning houses and historical monuments (including the fire of the Royal Castle, which was later rebuilt in the 1970s), digging anti-tank ditches, dead people and animals on the streets, deadly tired and decimated troops returning to the capital, chaos and suffering. Just before the Germans entered Warsaw, the filmmakers had managed to take a large part of these materials from the city and then from Poland. Later, the Allies used them in their documentaries. Some of these tapes survived in Poland, and after the war they were stored in Documentary and

Feature Film Studios (WFDiF). After many years, they were digitally reconstructed and used in a ten-minute film, entitled *A chronicle of besieged Warsaw*, with a contemporary commentary (the film is silent, so contemporary viewers do not always know what they are watching).

In September 1939, the only foreign journalist present in Warsaw was Julien Bryan - an American reporter. He left the city just before the German entering and took with him footages that he used in 1940, making a 9-minute documentary film entitled *Siege*, nominated for an Oscar in 1941. This film is a record of a terrible crime against the city and its inhabitants and was the first to show the world that the Nazis did not respect any war conventions, and their attack was aimed at civilians. The Germans deliberately bombed hospitals and buildings clearly marked on the roofs with a red cross symbol.

The film contains shocking scenes shot in a bombed maternity hospital. Mothers, right after delivery, with tiny children in their arms, hide in the basement. Some babies are injured, becoming victims of the War in the first hours of their lives. Bryan's testimony was very important because its author witnessed the events shown and addressed the viewer directly about what he saw. As a foreigner and reporter, whose profession was, showing the truth above all, he denied German propaganda, presenting the assault on Poland as a mission to bring civilization to the East.

### **Film activities during the occupation**

In October 1940, the German occupation authorities issued an order forbidding Poles not only to use film cameras, but also to own them. Of course, the failure to comply with this command was punished with death - as was the vast majority of things at that time. The idea was that Poles could not independently document German crimes, but also that they did not have access to anything that would allow them to create culture. Inhabitants of the conquered countries were to be slaves of the Nazis, and because it is always easier to lead uneducated and primitive people, high schools and universities were immediately shut down. Arrests and executions of intelligentsia started; creative activity was banned. However, cinemas were still open, but they showed only very bad films. They were mainly German films, but also about 40 Polish pre-war films, usually very primitive, were shown. The names of non-Aryan artists were cut out of their opening credits.

Each screening was preceded by a German newsreel - very professionally realized, praising German victories and proving that the Third Reich was invincible, so resistance made no sense. There was also widespread awareness that the proceeds from tickets go to German armaments - so a Pole buying a ticket, contributed to the financing of the German army. For these reasons, the Polish underground quickly began to organize actions to discourage the public from visiting the cinemas - during the screenings, smelly substances were sprayed, paint was poured on the viewers leaving the cinema, the slogans "only pigs are sitting in the cinema", "carrion goes to the cinema", both forming rhymes in Polish, were painted on the walls. Such actions proved effective in Warsaw, but not in other cities.

### ***Heimkehr* by Gustav Ucicky**

Almost from the beginning of the occupation, the German authorities tried to get Polish pre-war filmmakers to cooperate. But Poles tried to avoid that - they changed their identity, hid from the authorities, undertaking jobs far from their previous professions. Fortunately, there were very few cases of collaboration, and the film community largely emerged from the Second World War with honour. Nevertheless, a shameful film was made at that time, in which the Poles took part - actors, extras and some technical staff. It was *Heimkehr* (*Return to Home*, 1941) by Gustav Ucicky. This is a terribly propaganda Nazi film depicting the persecution of the German minority by primitive and cruel Poles and Jews. It was to justify German intervention - the German army entered Poland because it had to save its citizens and ensure their safe return home (the title "heimkehr"). Poles and Jews shown in the movie are such disgusting people (or rather sub-people) that there is no punishment that would be suitable for them. The film was so moving that German soldiers were crying while watching it, and German propaganda minister Josef Goebels considered it an outstanding work.

Poles were played in this film by Polish actors, including Bogusław Samborski - a well-known and respected actor before the war. They were recruited by Igo Sym - the most famous collaborator among Polish filmmakers who was a German agent before the war. After the German invasion, he openly cooperated with them and was responsible for many arrests of Polish culture creators. In the end, the underground issued a death sentence on him, and Sym was executed in 1941.

## Film underground activities

Despite the inability to take up an open job, Polish filmmakers tried to work in underground. In 1942, the Polish underground began to consider recording war events on film tape. At that time, the Propaganda Department was established at the Information and Propaganda Office of the Home Army Main Command. This unit's short name was "The Hive" ("Rój"). A photo-film section was created at the Hive, led by Antoni Bohdziewicz. Jerzy Zarzycki, Janina Cękańska and Andrzej Ancuta worked there. Their task was to train film operators who were to register the uprising prepared in Warsaw at that time. In 1943, an underground film recording course was launched in the capital. The equipment needed for this came from Allied discharges, was bought on the black market or stolen from the Germans. Pictures were taken from hiding and developed in the hideouts of the Home Army.

The group trained at the time proved to be excellent during the 1944 uprising. They shot a lot of various materials. Despite the dramatic conditions, they almost all the time recorded both the course of the fights and everyday life of Warsaw residents at that time. The tapes were developed on a regular basis and already during the uprising three numbers of the insurgent film chronicle, entitled *Warsaw fights!* (*Warszawa walczy!*), were released. They were shown in the "Palladium" cinema: the first issue - August 13, the second - August 21 and the third - September 3. The fourth issue was not finished anymore. The cinema where it could have been shown didn't exist any more...

Today these footages are priceless. Many of them survived - some in hideouts in the country, others smuggled outside Poland in the form of microfilms. In 2004, on the seventieth anniversary of the outbreak of the uprising, these footages were digitally restored, coloured and edited by Jan Komasa in the world's first non-fiction war drama. *The Warsaw Uprising* is a story told from the point of view of two brothers who are film operators. We hear their voices from behind the camera, and day after day we immerse ourselves in the world of real events, being aware that the pictures we see and the words we hear (read from the lips) have not been staged.

## Polish filmmakers in the West

Some filmmakers decided to leave Poland just before or right after the outbreak of the WWII. Those who decided to flee to the West (Ryszard Ordyński, Eugeniusz



Cękałski, Stefania Zahorska, Franciszka and Stefan Themerson) built an important film cell operating under the Polish government in exile - first in France, and after its occupation by the Germans, in England and the United States. Their task was to make documentaries about Poland and its current situation, addressed to Western viewers. They were to counterbalance German propaganda - to show the true picture of war in occupied Poland and to inform the West about German cruelty. Therefore, the principle of contrast was often used - using pre-war photos the beauty of Poland was shown, its tradition and culture was discussed, and then photos showing the destruction of all this by the Germans were shown.

This is how the first documentary in this series is built - *This is Poland (To jest Polska, 1940)* by Eugeniusz Cękałski. The first half of the film is devoted to information about Polish tradition, history, culture, customs and folklore. Poland is presented as a country of beautiful nature and historic, charming cities, and Poles - as a nation of solidary people, wise, strong, brave and pious. The second part of the film shows German barbarism during the September campaign.

Two years later, Eugeniusz Cękałski made the movie *The White Eagle (Orzeł Biały, 1942)*, telling about how Polish emigrants are doing in England. This is a very positive image of the Polish community, which quickly adapted to the habits of the British, respects their country, tries not to abuse hospitality and not be a burden to anyone. Poles hope to return to their free homeland and rebuild it after the war damage, and meanwhile learn and work, trying to be useful. The film was accompanied by an off-commentary by an English actor Leslie Howard - full of compassion and admiration for a nation that is doing so well in such difficult situation.

An extremely interesting film from this period is *Calling Mr. Smith (Wzywamy pana Smitha, 1943)* by Franciszka and Stefan Themerson. This is an experimental film, combining the greatest achievements of world art, including Polish, with contemporary German "art" - cruelty, murder and destruction. The authors turn to the typical representative of the British people - the title Mr. Smith - that he should not be indifferent to the drama of occupied Europe, although it does not concern him personally. Indifference is also a crime because it means allowing it. If you see evil and do not react, then you are responsible for it too.

## **Polish filmmakers in the East**

After the outbreak of World War II, many Polish filmmakers decided to flee to the East, to the areas later occupied by the Soviet Union. They were, among

others: Aleksander Ford, Władysław Forbert, Stanisław Wohl, Henryk Wars, Michał Waszyński, Seweryn Steinwurz, Ludwik Perski, Józef Lejtes. Their fate and the fate of many others, similar to them, turned very differently. Some managed to find a job in or similar to their professions - they worked in Soviet film production companies and the media; they took pictures. Some people had to take physical labour. Others - as potential enemies of the USSR - were arrested, imprisoned or killed. One of the victims of Soviet terror was Eugeniusz Bodo, probably the most famous Polish pre-war actor. After being arrested by NKVD, he was falsely accused of being a spy; sentenced to a lager camp where he died of hunger.

The situation of all of them changed significantly after signing the Sikorski-Majski agreement. In June 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union, which was completely unprepared for the assault of its current ally. The Soviets needed help, first of all, additional soldiers. So, they allowed the army to form in the USSR, consisting of Poles who were released from labour camps or exiles to the far ends of a totalitarian state. The mission of forming and commanding this army was given to General Władysław Anders, who, together with potential soldiers, tried to take civilians from the Soviets, being aware that this was perhaps the only chance of these people to get out of captivity. However, not all Poles managed to reach Anders on time and leave the USSR with him. Some of them did not manage on time and joined the army that entered Poland in the summer of 1944 together with the Red Army. It must be admitted, however, that for some, it was this army that was the right one because they identified with communist ideology.

Both armies - the army of general Anders and the Tadeusz Kościuszko 1st Infantry Division - established the Film Units, i.e. film teams created to document the lives and struggles of the soldiers.

### **Film Unit at the Polish Army of general Władysław Anders**

This team was made up of excellent professionals whose names we already know: Józef Lejtes, Michał Waszyński, Seweryn Steinwurz and Henryk Wars. They have made several documentaries, 40 (!) war newsreels and a full-length feature film. Their achievements are therefore really impressive. *From Latrun to Gazala (Od Latrun do Gazali, 1943)* by Józef Lejtes is a film documenting the everyday life of the Carpathian Rifle Brigade and the staging of battles in which they took part. Michał Waszyński's *Children (Dzieci, 1943)* is a beautiful film based on the letters of a boy

separated from his mother, who writes to her every day, describing the path he travels with the Anders Army.

However, the most famous document of that time is *Monte Cassino* (1944), also by Michał Waszyński, which is the recording of the famous attack on the German-occupied Monte Cassino Hill in Italy. It was only won by the Poles, however, paying huge losses for this victory. The film was made in 5 different language versions and became something of a visiting card of General Anders' Army and contributed to its post-war legend.

An amazing production is *The Great Road* (*Wielka Droga*, 1946) - a full-length feature film, but extensively illustrated with documentary materials. This is the last film by Michał Waszyński, who from that moment was mainly involved in film production. *The Great Road* is a story about the love of two Lviv residents who intend to get married, but in these plans, they are disturbed by the outbreak of war. Adam (Albin Ossowski) goes to fight, is imprisoned in a Soviet labour camp in Siberia, finally manages to reach the Anders Army and is wounded in the battle of Monte Cassino. He loses his sight and his will to live, and the nurse taking care of him (Jadwiga Andrzejewska), wanting to help him and find something that could give him hope, looks through his things. She reads his diary and the letters from his fiancée and does not protest when Adam accidentally takes her for her beloved Irena (Renata Bogdańska - the future wife of General Anders). Irena finally finds her fiancé when he regains health. He does not know, however, that he owes it to the dedication of the nurse Jadwiga, who shifts into the shadows. The young leave together, and the last scene of the film shows them in exile in England - they cannot return to Poland, which has changed from one occupation to another, this time the Soviet one. However, they hope that their country will regain freedom soon.

The film carried a strongly anti-Soviet message - it showed the camps, poverty and cruelty that the inhabitants of the USSR suffered from. It carefully reconstructed the entire "great road" that Poles had to travel to get out of the Soviet land (through Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt and Italy) and reach England, where was the Polish government in exile at that time. For political reasons, the film was not shown in Poland until 1990.

### **Film Unit at the Tadeusz Kościuszko 1st Infantry Division**

The team included both filmmakers who did not reach the Anders Army before it left the Soviet Union, and those who represented leftist views and who were in

line with the ideology of the USSR. In May 1943, a Photographic - Film Section was created at the Kościuszko Division, which in July 1943 was transformed into the Film Unit. There were mainly former members of START and SAF there: Stanisław Wohl, Adolf and Władysław Forbert, Ludwik Perski, Jerzy Bossak. Aleksander Ford was their boss.

However, very few films were made by this Unit: only three issues of the *Fighting Poland* film chronicle (against 40 produced by the Anders Army film team) and several documentaries, of which only one can be considered valuable. The Soviets treated Polish filmmakers with distance, censored their work at every turn, mostly simply preventing them from it. There was also a lack of equipment and materials needed to make films.

At that time, Alexander Ford made the documentary *We swear the Polish land...* (*Przysięgamy ziemi polskiej*, 1943). The climax of this film is the moment of taking the oath by Polish soldiers on the anniversary of the victorious battle of Grunwald - July 15. However, it is impossible to watch it today - the film has a propaganda, intrusive commentary and presents the Soviet Union, a state of lawlessness and harm, as a liberator of humanity.

However, there is a unique film in the unit's achievements: *Majdanek - a cemetery of Europe* (*Majdanek, cmentarzysko Europy*, 1944) directed by Aleksander Ford. It was realized in the summer of 1944, when the film crew together with the Red Army arrived in Lublin. There was Majdanek concentration camp there, which the Germans left just a moment before the arrival of Poles and Russians. The view was terrible - no one expected piles of dead bodies, pits full of thousands of human corpses, piles of shoes, clothes, toothbrushes and people who looked like living skeletons. It was a few months before the liberation of Auschwitz, and no one was really aware of how monstrous the reality of concentration camps was. *Majdanek* is the first film in the world that shows it. It was given pathetic commentary, which today can torment and irritate the viewer, but then it was completely natural and understandable.

# Chapter V.

## The first years of Polish cinematography after World War II

For many reasons, Polish cinema after the Second World War had to be created almost from scratch. Two of them were the most important. First of all, the country was largely ruined - everything was missing, a very large part of the pre-war infrastructure, including film infrastructure, did not exist. Secondly, the communists who took power did not want to carry on with pre-war cinema patterns, that they considered primitive, kitschy, and above all glorifying those values that were supposed to be foreign to the citizens of the new communist country. The authorities entrusted the creation of new cinematography to those filmmakers who survived the war in the Soviet Union and who entered Poland with the tanks of the Red Army. They were mainly former START members, who before the war represented strongly leftist sympathies (however, it remains a mystery how they could still support Soviet ideology after spending a few years in the USSR...).

From the first moment it was clear that the cinematography in Poland would be fully nationalized and cultural policy would be subordinated to communist ideology. Leaving the film production studios and cinemas in private hands would mean lack of control over the topics in films, and this could not be accepted. The authorities were aware that most of the Polish society did not support the new political system and would like to return to pre-war borders and democracy. Therefore, the films were to convince Poles to accept the new reality. Hence, in 1944, the process of "cinemafication" ("kinofikacja") began in Lublin - that is, launching surviving cinemas, taking them away from their rightful owners, requisitioning of film equipment, and expanding the cinema network in cities and in the countryside, as well as creating a touring cinema network.

Polish viewers after years of war torment desperately wanted any kind of entertainment. The cinema halls were besieged for hours before the screening, and there were often so many people willing to watch the film that the crowd was simply demolishing the buildings. Sometimes militia protection was needed for the projection to take place. The problem was also lack of films to display in these cinemas. Pre-war films were in a very bad condition, there were few copies, besides - as I mentioned above - they were largely considered incorrect. They did not fit the new system. Therefore, films were imported from abroad, mainly from the Soviet

Union, but shortly after the war, American and Western European films could still be seen in Polish cinemas.

On November 13, 1945, a decree was adopted on the establishment of the "Polish Film" Company ("Film Polski"). According to this decree, all cinematography departments - production, post-production and distribution - were concentrated in one company owned by the state. In this way, "Polish Film" was to control the film life in Poland completely. Someone who would like to make a film on their own, had no such opportunity, let alone that such action was henceforth considered a violation of the law. Aleksander Ford became the company director, and Jerzy Bossak the artistic and program director. They both had very ambitious plans - they assumed that 25 feature films and 120 documentaries would be produced in Poland every year. Of course, time quickly showed that their plans were just a fantasy. Both men also declared what kind of films would be made in communist Poland: they were supposed to be valuable, wise and original. They were also to talk about problems and matters important to modern Polish society. To make this fairy tale image complete, it was also planned to build a thousand permanent cinemas and a touring cinema network consisting of three thousand trucks with a complete crew.

Jerzy Bossak was also the editor-in-chief of "Film" magazine. In this magazine he published a survey in which he asked readers what topics interested them most and what they thought should have been in the first Polish films shot after the war. The answers were easy to predict - Poles wanted to see films about their experiences during the war: about the Warsaw Uprising, the battle of Monte Cassino, about partisan war in the woods, and finally about everyday life during the war. Unfortunately, most of these themes would probably be censored - the Warsaw Uprising was not only aimed against Germany but was also to anticipate the marching into the capital of the Soviet army and prevent them from taking over the power. The battle of Monte Cassino was won by the army of General Anders, who did not acknowledge the communist authorities and remained in England after the war. Soldiers of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) who were negative about communists took part in the guerrilla fights. Of all these topics, therefore, only war day-to-day life was acceptable.

The announcements of the heads of "Polish Film" were impressive, but the reality was definitely less colourful. Many interesting screenplays were shelved for censorship reasons, as well as the films for some reason considered uncomfortable. It was then that the expression "shelf movie" (in Polish: "półkownik" with "ó") was

born - that is, a finished film that is put aside for no time (sometimes even tens of years...), because the communist authorities recognize that it cannot be shown to the public.

The first Polish "shelf movie" was a short film  $2 \times 2 = 4$ , which was realized in 1945 by Antoni Bohdziewicz and a group of his students from the Krakow Youth Film Workshop. Bohdziewicz spent the WWII in Poland, joined the Film Unit in Krakow. He dreamed that it was here that a new Polish film centre would be created - a film studio and a film school - and there was a good chance for that. The city was not destroyed, a great university and Academy of Fine Arts were there, so there were professors who could teach art classes. In addition, the retreating Germans left in Kraków at 16 Józefitów street, a well-equipped photographic and film studio (today it houses a division of the Museum of History of Photography, changing its name to Museum of Photography).

Bohdziewicz managed to launch practical classes for a group of several dozen young people in 1945. He did not want to give traditional lectures for them because he thought it was best to learn the film craft in practice. Together with them he made a kind of movie that resembled a movie poster that was supposed to convince viewers to the new system. However, he unwittingly revealed that virtually no one in Poland - except for very young people and a handful of former leftists - does not accept communism. In the end, the film was put on the shelf, the Workshop was liquidated, and the dreams of creating a film production centre in Krakow were dispelled.

A horrible fate also met another film that could have become a very important and necessary work - *Robinson of Warsaw* (*Robinson warszawski*) directed by Jerzy Zarzycki. It was supposed to be an adaptation of the memories of Władysław Szpilman, who in the spring of 1945 told Czesław Miłosz and Jerzy Andrzejewski about his wartime fate. Szpilman was a Jew, he lost his whole family in the Warsaw Ghetto. He hid on the Aryan side for a year and a half, and after the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising, he survived several months in the rubble of the capital. Miłosz and Andrzejewski immediately wrote the script of the film, which was to be a psychological study of a man in a borderline situation. Meanwhile, the selection committee made so many changes and corrections that nothing left out of the original story. The hero was no longer a Jew, so he could not have been in the ghetto, and thus the most important plot of the story was dropped. He was no longer hiding alone in the ruins - he was accompanied by a girl he saved, then by Polish partisans, of course from the People's Army (*Armia Ludowa*), not the Home

Army (Armia Krajowa), and finally a Soviet paratrooper joined them. In the finale of the film, the Red Army and the Polish Army liberated the capital together. In this shape, the massacred project came to the screens in 1950 as *The City Invincible* (*Miasto nieujarzmione*).

Another wasted project, also shelved for many years, was the film *Two hours* (*Dwie godziny*, 1946, premiere 1957) by Stanisław Wohl and Józef Wyszomirski. It was planned that this film would enter Polish screens as the second feature film after *Robinson of Warsaw* - of course this did not happen. It was a very interesting attempt to show a portrait of Polish society right after the war. The action of the film took place during the title two hours, when the train stopped at some provincial station. Among the train passengers are a couple returning from forced labour in Germany and a former concentration camp prisoner who meets the ghosts of the past in the town. The film had a very pessimistic message - the country is ruined, people extremely tired, hopeless and demoralized by war. Such an image could not be shown to the viewers. Today the movie is available in a very mutilated form - uncomfortable fragments were cut out and lost, so many plots are broken.

A similar fate met several other projects, while Polish viewers were eagerly waiting for the first Polish post-war film. At that time, the directors of "Polish Film" decided to ask for help pre-war professionals whose films before the war were criticized and laughed at: a director Leonard Buczkowski and a screenwriter Ludwik Starski. They offered to make *Forbidden Songs* (*Zakazane piosenki*) - a documentary film about occupational singers and their songs that were sung in the streets during the war. The idea was brilliant - they still could reach these singers and record their songs, and then quickly and neatly combine these recordings into a larger whole. The original project, however, had no heroes or plot. It was based on the contrast between the Nazi march with the hated "heila heilo" chorus and Polish songs commenting on political events. The film was to be something of a musical reportage from occupied Warsaw and tell with the songs about its wartime fate - from September 1939 to "liberation" in 1945 by the Red Army. The song performers were to constantly change, according to the thesis that the occupation songs were sung by everyone, regardless of their condition, age, sex or wealth, because it was a form of fighting the occupier.

The document was created at the turn of 1945 and 1946, it was shot entirely in Łódź, where monumental decorations staging Warsaw streets were built. After its pre-release screening (a show for the political committee deciding to weather to let the film on the screens or not), it was decided, however, that it was worth



making a feature film version of *Forbidden Songs*. Therefore, the authors of the film were asked to make the story of the episodes already recorded. The songs were supposed to rhythmize the narration, to be a leitmotiv of the film, which was to tell about the fate of three young people: the siblings Halina (Danuta Szaflarska) and Roman (Jerzy Duszyński) and their friend Ryszard (Jan Świdorski). The heroes are involved in the conspiracy, brave and good, and their attitudes and decisions are contrasted with the behaviour of other people during the occupation. To a large extent, however, Polish society behaves with dignity and nobility. Collaborators are only individuals confirming the rule.

The premiere of the film took place in January 1947 and caused mixed reactions. On the one hand, it was euphoria - finally the first post-war Polish feature film appeared on the screens! Viewers stormed theatres, and occupation songs were hummed on the streetcars and in the streets again. On the other hand, attention was drawn to the fact that the picture of the occupation in this film is too mild, that it does not feel horrible at all, and the Germans are portrayed as primarily stupid, not cruel and ruthless people. The Ministry of Information and Propaganda decided to withdraw the film from the cinemas, and Leonard Buczkowski was asked to make some cuts and alterations. The director met these expectations and added several scenes highlighting Nazi terror. A new narrative frame also appeared - earlier Roman told the film director about the occupation playing songs in a film studio, and now he talked about the war to a colleague who survived that time in England and of course had no idea what was really going on here. Roman also convinced him that it was worth staying in the country. The film ended with pictures of the Polish-Soviet "liberation" of Warsaw in January 1945. In this shape it was again introduced to cinemas in November 1948.

Wanda Jakubowska's *The Last Stage* (*Ostatni etap*, 1947) is an extraordinary work - the first feature film in the world about the Auschwitz camp, in addition made by its former prisoner. During the war, Wanda Jakubowska was active in the communist resistance movement, but she used false documents and was arrested accidentally, without any connection with her activities. If the Germans had been aware of who really fell into their hands, Jakubowska would have had no chance to survive. She ended up in Auschwitz and it was thanks to her contacts with the communist underground that she managed to find a job that gave her a chance to survive - Jakubowska managed a photography studio in the camp. It was there that she met the German communist Gerda Schneider - also a prisoner - and both women promised each other that if one of them survived, she would make a film

about Auschwitz after the war, because only by means of an image would it be possible to tell the truth about what was happening there. They both survived and immediately after the war started writing the script. The text was ready at the end of 1945, but then it turned out that the director of "Polish Film" approaches the project with great reluctance. Negotiations lasted long enough that finally desperate Jakubowska turned to Soviet cinematography for help. The legend says that Stalin himself was touched by the script (in the film there is a scene of the prisoners' prayer addressed to him...) that he supported the production.

The film takes place in a part of the concentration camp for women in Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the protagonists are prisoners who, regardless of their nationality and origin, join the camp resistance movement. There are also women collaborators, but these are exceptions. The Polish prisoner Marta escapes from the camp wanting to report outside of Auschwitz crimes, but she is caught. She dies in the final scene of the film, whispering "don't let Auschwitz happen again".

The film has a very propaganda message, completely subordinated to the thesis that only communism can defeat Nazism. Only communists are people of a pure heart who are able to go through the experience of a concentration camp with dignity and by setting an example to others. The most positive characters in the film are Russian women - extremely good, devoted, brave, helping others. It is on their initiative that the resistance movement is formed. The very image of the camp is also very softened - the action takes place mostly in the camp hospital, where, however, different conditions and rules prevailed than in the camp itself. However, this does not change the fact that *The Last Stage* is still very important and valuable film, although its propaganda message is unacceptable today. The film was extremely carefully made - in a real camp - and is an example of solid, professional film work. Jakubowska worked with her actresses using Stanislavski's system - each actress had to make a psychological analysis of the character she played. The film's leitmotifs are morning and evening appeals, train arrivals and departures, and finally selections during which life and death were decided. *The Last Stage* created the film iconography of the Auschwitz camp, which has since been used by the authors of almost all films made on the subject.

However, post-war cinema was not only about topics related to the war tragedy. The audience also went to the cinema in search of entertainment - their everyday life was so difficult that they wanted to forget about it for a moment. The first Polish post-war comedy was *Treasure (Skarb, 1948)* by Leonard Buczkowski - a great pre-war specialist who knew perfectly well how to entertain the viewer. Thus, *Treasure*

implements the proven model of pre-war comedy and talks about the vicissitudes of a young couple, Witek (Jerzy Duszyński) and Krysia (Danuta Szafarska), who have huge problems finding their own place to live. In ruined Warsaw it's almost a miracle, but Witek manages to find a room somewhere on the outskirts. He brings his wife there, but then it turns out that several other people already live in the same room, about which the owner of the apartment "forgot" to inform the new tenant ...

The background for the pair of main characters is a secondary couple: waitress Basia (Alina Janowska) and radio employee Fredek Ziółko (Adolf Dymcza). We are also dealing here with a typical set of comedy tricks: adventures, dressing up, pretending to be someone else, characteristic human types. A very important part of the film - just like in the pre-war comedy - is also the music, especially the songs. The image of a new, post-war reality, since almost everyone struggled with the lack of housing, was shown in a humorous and optimistic way. Witek and Krysia are waiting for a new apartment, but Warsaw is recovering quickly, so the viewers could hope that all the problems were temporary. The advantage of the comedy was also the fact that it was almost completely devoid of propaganda - it was simply an interesting, funny and dynamic film about the problems that almost all viewers had at that time. No wonder that they loved *Treasure*, and the queues to the cinemas lined up for many months.

In 1949 Alexander Ford made his first post-war film - and also the first Polish film on the Holocaust. It was *Border Street (Ulica Graniczna)*, in which, on the example of the residents of one Warsaw tenement house at the title Border Street, different attitudes towards the Jewish tragedy are shown. The whole story focuses on children's perspective - after all, the attitudes and opinions of adults are reflected in the judgements, opinions and behaviour of children. The film is about several children who had more or less friendly contacts with each other before the war. The outbreak of war completely changes the relationship between them: Jadzia (Maria Broniewska) and Dawidek (Jerzy Złotnicki), as Jews, are forced to move to the ghetto. Their Polish colleagues either try to help them or enjoy their unhappiness - Fredek's family takes Jadzia and her father's apartment.

It was very valuable film about very difficult and complex issue of Polish-Jewish relations. Contrary to the official propaganda (still in force...), a large proportion of Poles behaved shamefully towards the Jews, openly supporting Holocaust, or remaining indifferent to "someone else's" misfortune. Here are the signals of such an attitude, but the original version was much stronger than the existing one - the

main heroine, the Jewish girl Jadzia, died after the war on the rubble of her own home, from the hands of her former Polish neighbour. It was also the first Polish film in which the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943 was shown. Fighting Jews are pictured as heroes, and the use of the Polish and Jewish flags is a very important symbol here - both flags are very important to Jews because they identify themselves with both Polish and Jewish values.

Ford considered the film to be his moral duty - he, being a Jew, survived the Holocaust in the Soviet Union and only after returning to Poland he realized what the Holocaust truly was. His film was supposed to be something like a monument to murdered people. He made his film at a very difficult moment - he started working on it shortly after the Kielce pogrom in 1946. Due to strong anti-Semitic attitudes, film production was finally moved to Czechoslovakia. During the project, Ford was forced to make numerous corrections and cuts that softened the final message of the film. The version we have today ends when the ghetto uprising breaks out, and Polish communists armed to the teeth hurry to help the Jews. This is obviously completely factless picture. But the year 1949 was coming and there would be even more such absurd images in Polish cinema ...

# Chapter VI.

## Polish Socialist Realism. 1949-1955

In 1949, Socialist Realism was officially proclaimed in Poland as the only acceptable and valid creative method. From January to December 1949, conventions of representatives of creative industries took place all over Poland (in November in Wisła there was a congress of filmmakers), during which Minister of Culture and Art Włodzimierz Sokorski presented Socialist Realism as a method without which “no great artist can neither reach nor understand the essence of historical processes, without which there is no great art today.” The audience had no choice but to accept that from now on every film made in Poland would be made in accordance with the assumptions of Socialist Realism or would not be made at all. However, the problem was more complex - the lack of acceptance for Socialist Realism meant the same as the lack of acceptance for the communist system. During the period of raging Stalinist terror, this could mean losing job and housing, being arrested, false trial, long imprisonment or even death sentence.

Today, it is hard to even imagine the pressure put on artists at the time. Therefore, it is impossible to unequivocally misjudge their decisions on the implementation of propaganda, hypocritical, terrible communist films. Some of the filmmakers of that time really believed in this ideology, but others were simply afraid - or even scared about their own safety and of their loved ones. As a result, they wrote poems and books that are terrible from today's point of view. They created mass songs, they carved the busts of the communist in charge, and finally - they made propaganda films, although they knew that they did not match reality. This shameful period did not last long but left behind a terrible disgust and a sense of shame. The authors of those works did not want to come back to them later in their work - and it is hard to be surprised.

What was Socialist Realism? It was a “non-autonomous” art, completely dependent on patterns from the USSR (where this method was present since 1934). All achievements of world art, especially Western art, were negated and perceived as hostile and evil. The artist was treated as a craftsman who was supposed to perform work on a party order. Originality was not allowed, there was a scheme of themes, plots and film solutions that should have been used. Socialist Realism was supposed to be a mass art, adapted to the perception capabilities of the average worker (and these were not large, especially since a large part of Polish society

consisted of illiterates or people who finished their education after the first classes of primary school).

Socialist Realism books and films would have to be optimistic - all difficulties had to be overcome, the enemies of communism unmasked and punished, and hard-working workers rewarded. The conflict between good and evil was always shown very clearly. Good were Socialism and Communism, industrialization, progress, youth and the future. Party and Soviet Union, secret service, communist authorities, atheism and science. Employment of women in positions previously considered male. Domination of what is public over what is private. Evil was longing for the past, especially for pre-war Poland. Western countries, especially the United States (symbol of the worst possible evil), capitalism and imperialism. Western art and science, western fashion, individualism and the need for privacy. Faith in God. Reluctance to engage in mass activities and reluctance to communism in general.

Socialist Realism characters were categorised into clear types, positive or negative. Positive heroes were communist workers, exceeding standards by many percent. Women who undertook physical work, until now reserved for men - became bricklayers, drivers, crane operators, welders, etc. Communist party officials, Secret service officers and representatives of the communist authorities - the higher placed, the more positive. At the very top, of course, was Joseph Stalin - the sun of all the nations (that was his most popular nickname...).

Negative characters were people avoiding work or doing it carelessly, so-called bumelants (layabouts or lazy fellows). People fascinated by Western culture, trying to dress according to Western fashion, listening to Western music (though jazz was banned at that time). Women who excessively cared for their beauty and did not take up professional work, choosing to take care of children and home. Rich farmers who had a lot of land and animals. Western spies. Saboteurs trying to disrupt work in Socialist enterprises. And anyone who did not enthusiastically approach the new system and questioned the ideal image of the Soviet Union.

The only proper model of life was collective life - all the time in mass, all the time in a group, so one could be watched all the time. Every element of life should be subordinated to social issues and communist ideology. Hence, all kinds of meetings, marches and rallies took the form of a ritual. The common room or meeting room became something of a communist chapel, photographs of communist leaders - images of new saints, mass songs - new hymns and psalms. A new language was created - the so-called Newspeak, in which concepts changed their meaning. In

this language, art creators became “engineers of human souls” - so the art they created was simply supposed to be an indoctrination tool.

It is impossible to watch these films today. Not only because they are generally very bad - it's difficult to create valuable art when you don't have the right options and when you are aware of the consequences of accusing you of being against the communism. It's difficult to watch these films because they are terribly hypocritical, they are a testament to the fall of values and an example of complete disrespect for the viewers. It is hard for a man living in a democratic country to understand how one could have accepted such far-reaching concessions and sign with their name such nightmarish films that offended human intelligence. Nevertheless, it is worth watching several Socialist Realism titles, because it is necessary to understand the era in which they were created.

A classic example of a Socialist Realism production film is *Two Brigades* (*Dwie brygady*, 1950) collectively (!) made by students and graduates of the Film School in Łódź, supervised by Eugeniusz Cękański. The film is set in parallel in the factory and in the theatre. Factory workers must switch to new working methods - the “old” and “new” fight continues here, and young, progressive workers try to convince old foremen of improvements that will affect production efficiency. In the theatre, the actors perform a play about workers having exactly the same problems as those from the factory, so while preparing the premiere they visit the factory to study the behaviour of workers in nature. Of course, the film has a happy ending - old workers agree with the young and will now work according to the new methods. However, the old actor, who did not want to give up the traditional way of playing, under the influence of observation of an old worker, his peer, begins to imitate his behaviour.

Leonard Buczkowski's *First Start* (*Pierwszy start*, 1950) also talks about the transformation of the hero. This is the story of a boy who participates in a gliding course but does not want to adapt to the collective and does not respect discipline, so he is sent home. However, during a storm he helps a friend and is rewarded with the permission to go back to school. *The first days* (*Pierwsze dni*, 1951) by Jan Rybkowski is a story about a common worker who, shortly after the war, rescues factory equipment from NSZ partisan unit. He cannot be bribed with dollars; he helps to set up a factory where he works - first as an average worker and then as a foreman. He learns to read and write, gains ideological awareness and social respect. He does not allow a strike that could stop the production of steel needed by the communist state.

The story of ideological maturation is also told in *Cellulose (Celuloza, 1953)* by Jerzy Kawalerowicz - one of the few really good films made during the period of Socialist Realism, although its message is difficult to agree today. It is an adaptation of the novel by Igor Newerly *Souvenir from Cellulose* - this book was a must read at school at that time. The film is about a boy from the village (Józef Nowak), who emigrated to the city before the war in search of a better life. He meets various societies and gets involved in various situations, thanks to which the director honestly shows the realities of life of people from social lowlands before the World War II. Under the influence of a communist activist, a young girl met accidentally, the character decides to return to the cellulose factory and conduct revolutionary activities there.

*An Adventure at Mariensztat (Przygoda na Mariensztacie, 1953)* by Leonard Buczkowski is still also very interesting to this day. It is a sensation in the history of Polish Socialist Realism – *An Adventure at Mariensztat* is a romantic comedy with elements of a musical, and it's a colourful movie! The communist ideology is conveyed here in such a way that it is almost not offensive, although, of course, the image of work on construction sites and the conditions in which Warsaw workers used to live at that time was completely false. The film is a story about rebuilding Warsaw and at the same time building private happiness. A girl from the village, Hanka Ruczajówna (Lidia Korsakówna), during a trip to Warsaw meets Janek Szarliński (Tadeusz Schmidt) - a bricklayer and work leader. After returning to the village, Hanka dreams of going to the capital and becoming a bricklayer too. A few months later, she makes her dream come true - she enrolls for a bricklayer course, lives in a workers' hotel with her friends, also bricklayers to be. She starts working on the same construction site as Janek. There is fierce rivalry between his and her brigades. Janek's boss, foreman Ciepiewski, is unable to accept women in men's occupations, he considers them stupid and worse than himself, he thinks that their place is at home and in the kitchen. Janek does not quite share these views, but he is also not impressed by the presence of women in every area of the economy. The relationship between him and Hanka begins to break down, young people stop dating, although they miss each other very much. Meanwhile, the women's brigade undertakes a production commitment and starts building a House of Bricklayer. After all, the reluctant foreman Ciepiewski admits he was wrong and begins to help them, and the members of his brigade do the same. Janek and Hanka reconcile. Everything ends well.



You find here all elements typical of Socialist Realism: glorification of physical work, agitation for women to occupy positions in which men dominated so far. The film takes place at the construction site, but the image of the work is idealized and sugary, as is the image of the conditions in which workers live. The characters lead a collective life, they feel best in mass. They are eager to participate in rallies, meetings and marches. They are surrounded by red banners and portraits of communist leaders. The most positive figures are party members who shape new cadres for the communist state. And at the same time - this film is a nice love story that we can still watch with pleasure today, supporting the young couple.

There is completely different atmosphere in Maria Kaniewska's film *Not far from Warsaw (Niedaleko Warszawy, 1954)*. Here we have threads of espionage and sabotage, inspired by Western countries that cannot come to terms with the happiness and prosperity prevailing in communist Poland. The story is as follows: a saboteur (Ludwik Benoit) is sent to Poland from West Germany to stop steel production at the steelworks in Bielawa. He tries to make contacts with his former collaborators (he is a Pole, he worked in a steel mill before the war), but it turns out that the engineer Przewłocki managing the factory does not want its loss and protests against the plans of saboteur Borucki. Borucki kills the engineer. Meanwhile, Wanda Bugajówna (Urszula Modrzyńska), in whose parents' house Borucki rents accommodation for, begins to guess that he is so called class enemy. The girl is a real communist, wise and brave, and turns to the secret political police for help. They arrest Borucki and save the steel mill from destruction. In the last scene of the film, a party court is held on Wanda's father, who took the enemy home and ignored his daughter's requests and warnings.

The division of the world into a good communist part and a bad western part is strongly emphasized here. There is no chance for these worlds to reconcile, because the Western world strives for the destruction of communist ideals, so one needs to be vigilant (like Wanda) to prevent this. Young people are opposed here by old, and officers of the secret service - in fact bloody political police - are portrayed as flawless guardians. There is also present here - as in every Socialist Realism film - iconography typical of this trend.

For those of you who would like to have a more complete picture of this trend, I recommend the following titles: *A matter to be settled (Sprawa do załatwienia, 1953)* by Jan Rybkowski, *Five boys from Barska Street (Piątka z ulicy Barskiej, 1953)* by Aleksander Ford, *The Bus leaves at 6.20 (Autobus odjeżdża 6.20, 1954)* by Jan Rybkowski and *Irena, go home! (Irena, do domu!, 1955)* Jan Fethke.



# Chapter VII.

## The Polish School. 1956-1961/62

I have already pointed out many times that the shape and content of Polish films have very often been dependent on the political situation – Polish cinema, like few cinematography in the world, was (and still is...) dependent on what is happening in the world of politics. It was no different in the turbulent fifties. Socialist Realism cinema opens this decade - there is Stalinist terror in Poland. Any behaviour, word or gesture can lead to arrest. However, the situation begins to change after the death of Józef Stalin (1953) and the related changes at the power summit - first in the Soviet Union, and then in satellite states, and thus also in Poland. With Stalin's death socio-political changes also start: so-called "The Thaw", from the title of the famous novel by Ilia Erenburg.

Since the end of 1953 there was a slow and gradual but noticeable change in cultural policy. The books, poems, articles and texts, that one could have not even thought of before are beginning to appear. Their authors' look at the communist reality that surrounds them reveals its misery and hypocrisy. Translations of Western literature appear in bookstores. In cinemas - western movies. In 1955, film units, i.e. small creative groups, are established, with the literary director and artistic director at the forefront. Thanks to this, filmmakers gain more freedom of creative expression and the ability to omit censorship. Finally, in the mid-fifties, the first graduates leave the Film School in Łódź.

Established in 1948, the film school was to educate directors completely loyal to the system, creating propaganda films. Although professors who generally accepted the communist system taught there, they remained people who were largely open to the world art. They made sure that their students knew the greatest achievements of film art and also that they had contact with Western art in general, even though it was officially banned in Poland. Students of the Łódź Film School, as few in the country, could watch Western films imported for them and learn on the best patterns. Italian neorealism was a very important point of reference for them. The films by Vittorio de Sica or Roberto Rossellini, very harsh, honest and brutal, showed without embellishment the realities of life in post-war Italy. It was not only excellent cinema, first of all it was honest.

These were the films that future Polish directors wanted to create - good, original and true. They were lucky that they had survived the terrible period of

Socialist Realism at school, and when they graduated from it - in 1954 and 1955 - the Socialist Realism cinema was just ending, and the Thaw was already underway. Owing to that, they could create a completely new quality, a new trend addressed to new viewers and carrying a new message. And they took advantage of their chance by creating a trend already called "The Polish School". It was also the first moment when Polish cinematography was spotted in the world, and Polish films were beginning to be awarded at major international film festivals.

Polish School is not a homogeneous trend, but one can see several characteristic features in it. First of all, this is a huge opposition to Socialist Realism cinema. Aversion to production stories - that is to say, at the centre of the stories placing the workers and their work, happening in factories or on construction sites and showing them in an extremely false way. Another characteristic feature is the return to the war theme, but in a completely different way than it was done before. The films we discussed in previous chapters were very much saturated with communist ideology and subordinated to the thesis that only communism could defeat Nazism, and that the Red Army brought Poland freedom, and not - as it really was - a new occupation. For young directors of the Polish School - Andrzej Wajda, Andrzej Munk, Kazimierz Kutz, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Wojciech Jerzy Has, Stanisław Różewicz, Tadeusz Konwicki and others - war was the most important experience in their lives. Many of them belonged to the so-called "Columbuses generation" (from the title of the famous novel by Roman Bratny, *Columbuses, year 20*), and therefore entered the war as people around 20 years old. They were raised in respect for romantic ideals - and therefore for national uprisings, struggle and dying for their homeland. Very often during the war, they themselves engaged in resistance movement - they managed to survive, but most of their friends died. The war experience determined their life and influenced everything they did.

Their films are very personal and derived from their own experiences. The audience felt this personal commitment and perhaps this was also the source of the artists' deep understanding with the viewers. Young filmmakers, despite the easing of censorship in the mid-1950s, could not directly say about the Soviet Union's invasion on Poland in September 1939, about the murder of Polish officers in Katyń, about the fact that the Home Army fought also with communists, or about another fact that the Soviets idly watched the Warsaw Uprising standing on the other bank of the Vistula and letting the Germans kill the insurgents and civilians, and then destroy the city. They also could not directly talk about the Soviet occupation, which replaced the German one, about falsified elections and post-

war Stalinist terror. So, they learned to use symbols, metaphors and the language of Aesopus - counting on the intelligence and sensitivity of the audience with the help of non-obvious images, understatements and symbols reminding events that could not be officially talked about.

In the films of the Polish School, the motive of vain sacrifice was very important - the noblest heroes were killed. Their patriotism, idealism and honesty had no chance against the cruelty of the occupiers. These films never ended well - because World War II for Poland did not end well. Contrary to communist propaganda, Poles lost it, losing a huge part of their eastern territories, millions of citizens, and above all - freedom and sovereignty. The hero's individual fate was also a metaphor for the fate of the whole Poland - and characters' defeat meant the defeat of their homeland. And finally, the last feature - an unusual visual form. For the first time in Polish cinema, so much attention was paid to the composition of the frame, which was tried to be built as if it was a painting image. This was due to the young generation of cinematographers, including graduates of the Łódź Film School: Jerzy Wójcik, Kurt Weber, Jerzy Lipman and Jan Laskowski.

The film, which announces the trend, but also has many Socialist Realism features, is *A Generation (Pokolenie, 1954)* - Andrzej Wajda feature film debut. It is an adaptation of the propaganda novel by Bohdan Czeszko, which tells the story of several boys involved in the communist conspiracy during the World War II. From the group of several people, eventually only one, Stach (Tadeusz Łomnicki), survives, and he is building a new, communist group of young people, deciding to continue the fight against Germany, although he knows that the price for it is death. The title of the film refers to the entire generation of young people who grew up during the War. At the same time, however, it is a symbolic title, because with this film a whole generation of young filmmakers entered Polish cinema. Wajda's assistant was Kazimierz Kutz, Jerzy Lipman and Stefan Matyjaszkiewicz were the cinematographers, and very young but already outstanding actors played in this movie: Tadeusz Łomnicki, Tadeusz Janczar, Zbigniew Cybulski, Roman Polański (he became a very well-known film director later) and many others. Although Wajda's film was censored and several very important fragments were cut out, and despite its ideological message, it is still worth watching today.

I have already mentioned that the Polish School is not a homogeneous trend. At the centre of almost all the films remains the World War II, but the approach to this topic depends on the personality of the particular director and his (all of them

were men) personal experience. As a result, three sub-trends can be distinguished: psychotherapeutic trend, psychological trend and plebeian trend.

### **Psychotherapeutic trend**

The easiest way to define this sub-trend is as a form of collective psychotherapy. It consisted of the experiences, which became common to almost entire nation, and could have been relived during the film screening. Emotions released while watching a movie allowed the viewers to experience something like catharsis, a ritual of purification. The movies allowed them to make sure that what they saw on the screen really happened, and not just seemed to them, as communist propaganda tried to convince the Poles. Therefore, they have the right to feel disappointed, angry, helpless and defeated. And finally - that their (the viewers') feelings are shared by thousands of other people, although they must not speak about it loudly.

The film *Kanal* (*Kanał*, 1956) by Andrzej Wajda opens this sub-trend. It is an outstanding work, awarded with the Silver Palm in Cannes, ex aequo with the *Seventh Seal* of Ingmar Bergman. This is a shocking, para-documentary picture of the last days of the Warsaw Uprising. From a unit of several dozen people, that we see in the first scene, no one will live at the end of the story. Decimated and surrounded by the Germans, insurgents go down to the canal to get to another district of the city that the Germans have not yet occupied. We watch them die one by one. Only their commander comes to the surface, but when he realizes that no one is following him, he goes underground again to look for his soldiers. We know that he will stay there forever.

It was the first film that showed uprising in this way - as the fall of the world, as the last circle of hell. Ingeniously played (the wonderful roles of Tadeusz Janczar, Teresa Łęwska, Wieńczysław Gliński, Emil Karewicz and others) forced the viewer to identify with the characters and experience each death individually. Symbolism typical of the Polish School and the work of Andrzej Wajda also appeared here. Believing in the intelligence of the viewer, director leads a couple in love to the exit from the collector, but it turns out that there is a lattice at the end of collector, and the characters have no chance to break it. They won't get into the river, they won't cross the river, they won't survive. The viewer knew that it was a reference to the Soviet army, which at the same time stood on the other bank of the Vistula and waited indifferently until the Germans murdered the Polish intelligentsia, in order to be able to introduce a new, communist order here.

Andrzej Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* (*Popiół i diament*, 1958) is also a legendary film. It is an adaptation of Jerzy Andrzejewski's novel of the same title, but a very original and authorial adaptation, giving Andrzejewski's story new meanings. It is also the best and most important film of the Polish School and at the same time the best role of Zbigniew Cybulski as Maciek Chełmicki. It is May 1945, the end of World War II. Maciek, a soldier of the Home Army, is ordered to liquidate the party secretary, communist Szczuka (Wacław Zastrzeżyński). Maciek no longer wants to kill - he fought for several years, lost his closest friends, is "infected with death". Fighting an enemy in a German uniform, a foreign invader is one thing, and killing someone who speaks the same language, but who serves a different political option - is another one. The matter is even harder as Maciek falls in love with Krystyna (Ewa Krzyżewska) and the feeling for her makes him turn towards life rather than death. Contrary to himself, he decides to carry out the order - and is killed by a patrol met accidentally.

*Ashes and diamonds* is the most symbolic Polish film. It is here that the famous scene of lighting spirit lights in a bar is located, when Maciek and Andrzej (Adam Pawlikowski) recall colleagues who died during the occupation. In the ruined church, which Maciek visits with Krystyna, Jesus Christ hangs upside down on the cross - because all the values that Christianity stands for have been turned upside down during the war and now it is no longer known what to hold, what is good, and what is bad. At the moment when Maciek kills Szczuka, fireworks explode over their heads celebrating the end of the War - but this is not the end of killing, because another war is just beginning, even more terrible than the previous one: the civil one. A few hours later Maciek dies on a landfill site - and it was the landfill of history where the communists threw the memory of the Home Army soldiers, making them equal with German collaborators. When dying, Maciek presses a white sheet to the bleeding wound, and although the film is black and white, the viewer knows that it is about the colours of the Polish flag - white and red. A valuable human being is crushed by a great History, and his fate becomes a symbol of the fate of thousands of the same boys who gave up their youth in the fight against the Germans. If they miraculously survived, the new system massively destroyed, arrested and killed them.

Along with Andrzej Wajda, the most important director of the psychotherapeutic trend was Andrzej Munk. He made his debut making Socialist Realism films and documentaries, but he was closer to the ideas and poetics of the Polish School. His first feature film, made as part of this trend, is *Man on the Tracks* (*Człowiek na*

torze, 1956). This film is unusual and exceptionally brave because its author clears accounts not with the Second World War, but with the Stalinist period. The film is an adaptation of a short story by Jerzy Stefan Stawiński (the Polish School main screenwriter - he is the author of screenplays for the best and most important films of the trend) titled *The secret of Orzechowski's train driver*.

The film begins when the investigation continues after the tragic death of Orzechowski, who died under the wheels of a train. It is the beginning of the 1950s, and people present at the meeting accuse the old driver (the dead one) of sabotage. Gradually, however, the subsequent accounts of the people interviewed reveal a portrait of an old, reliable, pre-war specialist who had worked his entire life on the railway. He could not come to terms with new working methods, senseless exceeding production standards, because this meant poorer work quality and destruction of the rolling stock. The conflict between him and the young, "progressive" communists became so great that the train driver finally retired against his will. Out of habit, however, he went to the station and during one of such trips he noticed the lack of oil in the semaphore. He immediately realized what it meant: the train driver would receive the wrong signal "free path", he would go ahead and collide with another train... Orzechowski knew that the only way to stop the train was to stand on the track - and thus choose his own death instead of the deaths of hundreds of people.

Munk's film is not only a reconstruction of events that led to a tragic accident. It is, above all, a record of a process typical for Stalinism - and also for every totalitarian system - of bullying a valuable man who does not want to adapt to political standards. Totalitarianism destroys decent and wise people who have the courage to resist evil. At the same time, it puts passive, mediocre, but faithful people on a pedestal. Recalling post-war history, Munk exposed the very essence of the system. In the mid-1950s, the first secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) Władysław Gomułka spoke about the "errors and distortions" of the system, suggesting that it was not communism that was bad, but the wrong attitude of people who introduced this system in Poland. Munk, however, showed that Orzechowski's tragedy is the fault of a system that does not tolerate individuals who think differently and gives room for abuse.

*Eroica* (1957), made a year later, tells about the Second World War. This is a film consisting of two separate stories. It was also supposed to be third one, but it turned out to be too weak and the director did not decide to include it in the film. *Eroica* demythologizes Polish martyrdom - it shows that heroism often resulted



from chance, not from ideology or belief in a fight. People taking part in the fight against the occupier consist of many features that are not always beautiful and worth imitating. They are not statues, monuments - they are ordinary people who are afraid, who cheat, who lie, who sometimes act silly. But at the same time, they are able, sometimes even surprising themselves, to do great things.

The first part of the film (*Scherzo alla polacca*) takes place during the Warsaw Uprising. Dzikus Górkiewicz (Edward Dziewoński), lives near Warsaw and tries to get to the capital not to fight with the Germans, but to steal valuable things from flats abandoned by people of Warsaw. By chance, he becomes the link between the insurgents and the Hungarian unit. The Hungarians, in exchange for a guarantee of immunity, want to join the uprising and support Poles. Negotiations fail, but Górkiewicz decides to take part in the uprising, although he knows that Poles have no chance. His motivations, however, are not heroic - he realizes that his stupid, infantile wife cheats on him (with a Hungarian officer) and prefers to risk death in the uprising than to stay safely with her in their beautiful suburban villa.

The second part of the movie (*Ostinato lugubre*) takes place a few months later, in an Oflag, i.e. a German prisoner-of-war camp for officers. The soldiers who got there in the fall of 1939 are joined by Warsaw insurgents. They are shocked by the mental state of Polish prisoners of war and the relations between them. Officers who have been living in cramped conditions for five years and don't even have a little privacy, can no longer stand it. The captivity is humiliating, and Polish officers are emotionally and mentally destroyed by it. The legend of officer Zawistowski's escape gives some of them strength, but the truth is that Zawistowski did not really escape. He dies of pneumonia, hidden in the attic of the barrack, just above their heads.

*Eroica* destroyed the heroic myth of the struggle of the entire, of course steadfast and strong, Polish nation. A thief turns out to be a real hero, and prisoners in the Oflag argue about trifles and organize competitions, who eats the food parcel sent by the Red Cross faster. But at the same time, they are real people, of flesh and blood. Not stone monuments, but lively, real people with whom one can identify. The conclusion was simple - there could be a seed of heroism in everyone.

A similar non-heroic approach to Polish modern history was demonstrated by Munk in his next film - *Bad Luck (Zezowate szczęście)* from 1959. This is a black comedy and its hero is the citizen Jan Piszczyk (Bogusław Kobiela in his role of life!). The film begins in 1956, when, as a result of an amnesty for political prisoners, Piszczyk is released from prison. However, he does not want to be released and,

trying to beg the prison head for permission to remain there, tells him his whole life, which is also the story of the last thirty years of Polish complicated History.

Piszczyk is a model conformist, a man with no qualities who, not having his own views or moral backbone, tries to adapt to the situation. He sneaks up, cheats, lies, steals - just to keep his own skin. He is stupid, so all his actions always turn against him. All he wants in the final is holy peace. The prison was the only place in his life where he felt good - he followed the rules and instructions, he did not have to think for himself. He is frightened by the thought that when he is free, all misfortunes will begin again. He would like to be a hero, but he can't - because he is a small, stupid, ugly man who does not represent anything good. That is an ideal average guy, such as thousands - at any time and place in the world.

The most shocking and moving, for many reasons, is the last film by Andrzej Munk - *The Passenger (Pasażerka)* made in 1961. The director died in a car accident during making the film, when about half of the pictures were ready. His friends decided to finish the work but using only the materials that Munk did himself. In place of the missing sequences, stills were added and narrator's voice, which gave the viewer the information necessary to understand the story. In this mutilated shape, *The Passenger* entered the screens in 1963 and turned out to be an outstanding work, widely commented and awarded. It still makes a great impression today.

It is an adaptation of the radio play by Zofia Posmysz, a former prisoner of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Based on her own experience, she described the story of a girl who becomes the secretary and assistant of one of the German guards in the camp. Marta (Anna Ciepielewska) tries to keep her dignity in the terrible conditions of the camp, and Liza (Aleksandra Ślaska), somehow fascinated by Marta, tries to save her life on the one hand, and tries to break her and completely enslave her on the other. Marta is engaged in the activities of the camp resistance, she is apprehended and imprisoned in the death bunker. Liza is convinced that she died, but a dozen or so years later she sees a woman on a cruise ship who looks like Marta, and at the age Marta would have been if she had survived. Liza recalls events from years ago. We can see their reconstruction on the screen. This is both a very harsh, reliable and convincing story about life in Auschwitz, but also a study of the relationship of two extraordinary women who are playing a strange game with each other. The rules of this game are not defined, but everyone knows what they are. Liza is in the SS, theoretically she has full power over Marta. However, she cannot reach the girl's feelings and emotions, she cannot break her dignity. Until this happens, Marta, although a prisoner, wins the game.

## Psychological trend

This trend includes the films in which the psychology of the characters comes to the fore. Their inner worlds, emotions, feelings, motivation to act - are much more important than what happens in the diegesis. Directors put an emphasis on the uniqueness of the situation, on its individuality, although again - as in the previous sub-trend - emotions and the mental state of characters are often associated with the War (but not always).

I mentioned above that the Polish School defined itself in opposition to Socialist Realism. As you probably remember, Socialist Realism was focused on collectivism - the individual had to live in a group, in mass, and matters of the collective had to be more important than private matters. Thus, focusing on the emotions, thoughts and experiences of a single person meant the rehabilitation of privacy, emphasized the right to individuality and defining oneself not in relation to other people, not as a member of some group, but as a unique individual.

In this sub-trend of the Polish School, three directors stand out in particular: Wojciech Jerzy Has, Jerzy Kawalerowicz and Tadeusz Konwicki. Let's try to describe their most important works of this period.

Wojciech Jerzy Has feature debut was *The Loop* (*Pętla*, 1957) - an adaptation of the story by Marek Hłasko under the same title. In the second half of the 1950s, Hłasko was the most popular writer of the young generation, and his works were eagerly adapted by both students of the Łódź Film School and directors working in professional cinematography. *The Loop* is a moving story of Kuba (Gustaw Holoubek), who is an alcoholic. He is aware that his addiction degrades him, that it ruins him and his loved ones' lives, so he decides to quit alcohol. However, he needs help - he can't do it alone, so his fiancée (Aleksandra Ślaska) gives him support. Kuba has to endure without alcohol all day before Krystyna returns from work and can go with him to see a doctor and pick up the medicine necessary to quit the alcohol. This attempt is unsuccessful - Kuba is not able to stay at home, he can not cope with his thoughts, memories and questions of friends who call him every now and again giving good advice. He leaves the house - and goes to the pub. After returning home, aware of the depth of his fall, he decides to commit suicide. The telephone cord is used to prepare the title loop.

The plot of the film is an exact adaptation of Hłasko's story, but it is not true to its atmosphere or message. The Hłasko's character drank vodka because he was disappointed with the communist system, which he believed in as a very young

man. He was deceived, and perhaps he himself committed some shameful acts, which he now tries to forget drinking alcohol. However, in the Has' movie we do not know the reasons for Kuba's alcoholism - it's probably the widely understood pain of existence, the inability to adapt to the world and living in the way the society requires it. Kuba is different than everyone else - he is more sensitive, he perceives the world differently, other matters are important to him. Here, too, we deal with the so-called "Has' Junkyard" - a strange, disturbing set design in which the characters live. Kuba's apartment perfectly reflects his mental state - functioning on the verge of a nervous breakdown, a state in which nothing is normal anymore.

*Farewells (Pożegnania, 1958)* and *How to be loved (Jak być kochaną, 1962)* are two stories firmly rooted in the War, which determines the lives of the characters and evokes their specific emotional states. *Farewells* is an adaptation of the prose of Stanisław Dygat under the same title. The story begins just before the War and ends when it ends. It is a love story of two people, Lilka and Paweł (Maria Wachowiak and Tadeusz Janczar), from different social classes (Lilka is a fordanser, while Paweł comes from a wealthy family). Paweł withdraws from this relationship, but he does not forget about the girl, and she also keeps a feeling for him in her heart. They meet accidentally a few years later. Lilka is the wife of Paweł's cousin (Gustaw Holoubek), and Paweł receives hospitality in their home. Only now, knowing that the new system will bring a completely new order, Paweł and Lilka, more mature and wiser of the experiences of past years, decide to be together.

*How to be loved* is a story of Felicja (the only main role in Barbara Kraftówna's career - absolutely outstanding), an actress who, in love with her older colleague from the theatre, Rawicz (Zbigniew Cybulski), hid him from the Germans in her apartment for several years. The man - stupid, weak, cowardly cabotine - did not deserve her sacrifice and underestimated what she did for him. However, this did not change the feelings of the girl who never stopped loving him and never got involved with anyone else. Convinced that Rawicz will finally be with her, she does not understand that the man is unable to start a relationship not only because he does not love her, but also because she is the only one who knows the truth about his humiliation, cowardness and stupidity. After the war, Rawicz returns to her apartment, but only to commit suicide in front of Felicja. A dozen or so years later, Felicja, flying the plane for the first time in her life, recalls the story of her hopeless love that broke her for the rest of her life.

Jerzy Kawalerowicz is the unquestioned master of the psychological trend of Polish School. During the period in question, he made three feature films, each of

which takes place in a different time and place. Each time, however, at the centre of the story is a difficult emotional relationship between a man and a woman. The main female role is always played by Lucyna Winnicka - the then director's wife.

*The Real End of the Great War* (*Prawdziwy koniec wielkiej wojny*, 1957) is an adaptation of the short story by Jerzy Zawieyski under the same title. The hero of the film is Juliusz (Roland Głowacki), an excellent architect before the war. During the war, he was sent to a concentration camp, and his wife, convinced that he died (he did not return for a long time and there was no news from him), eventually became involved in a relationship with her superior. Janusz returned, however, but as a human wreck - a man completely broken, unable to communicate with people around him (he lost the ability to speak), suffering from psychosis and panic attacks caused by camp memories. However, he is healthy enough to be aware of his condition and what this means for his wife. At the same time, deprived of professional medical assistance and therapy (after the war, almost no one went through it, it was thought that traumatized people had just to cope with their problems - besides, it would not have been possible to provide such help to millions of people...) there is no chance for a return to normal life. He decides to commit suicide, no longer able to live with his own suffering and cannot look at his wife's pain. After his death she doesn't decide to continue relationship with her superior. Overwhelmed by guilt, she moves away from the man she had previously loved.

The message of the film is the thesis - and it is hard to disagree with it - that the War did not end on May 8, 1945. It continues to this day because the sufferings and results it caused in interpersonal relationships are still present. War traumas left terrible wounds in human psyche, ruined families, relationships and friendships. On the outside, everything seems normal, but inside many people are still experiencing their dramas. And sometimes the only way of stopping the pain is committing suicide - hence this motif appears so often in the films of the Polish School.

The action of *The Train* (*Pociąg*, 1959), the director's second film made as part of this trend, takes place presently (in the end of fifties) and is limited to a dozen or so hours. That long takes the journey from Warsaw to the sea by train. In the sleeping compartment, two people meet accidentally: Marta (Lucyna Winnicka), who has just ended a relationship with Staszek (Zbigniew Cybulski), and a doctor (Leon Niemczyk), who has just lost a young patient - she died on his operating table. Each of these two would like to be alone, but it's impossible - they have to stand the other's presence. Despite the initial reluctance, they open and talk about the most

intimate matters. This night could be the beginning of love between them, it not for the fact that the doctor has a wife waiting for him at the sea, and Marta is not ready for a new love. They part in the morning, but we know that they will never forget about themselves and the night they spent together.

*The Train* is also a very successful portrait of Polish society in the late 1950s. We watch passengers, listen to their conversations, see how they are dressed and how they behave. The background of the relation between Marta and the doctor is a sensational plot - it turns out that on the same train there is a murderer chased by the militia, for which the doctor is taken at some point. However, the most important part of the action takes place in the sphere of emotions of the two characters.

*Mother Joan of the Angels (Matka Joanna od Aniołów, 1960)* is kept in a completely different atmosphere. It's an adaptation of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's short story of the same title. In 18th-century Poland, in a monastery located in Ludyń, Father Garniec brought demons to local nuns. He was burned at the stake for it, but the demons remained and still torment the nuns. Exorcists who have been called so far, have not been able to deal with the forces of darkness. So, another one comes to Ludyń - Father Suryn (Mieczysław Voit), considered almost a saint. The reverend mother of the monastery, Mother Joan of the Angels (Lucyna Winnicka), arouses his love - the first such feeling in his life. The priest realizes that there is no other way to set her free from suffering caused by demons than to commit cardinal sin and accept the demons in his soul. In the name of love for Mother Joan, he kills two servants and, through this crime, opens his soul to devils.

Although the action of the film takes place in the old centuries, this film was received as a statement about the then present. It was treated as a reference to totalitarianism (remember that films of the Polish School did not say many things directly, and the filmmakers used symbols and metaphors, counting on the intelligence of the viewer). Strict religious doctrine does not allow Father Suryn to love Mother Joan, just as Stalinism stigmatized privacy. Someone who expressed and manifested their desires was treated as inferior, worthy of punishment and stigmatization.

It is worth paying attention to the exorcism scene taking place in the church - the nuns are prosecuted, physically and mentally abused, just because they behave differently than everyone else and do not want to be imprisoned in a monastery, where they were mostly brought against their will. This scene certainly reminded the viewers of Stalinist gatherings, forcing people to self-criticism for the fact that, for example, they wore colourful socks (really!), and intimidating and destroying

those who were different in any way. The question of ethical attitudes remains very important here - what drives us, what principles and why do we follow, what determines that we consider something bad or not. The atmosphere of this film is also unusual - dark, stuffy, disturbing, emphasized by the outstanding photos by Jerzy Wójcik, referring to the aesthetics of expressionism. The movie was awarded with the Silver Palm at Cannes Film Festival.

The psychological and existential trend is closed by the works of Tadeusz Konwicki, a great Polish art creator, writer and director. His directorial debut – and immediately an outstanding work – is *The Last Day of summer* (*Ostatni dzień lata*, 1958). It's a very ascetic, modest story, taking place in a few hours, with only two characters. The film was made in amateur conditions, with the participation of a small crew, minimal use of film tape and only filmed with one camera. It tells the story of two people who meet on the beach on the last day of summer. The woman (Irena Laskowska – privately sister of the film's director of photography, Jan Laskowski) is thirtyish, lonely, tired and bitter. Throughout the holiday, she was watched by a man about 10 years younger (Jan Machulski – later, a very famous director of popular comedies). When he finally decides to approach her, it turns out that it is not possible to break the distance between them. Not only because of the age difference or because the woman leaves in a few hours. First of all, because each of them has the trauma associated with great History. A woman lost her fiancé, who was an aviator during the war. She never overcame it; she never got involved with anyone else. The man, on the other hand, is probably a former Stalinist who, as a boy, became involved in communism, and only years after he learned the truth about the crimes of the totalitarian system. They both hope for a moment that they will be able to build something together, that the second person will prove to be a cure for pain and loneliness. But the thread of agreement cuts off and hope vanishes. The man eventually enters the sea, and the viewer knows that he can not swim... His footprints end on the shore.

*All Souls Day* (*Zaduszki*, 1961) also speak of loss, trauma and war, which, although it ended many years earlier, still determines the lives of the characters. Two 30-year-olds – Michał (Edmund Fetting) and Wala (Ewa Krzyżewska) come to a small town to spend a few days together. It is the beginning of November, so a moment in Polish culture quite special – on the 1<sup>st</sup> November the All Saints day is celebrated in Poland, which is a remembrance day for the dead. Michał and Wala remember their old war time loves. Michał fell in love with a guerrilla girl who died

in an encirclement. Wala was in love with a boy from the NSZ (right wing partisan forces), who revealed himself after the War to the communist authorities and considered a traitor by his former colleagues, was shot by them. Many years later Michał and Wala try to forget about the past and build on the rubble of their first loves a new relationship. However, this proves very difficult, almost impossible. Their love comes not so much from their fascination with each other, but from their fear of loneliness, shared desire to find safety in the care of another person. So this relationship is colored by misery, longing for something that cannot be regained, and resignation. A very important, supporting character of the film is an old Jew Goldapfel (Włodzimierz Boruński), who as former resident of the town, is the only Holocaust survivor. Everyone died, they don't even have graves, no one wants to remember them either. There is silence over the Jewish tragedy – as it lasted for decades in Polish society and culture. Wala and Michał do not know how to talk to him, they even feel embarrassed by his presence. They sympathize with him, but he is a stranger to them. His tragedy, however, has a completely different dimension and scale than their own tragedies.

### **Plebeian trend**

The name of this sub-trend is a bit confusing - it's not about movies whose protagonists are just plebeians, people from the social lowlands, although these kinds of heroes, of course, also appear. Films of the Polish School made within the plebeian trend are stories that depict war from the point of view of a very ordinary, average people, often children, who have to deal with the effects of war, although very often they do not understand it and actively do not participate in it. They just want to survive, they don't want to be heroes. Fate, however, puts them in situations where they have to take a position, make a decision or take action. These films are far from martyrdom, although very often they present the events we know from history textbooks. Here, however, we look at them through the eyes of participants and witnesses, whose daily life was destroyed by those events.

The undisputed masters of this trend are Stanisław Różewicz and Kazimierz Kutz. Endowed with a completely different temperament, coming from extremely different backgrounds (Różewicz from the intellectual family, Kutz from the family of Silesian miners) made the first films of their careers about the experience of war, which they experienced as very young people (Różewicz was born in 1924, Kutz in 1929) and somehow aloof. Characteristic for Stanisław Różewicz was a very careful



and calm observation of reality, about which he talked as if in a whisper, without screaming and crying, regardless of how dramatic events he showed. Co-authors of his films as screenwriters were often two writers - poet Tadeusz Różewicz, brother of the director, and novelist Kornel Filipowicz, a friend. Różewicz's films are simple, uncomplicated stories, which, thanks to their simplicity, made a huge impression - because they were real and credible, and the viewer could more easily identify with heroes like him. A characteristic theme were interpersonal relationships in a dangerous situation.

*Three Women (Trzy kobiety, 1956)* is a story about the relationship of women who meet in a German concentration camp. By walking in the so-called death march, they promise that if they survive, they will live together after the war and help each other. None of them has a family anymore, so joined by shared suffering, they decide to be a foster family for themselves. The oldest of them, Helena (Zofia Małynicz), is about 50 years old, the average, Maria (Elżbieta Świącicka) is thirty years old, and the youngest Celina (Anna Ciepielewska) is a teenager. Initially, their joint existence succeeds - friends go to the western lands, formerly inhabited by the Germans, occupy a small house, start working (two older) and learning (the youngest). However, it soon becomes clear that a community born in danger is falling apart in peace. Celina falls in love and does not want to submit to Helena's educational methods. Maria, after losing her first husband, wants to bond with someone else and build her own house. Helena learns that the man she loved during the war was really a German collaborator and he led her to imprisonment. The film is set after the war, but thanks to extensive flashbacks we learn what the war stories of the three heroines looked like. By comparing these two action plans, we can understand how the war affected them, what changed in them, and how it determined their fate. A very important value of the film are sequences showing the settlement of Poles in the so-called "recovered territories" - occupying former German houses, robbing and transporting German belongings to the central Poland, catching up with science by adults who spent the War in guerrilla, and finally the entire organization of life at that time. This is a very reliable, almost documentary account.

In 1958, Stanisław Różewicz made *Free City (Wolne miasto, 1958)* - a film about the defence of the Polish Post Office in Gdańsk, in September 1939. Polish postal workers - ordinary employees: postmen, telephonists, officials, an old caretaker with his wife and little granddaughter - defended themselves against the German army throughout the day of September the 1st. The Polish Post Office in the free

city of Gdańsk was a piece of Poland for them, their homeland - so they were defending something more than just a building. They only surrendered when the Germans pumped gas into the basement and set it on fire. Those who managed to survive the attack were led through the Long Market in Gdańsk, beaten, spat on and ridiculed by the German inhabitants of the city. A month later, the heroic postal workers were murdered.

Różewicz's film tells not only about hours of hopeless from the beginning defence of the post office, but also about months and weeks preceding the outbreak of war. About fear growing among the Polish population of Gdańsk, more and more frequent harassments from the Germans. It also shows the colossal difference between German and Polish fighting methods - the Germans do not follow any conventions and rules, they attack civilians, use cruel and shameful methods. Poles are portrayed as noble people, trying to keep their dignity and honour even in a borderline situation. But above all they are very ordinary and very average people, who one day, as usual, came to work and were forced to confront a situation for which they were in no way ready.

The characters of the *The Birth Certificate* (*Świadectwo urodzenia*, 1961) are children and war is shown from their perspective. This is obviously not the first film that shows the fate of children during the war - you already know Alexander Ford's *Border Street*. But earlier films actually showed the War from an adult's perspective - it was more of an adult's image of how a child can perceive the state of war than a real attempt to delve into the child's mind. Różewicz's film consists of three separate, independent stories of three children: two boys are Polish and the girl is Jewish. The origin, confirmed by the title birth certificate, determines their fate - boys, even when they experience a loss (home, parent, material status and so on), however, have the right to remain in their environment, preserve their identity, they can count on the help of Polish society, they have right to existence. The girl loses everything - the whole family, home, identity, family history. She must pretend to be someone else, deny her background, hide her pain, deny the mourning of losing her parents, to have a chance to survive. Everyone - not only a German... - is a threat to her, the girl loses all possible points of support.

An anthology film - and thus built from separate short stories combined into one whole - is also the *Cross of Valor* (*Krzyż walecznych*, 1958), the feature debut of Kazimierz Kutz, based on the stories by Józef Hen. The look at war here is marked by a slight irony and distance - Kutz was far from pathos and national martyrdom, he could see ridiculousness in tragic situations, and tragic in trivial situations. The first

short story - *The Cross* - takes place during the war; second – *The Dog* - at its end; and the third – *The Widow* - a few months after the end of it. Kutz shows the motivations and feelings of ordinary people who have to face overwhelming situations and challenges. The hero of the first novel (Jerzy Turek), an ordinary peasant son despised by all, goes to the army not to fight for his homeland, but to win a medal with which he can boast in his native village. When he finally conquers it, it turns out that the village was burned down by the Germans and all the residents died. The fight has no meaning for the hero anymore.

In the second novella, Polish soldiers take a homeless dog, but when it turns out that it responds only to German commands and probably belonged to the guard of the concentration camp, they decide to kill it. In this way, they want to take revenge on all those Germans. However, they are unable to trigger the rifle.

Finally, the third short story. It tells about the inhabitants of a small, charming town, somewhere in the regained territories, who decide to take care of the widow (Grażyna Staniszevska) after their legendary commander. They expect a stable, old lady, and meanwhile a young, beautiful girl comes to them. After a period of mourning, Małgorzata would like to live like other young women - dress well, dance, work and finally - build another relationship with someone else. Her husband's former subordinates, however, control her every step and expel her boyfriend (Zbigniew Cybulski), whom Małgorzata met once or twice. The overwhelmed girl escapes from the city. She neither wants to be a monument nor to be buried during her lifetime. For her, the war is over - and for them it is still going on.

The adaptation of Józef Hen's story is another Kutz's movie - *Nobody's Calling* (*Nikt nie woła*, 1960). This is a polemic with Andrzej Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* - an attempt to think what would happen if Maciek did not decide to kill Szczuka. In Wajda's film, despite the hesitation, the hero decided to follow the order of the anti-communist underground and kill the communist official. Bożek (Henryk Boukołowski) from Kutz's film refuses and, fearing the consequences, escapes to the regained territories, where then, in the crowd of other fugitives, it was possible to start a new life. He meets Lucyna (Zofia Marcinkowska), with whom he will have a real, deep feeling, but the boy will not be able to respect it. By bonding with other, casual women, again and again he hurts a sensitive girl. When the past strikes him - someone recognizes him, Bożek must keep running away to save his life - he realizes how important Lucyna was to him. However, it is too late to fix anything. It is unknown if the young will ever meet again.

This is a very interesting movie - on the one hand, the wartime reality determines the fate of two young people, but on the other - the complicated, emotional relationship between them comes to the fore. Politics matters insofar as it affects the connection or separation of lovers, as well as the conditions in which they live every day and the matters they deal with. However, nothing is more important than their feelings and emotions.

This period in the work of Kazimierz Kutz ends with *People from the Train* (*Ludzie z pociagu*, 1961) - adaptation of the short story by Marian Brandys. The film takes place in the autumn of 1943 and tells the story of one occupation day at a provincial railway station. The train is stopped and its passengers - a whole cross-section of contemporary Polish society - have to wait for the machine to be repaired. Meanwhile, the Germans find the weapon and threaten to shoot every fifth passenger if the owner is not found. Then a boy, who had already lost two brothers during the War and promised his mother that he would not risk himself, takes the blame on himself to save the strangers from the train.

In an unusual and dangerous situations, very different attitudes are revealed. Polish society is not a homogeneous group of heroes, as we would sometimes like to believe today. It includes partisans, smugglers, some girls, some boys, a woman trying to save a Jewish girl and a blackmailer who forces her to pay a ransom for the child's life. Each of these people has their own matters to solve and everyone just wants to get out of this situation safely. A real hero turns out to be a spotty teenager during a mutation that no one would expect to do such a brave thing. Partisans, Home Army members, liaison officers - none of these people want to sacrifice themselves for others, although they think of themselves as heroes. So you never know what will trigger someone's heroism. The declarations we sometimes make: "I would never do that" or "I would definitely do that and that," are worth nothing. We can get to know ourselves only in a true extreme situation.

\*

I finish this story about the history of Polish cinema at the beginning of the sixties - the too modest size of this script does not allow to go further. However, I am planning another publication in which I intend to talk about the black series in Polish documentary and feature films, cinema of the sixties, films of eminent directors who became brands themselves, the wonderful Polish documentary school, cinema of moral concern of the seventies and films shot in the 1980s and

1990s. However, I hope that the events, situations and, above all, the film works that you had the opportunity to read about in this book will encourage you to explore the history of Polish cinema yourself. It is impossible to get to know it without watching movies and it is worth reaching for them not only because of the stories told in them, but because they are part of the broadly understood national culture and testimony of their time.





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