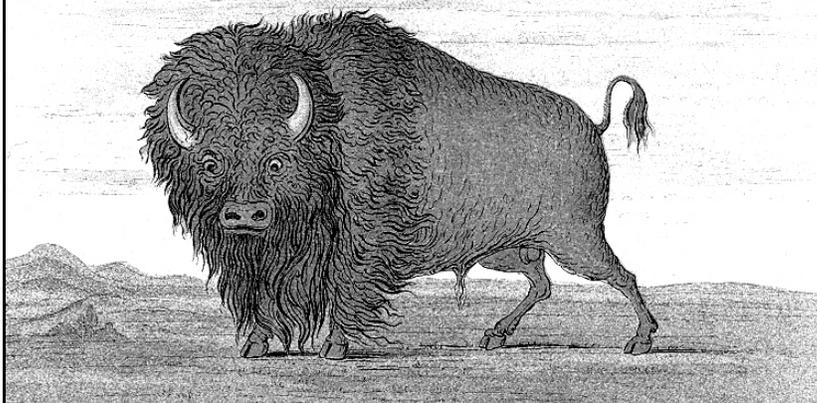


The Buffalo Film Seminars



Conversations about great films
with Diane Christian & Bruce Jackson

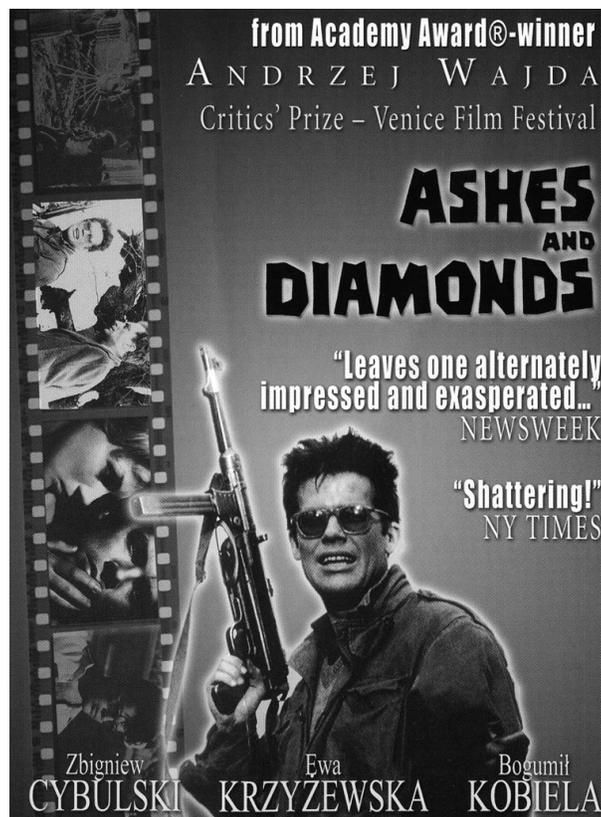
ANDRZEJ WAJDA (6 March 1926, Suwalki, Poland) has directed 48 films, most recently *Lekcja polskiego kina* (2002). Some of the others are *Pan Tadeusz* (1999), *Les Possédés/The Possessed* (1988), *Kronika wypadków miłosnych/Chronicle of Love Affairs* (1986), *Danton* (1983), *Człowiek z żelaza/Man of Iron* (1981), *Bez znieczulenia/Rough Treatment/Without Anesthesia* (1978), *Człowiek z marmuru/Man of Marble* (1977), *Sibirska Ledi Magbet/Fury Is a Woman/Siberian Lady Macbeth* (1961), *Kanal* (1957) and *Zły chłopiec/The Bad Boy* (1950). He was awarded and honorary Oscar in 2000.

JERZY WÓJCIK (12 September 1930, Nowy Sącz, Poland) has shot 30 films, the most recent of them *Aniol w szafie/Angel in the Wardrobe* (1987). Some of the others are *Pasja/Passion*, *Potop/The Deluge* (1974), *Zacne grzechy/Good Sins* (1963), *Matka Joanna od aniołów/The Devil and the Nun* (1961), *Eroica/Heroism* (1957) and *Koniec nocy/End of the Night* (1957).

ZBIGNIEW CYBULSKI (3 November 1927, Kniaze, Poland [now Ukraine]—8 January 1967
Wrocław, Poland, struck by railway train) acted in 32 films, the last two of which appeared after his death: *Morderca zostawia ślad/The Murderer Leaves a Clue* (1967) and *Jowita* (1967). Some of the others are *Jutro Meksyk/Tomorrow Mexico* (1966), *Sam posrod miasta/Alone in the City* (1965), *Rekopis znaleziony w Saragossie/The Saragossa Manuscript* (1965), *La Poupée/The Doll* (1962), *Krzyż walecznych/Cross of Valor* (1959), *Ósmy dzień tygodnia/The Eighth Day of the Week* (1958), and *Pokolenie/A Generation* (1955).

EWA KRZYZEWSKA (7 February 1939, Kraków, Poland—30 July 2003, Spain, car crash) first appeared in film in *Ashes and Diamonds*. She acted in 19 others, the last of them *Zazdrość i medycyna/Jealousy and Medicine* (1973). Some of the others are *Dzieciol/The Woodpecker* (1970), *Faust XX* (1966), *Piekło i niebo/Hell and Heaven* (1966), *Zejszcie do piekła/The descent to Hell* (1966), *Faraon/Pharaoh* (1966), and *Rat/Atomic War Bride* (1960).

ADAM PAWLIKOWSKI (21 November 1925, Warsaw, Poland—17 January 1976, Warsaw, Poland) appeared in 27 films. Some of the others were *Izkustvenata patitza/The Decoy Duck* (1974), *Dzieciol/The Woodpecker* (1970), *Piekło i niebo/Hell and Heaven* (1966), *Rekopis znaleziony w Saragossie/The Saragossa Manuscript* (1965), *Mój stary/My Old Man* (1962), *Pozegnania/Farewells/Lydia Ate the Apple* (1958) and *Kanal* (1957).
Andrzej Wajda



MARCH MARCH 8, 2005 (X:8)
Popiół i diament/Ashes and Diamonds (1958)
105 minutes

Directed by Andrzej Wajda
Based on the novel by Jerzy Andrzejewski
Screenplay by Jerzy Andrzejewski and Andrzej Wajda
Original Music by Filip Nowak and Jan Krenz
Non-Original Music by Frédéric Chopin (from "Polonaise in a-flat")
Cinematography by Jerzy Wójcik

Zbigniew Cybulski...Maciek Chelmicki
Ewa Krzyzewska...Krystyna
Waclaw Zastrzezynski...Szcuka
Adam Pawlikowski...Andrzej
Bogumil Kobiela...Drewnowski
Jan Ciecierski...Portier
Stanislaw Milski...Pieniazek
Artur Młodnicki...Kotowicz
Halina Kwiatkowska...Staniewiczowa
Ignacy Machowski...Waga
Zbigniew Skowronski...Słomka
Barbara Krafftówna...Stefka
Aleksander Sewruk...Swiecki

Polish film and theatre director, was born in Suwalki in northeast Poland, a small town dominated by its army barracks. His mother was a school teacher, his father a professional cavalry officer who was killed in World War II. Wajda grew up in a succession of provisional garrisons and “can remember gun carriages drawn by three pairs of horses come hurtling in at a gallop.....It was a real cavalry trained to fight wars and kill the enemy.”

When the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939 Wajda was thirteen. During the occupation he worked as a cooper’s apprentice and later in a locksmith’s shop and in various other jobs. He says that he took a “very modest” part in the resistance: “I was, it is true, a soldier in the Home Army, but I had a posting of no significance and the German reprisals never came near me....So I imagine that my war films...are a kind of compensation for the stirring and exciting lives that others led, whereas I had the good fortune to escape these grim and shattering experiences.”

During the war Wajda helped restore paintings in a church at Radom, an occupation that awoke his interest in the arts. In 1946, after he had completed his interrupted secondary schooling, he entered the Fine Arts Academy in Kraków. He left three years later without graduating and transferred to the newly opened State Film School in Lodz, saying that he was “looking for an open-air job.” He studied there from 1950 to 1952 and made several short films. In 1953 he was chosen to work as assistant to the veteran director Aleksander Ford on *Piatka z ulicy Barskiej* (*Five Boys From Barska Street*), a key work in postwar Polish cinema.

The following year, with Ford as his “artistic supervisor,” Wajda began work on *Pokolenie* (*A Generation*, 1955), his first feature and the opening shot in what was to become a trilogy about the war’s effect on the young people who lived through it. Based on a celebrated novel by Bohdan Czesko, it tells the story of a delinquent slum boy, Stach (Tadeusz Lomnicki), who finds his way to maturity and commitment through love and service in the resistance. To that extent, the film is in the optimistic tradition of Socialist Realism, which was statutory in postwar Poland. There are nevertheless qualities in *Pokolenie* that established it (though not immediately) as a turning point in Polish cinema. If Stach is more or less in the mold of the “positive hero,” his friend and alter ego Jasio is not. Jasio (Tadeusz Janeczka) is vacillating, unstable, and tragic—when he finally involves himself in a resistance operation he panics, runs, and in the end, trapped by German soldiers at the top of a spiral staircase, leaps to his death. And it is this bewildered and beleaguered character who dominates the film.

Almost everyone involved in the making of *Pokolenie* was young. “We were out not only to articulate our ideological dispositions...but also to demonstrate what we liked, what appealed to us, what we had failed to see in Polish films so far,” Wajda says. Roman Polanski, who had a small role in the picture, said: “For us it was a film of tremendous importance. The whole Polish cinema began with it.” Released in 1955, it brought Wajda a State Prize but caused surprisingly little critical excitement, positive or negative, and it is only in retrospect that the importance of its innovations have been recognized. Much influenced by Italian neorealism, the film was shot largely on location in Warsaw and only “rounded off” in the studio. It

introduces the theme of regenerating love (a recurrent one in Wajda’s work) and associates it with revolution. It admits a level of violence far beyond anything that was then usual, and it freely employs the startling visual contrasts, the painterly images, and the symbolism that have become associated with Wajda’s “baroque” style.

A short documentary followed, *Ide ku sloncu* (*I Walk to the Sun*, 1955), about the sculptor Ksawery Dunikowski, before Wajda made the second film in his trilogy, *Kanal*. It was adapted by the distinguished scenarist Jerzy Stefan Stawinski from one of his autobiographical stories and draws on his experiences as a young officer in the Polish Home Army, when his battalion was cut off and forced to withdraw into the Warsaw sewers. *Kanal* follows the destinies of three small groups as they journey through this contemporary version of Dante’s *Inferno*. It fully records the heroism of the Warsaw Rising, but raises bitter questions about the value of this action, which cost hundreds of thousands of lives but accomplished nothing (except to add yet another chapter to the long history of reckless Polish gallantry). Wajda himself, it has been suggested, was torn between the skepticism of Stawinski’s script and his own tendency toward romantic hyperbole and larger-than-life characters. The result is a film that is visually powerful but morally ambivalent; it won the Silver Palm at the 1957 Cannes Film Festival, but in Poland set off a prolonged and angry debate.

There is the same tension between romanticism and skepticism in *Popiol i diament* (*Ashes and Diamonds*, 1958), which won the Fipresci Prize at Venice. It was adapted by Wajda himself from Jerzy Andrzejewski’s famous novel about the internal strife that divided Poland at the end of the war against the Nazis. It is set in a provincial town celebrating the end of the occupation and the beginning of a new social and political order. Maciek, who as a young idealist had fought in the anticommunist Home Army, is given one final order—to kill the district secretary just appointed by the new communist government. The spark of hope offered by Maciek’s brief love affair at his seedy hotel turns to ashes. He at first resists his assignment but finally carries out the assassination, is shot himself, and died in agony on a garbage dump.

This last film in Wajda’s trilogy, suspenseful as a good thriller, has the dimensions and the shape of high tragedy. Concentrated within a single day, it is constructed around the pull of contradictory forces: war and peace, love and hate, death and life. Moreover, as Boleslaw Michalek points out, it possesses “all the ingredients of a national epic, showing individual destinies being reshaped in the turmoil of a great *débauche*.” It deliberately asserts its connection with the great romantic tradition in Polish art—a tradition that at its most extreme personifies Poland itself as saint and martyr among nations and views the artist as the country’s conscience and prophet. Released in 1958, it was attacked for its ornate, baroque effects and its negative and fatalistic spirit (though it may also be understood as an appeal for national solidarity—an end to ideological conflict). However, even reviewers who disapproved of the film recognized its stature as “a spellbinding, stirring work which imposes its own view of the world.” It is widely regarded as Wajda’s masterpiece and as “the supreme achievement of postwar Polish cinema.” Zbigniew Cybulski, who plays Maciek, became with his dark glasses and unruly hair as much a personification of disaffected postwar youth as James Dean did in the West.

Wajda himself says of the films in his trilogy that “they came without any specific deep thinking, or trying for any special involvement. They just simply came out of me. Unlike other films that I made later, for which I tried very hard, and for which I had some specific view....The trilogy came out spontaneously and achieved the most.” In fact, many themes introduced in the trilogy recur in Wajda’s next film, *Lotna* (1959), which centers on the futile heroism of the Polish cavalryman who charges against the Nazi tanks in 1939. *Lotna* is a beautiful white mare, coveted by all, but so conspicuous on the battlefield that she brings death to everyone who rides her. This rather shapeless film is full of symbolism and the visual shock tactics characteristic of Wajda’s early style at its most extreme—a combination of scrupulous realism with grotesque detail that often resembles surrealism (and sometimes descends to kitsch).

After all this, *Niewinni czarodzieje* (*Innocent Sorcerers*, 1960) was a startling change of pace, the first postwar Polish film devoted to the problems and mores of the postwar generation....It is a stylish and entertaining piece, but not what was expected of Wajda by the public or critics (or indeed by Wajda himself), and it was received in Poland with considerable hostility.

Wajda returned to familiar territory in *Samson* (1961), a rather unconvincing film about a hounded Jew during the occupation who eventually finds the courage to die fighting against his destiny. This was followed by *Sibirski Ledi Magbet* (*A Siberian Lady Macbeth*, 1962), a highly theatrical adaptation of a novella by the nineteenth-century Russian writer Nikolai Leskov in which a bored and headstrong woman, Katerina, conspires with her peasant lover to murder her husband. The crime is discovered, and they are banished to Siberia, where Katerina’s lover discards her for a new mistress. Having lost everything, Katerina drowns her rival and herself in the freezing Volga. Made on location in Yugoslavia, with a Yugoslavian crew and cast, it seems a somewhat unlikely project for Wajda. Perhaps he was attracted by the character of Katerina; he has said that he is “only interested in characters on the grand scale...someone who is in opposition to great ideals or who accepts them, but not in someone who trots along in the footsteps of others.”

In 1962 Wajda was one of an international group of directors (including Truffaut and Marcel Ophüls) who contributed episodes to a portmanteau film called *L'Amour à vingt ans* (*Love at Twenty*). His offering was an extremely interesting sketch about a war veteran (Cybulski) who saves a child from a bear at the zoo and later, carried off to a party given by his “inscrutable” juniors of the postwar generation, bores them with drunken reminiscences of the heroic past. This neat, simple, and direct little film overtly criticizes the self-absorbed generation on which *Innocent Sorcerers* had withheld its verdict and was greatly admired as “a crucial transitional work” in Wajda’s oeuvre.

However, *Popioly* (*Ashes*), the expensive and ambitious picture that followed in 1965, was very much a return to the baroque and “operatic” style of Wajda’s earlier films. It is a sprawling historical romance whose three heroes leave Poland to fight with Napoleon, whom they see as a liberator, and who share his defeat. *Popioly*, with its “cast of thousands,” was nearly two years in the making and runs for four hours. It seemed to many critics to share the faults of the famous novel by Stefan Żeromski on which it is based: “histrionics, excess, rhetoric...over-colored emotions, exalted gestures, passions caught on the boil.” In Poland it provoked a violent controversy on account of its “pernicious”

harping of the theme of the nation’s “futile heroism.” The argument spread to become one between those who thought it the artist’s duty to speak well of his native land, and those who defended his right to diagnose its psychological ills.

Another historical film followed, *Gates to Paradise* (1967), an international coproduction shot on location in Yugoslavia, but made in English, with a cast that included Lionel Stander and Jenny Agutter. It is an account of a single night in the course of the Children’s Crusade—the pathetic pilgrimage undertaken in 1213 by hundreds of children and teenagers who believed they could free the Holy Land from heathen rule. Jerzy Andrzejewski’s script set out to examine the forces—lust, jealousy, and the craving for power among them—that in his view underlay this doomed expedition. Handicapped by language problems and a tight shooting schedule, the film lacks any clear sense of direction and failed as completely as the Crusade itself.

A burst of intense activity followed between 1968 and 1970, Wajda directed four movies, two television films (*Macbeth* and a science fiction comedy called *Przekładaniec* [*Roly Poly*]), and two stage plays (Dürrenmatt’s *Play Strindberg* and Dostoevsky’s *The Possessed*). At a low point in his career, Wajda remarked that he was “making one film after another on the off-chance that one of them will at last come off.” One that did was *Wszystko na sprzedaż* (*Everything for Sale*, 1968). In January 1967 the actor Zbigniew Cybulski, who after his performance in *Ashes and Diamonds*, had become a cult hero in the Polish cinema, fell accidentally to his death between the wheels of a train. The tragedy greatly affected Wajda, who had been contemplating a film about his friend—an extraordinary personality and a cultural phenomenon, the personification of his generation. With Cybulski dead, he went ahead anyway, assembling a movie, as it were, around his absence—“the stories circulating about him, the odds and ends of his existence, the places still warm from his presence.”

Everything for Sale became also a film about making a film, the art of the cinema, and the state of that art. With many of Cybulski’s friends playing themselves, the picture raises serious questions about loyalty and evanescence, art and illusion. This is reflected in its improvisational style, a startling departure from Wajda’s usual manner. It offers a rueful answer to some of the questions it raises by showing how the vacuum left by Cybulski’s death is filled by a new kind of star, Daniel Olbrychski: life must go on. (Olbrychski, who first made an impact in *Popioly*, has in actuality become Wajda’s principal male lead, starring in the great majority of the director’s subsequent pictures.)

This searching film was followed by a misogynistic comedy, *Polowanie na muchy* (*Hunting Flies*, 1969), whose downtrodden hero is forced into an assortment of ill-fitting roles by the ambitious women in his life, and then by *Krajobraz po bitwie* (*Landscape After Battle*). The latter is based on an autobiographical story by Tadeusz Borowski, who survived Auschwitz to write with agonizing brilliance about this experience until, in 1951, he chose to kill himself. Olbrychski plays the writer Tadeusz who, in a displaced person’s camp in Germany just after the war falls in love and begins slowly to reawaken to life. His girl is killed but Tadeusz is perhaps not totally lost—he has recovered sufficient humanity for her loss to cause him anguish. Like many of its predecessors, the film was intensely controversial, bitterly attacked by some as an affront to “Polishness,” praised by others for its honesty.

Brzezina (*The Birch Wood*, 1970) derives from a story written in 1932 by Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz, and turns on that writer's preoccupation with the struggle between the forces of life and those of death and his existential notion that our best weapon against death is sexual love. The theme is worked out through the relationship of two brothers living in the solitude of a remote forest" one man is dying of tuberculosis but full of sexual vitality; the other, though healthy, is deeply scarred by the death of his wife. The film's "cadaverous" tones were suggested by the art nouveau paintings of Jacek Malczewski, who was also fascinated by the opposition of Eros and Thanatos. Dismissed by some critics as "old-fashioned," treasured by others as a "haunting and elegiac film," *The Birch Wood* seemed to Boleslaw Michalek a milestone in Wajda's career: "Here, for the first time, he made a success of a theme both universal and timeless," wrestling "with the most deep-seated anxieties of human existence." It won a Fipresci Prize at the Milan Film Festival.

Wajda, who had directed his first stage production in 1959, turned increasingly to the theatre in the 1970s. ...In 1972 he made a notable feature film for West German Television, *Pilatus und Andere* (*Pilate and Others*), a modern version of the Crucifixion drawing on Mikhail Bulgarov's fantastic novel *The Master and the Margarita*, and placing Pilate at the center of the action as a highly contemporary man, pragmatic rather than evil. Christ's interrogation takes place in the old Nazi stadium at Nuremberg, and Golgotha is a great garbage dump beside the autobahn, with cars streaming past as Christ is hoisted on the cross.

Wajda is an avowed devotee of the Romantic tradition in Polish literature and art, and in 1972 he filmed one of the great masterpieces of that tradition, Stanislaw Wyspianski's 1901 play *Wesele* (*The Wedding*), a powerful influence on Wajda's work. It concerns the farmhouse wedding of a Krakow intellectual and a peasant girl—a ritual undertaken by the bridegroom as a gesture of atonement for centuries of exploitation. But this brave step leads nowhere, and the play ruthlessly dissects the representative Polish types gathered at the farmhouse, each haunted by ghosts from the past.

Ziemia obiecana (*Land of Promise*, 1975), winner of the Grand Prize at the Moscow Film Festival and a number of lesser awards, is another ambitious and visually splendid historical movie—an adaptation of Wladyslaw Reymont's novel about Poland's industrial revolution and the metamorphosis of the landed gentry into ruthless industrialists. *Czlowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*, 1977) is something very different—a contemporary film in a contemporary manner, using the hand-held camera and hectic *cinéma-vérité* technique favored by its heroine. She is Agnieszka (Krystyna Janda), a young student who decided to make her diploma film about Birkut, a Stakhanovite bricklayer who had become a propaganda hero in the 1950s but had mysteriously fallen out of favor.

Stubbornly pursuing her researches, Agnieszka finds that Birkut had been incapacitated by a resentful comrade, who had deliberately passed him a red-hot brick. Birkut had subsequently involved himself in the case of a friend falsely accused of spying and had loyally persisted until he too had landed in jail. All his friends and relations had deserted him—including the now celebrated director who had made a national hero of him in the first place. This harsh movie, which explodes the myths of workers' solidarity and Polish justice,

greatly displeased the authorities. Made in the mid-1970s, it was denied an export licence until 1978, when it won a Fipresci Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. Most Western critics hailed it as a major film—"an Eastern European *Citizen Kane*" and "one of the few serious analyses of Stalinism the cinema has given us."

Bez znieczulenia (*Without Anesthesia*, 1978) was shot (by Edward Klosinski) with a hand-held camera in the same hectic style as *Man of Marble*. It tells the story of a middle-aged journalist at the peak of his success who suddenly loses his wife, his job, and his grasp on life. Peter Cowrie wrote that the film describes a society in which people are afraid to show their true feelings"—that as Jerzy finds his self-confidence peeling away (and becomes more likable in the process), "so his wife and her lover seem more closely identified with a code of behaviour, both social and political, that is undoing Communist life." Written by Wajda in collaboration with Agnieszka Holland, the film was described by Wajda as "the beginning of something that faces me, that will only crystallize. But it is a direction in which I now wish to proceed."

However, a more poetic side of Wajda's talent emerges in *Tanny z Wilka* (*The Young Girls of Wilko*, 1979), a Polish-French coproduction based on a Checkhovian short novel by Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz, author of *The Birch Wood*. Impressionistic in style, this sad film centers on a man who returns to the country estate where fifteen years earlier he had enjoyed a romantic vacation. He finds that the beautiful sisters who had so attracted him have changed as much as he has and must face the harsh discovery that his life has "been not much different from those of other people."

Wajda's next film *Drygent* (*The Conductor/Orchestra Conductor*, 1979), stars John Gielgud as a world-famous, Polish-born orchestra conductor who temperamentally forsakes a Parisian engagement to return to the place of his birth to conduct a small provincial orchestra.

Czlowiek z Zelaza (*Man of Iron*, 1981) was directly inspired by the wave of strikes in the Gdansk region that led to the Solidarity movement and carried the story of *Man of Marble* into 1980. Featuring Krystina Janda and Jerzy Radziwilowicz again as, respectively, the young filmmaker and the son of Birkut (the former Stakhanovite), *Man of Iron* shows them as a couple involved in political activity during the strike at the Lenin Shipyards. These events are seen through the eyes of an alcoholic radio reporter, Winkiel (Marian Opania), a former dissident pressured to find incriminating evidence about Tomczyk (Radziwilowicz). Winkiel, though fearful of the political policeman and Communist Party official who prod him, is drawn to the strikers despite their ban on liquor. Within the film are pieces of newsreel footage from the 1970 strike, during which the Birkut character was shot, and from the 1980 rallies and negotiations. Lech Walesa appears in the newsreel footage and in the directed portion of the film, as does Anna Walentynowycz, a shipyard worker whose reinstatement was a strike demand.

David Robinson, of *The Times* (London), called the film "a work born directly out of historical events and becoming itself a part of those events," adding that it "may well be...[Wajda's] masterpiece for this total union of art and history." "It's as exciting as any thriller," wrote Philip French for the *Observer*, "it contains a love story of great power and purity, and it's a religious film in the way Wajda brings home with dramatic force the role Catholicism has had in recent Polish affairs." The only negative

review was Stanley Kauffmann's in *The New Republic*, describing the feature as "a muddled, costly protracted film with Wajda's artiness once again splotching the sincerity of his concern and the urgency of his themes." "*Man of Iron* is not Wajda's finest picture," conceded Robert Hatch in *The Nation*, "but it is a political tract of great power, a courageous gesture and perhaps a historic document." A last-minute entry at the 1981 Cannes Film Festival, it won the Golden Palm.

At the close of *Man of Iron*, the Party leader who has been bullying Winkiel dismisses the August 1980 accord as a "mere piece of paper," and this scene proved sadly prescient: shortly after the film's release, martial law was imposed on Poland. Then, in 1983, Wajda's Unit X—one of the nine divisions of the Polish film industry—was disbanded; his next two pictures were produced in Western Europe. *Danton* (1982), made in France, was a film version of a play written in 1931 by Stanislaw Przybyszewska, which Wajda had already staged three times. Jean-Claude Carrière adapted the work for the screen. The story focuses on the personal contrast and political conflict between Robespierre (Wojciech Pszoniak) and Danton (Gérard Depardieu) during the Reign of Terror. An ascetic ideologue, Robespierre wishes to carry the Revolution to its logical extreme, using the guillotine to purify the nation and to consolidate the power of the new government (embodied in his own incorruptible person). His former ally Danton, a volatile popular orator and careless sensualist, believes that the Revolution has gone far enough and that the state of emergency should be relaxed so that the people can enjoy the fruits of victory. But he is perhaps too busy enjoying these himself (or too confident of the claims of common humanity—his motives are not clear) to effectively resist his single-minded opponent. An atmosphere of feverish tension and ominous maneuvering is brilliantly evoked, and the intense theatrical style of the piece seems appropriate to the conscious political crisis it depicts. "In *Danton*, David Denby wrote, "speech is action. Characters race through the night and burst into rooms in a lather, holding forth as they walk; they address large groups of people, small meetings, a cell, sometimes another person....No one ever sleeps, and incoherence is a constant danger; therefore, to continue to speak well is to control history. When Danton shouts himself hoarse [at a show trial engineered by Robespierre] his career in politics, his life, is over."...Many read into *Danton* a condemnation of Communist Party practices, and the film's release in Poland was delayed.

It seems to Peter Cowrie that in Wajda's early films "there is a sense of man being manipulated by historical forces," while in his more recent work "the leading characters are a prey to their own nostalgia, impulsiveness, or prevarication, rather than to some implacable destiny." Other critics have commented similarly on Wajda's growing interest in "the psychology of his characters rather than ...their social context," Along with this change of emphasis in the content of his films has come a more dynamic and naturalistic camera style, and Wajda attributes this to the influence of the young film school graduates who worked under his guidance in Unit X. Cowrie believes that "what still distinguishes Wajda from the gifted new generation of Polish directors is his ability—or rather his willingness—to express ideas in terms of feeling. The dialogue is important, even moving at times, but the blend of imagery and emotion is specifically Wajda's alone, and a quality that allows his films to be appreciated far beyond the borders of Poland." Most critics would agree that he remains the

most significant of the Polish directors.

from *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda: The Art of Irony and Defiance*. Ed. John Orr & Elzbieta Ostrowska. Preface by Andrzej Wajda. Wallflower Press. London & NY 2003

American films teach me one important lesson: the audience may disagree with the concept that the director offers but they must understand what the director has to say. Unfortunately, a great majority of European films are lost somewhere along the line between director and screen because the director thinks that his confused, unintelligible language is part of his message. In fact, it makes it impossible to understand the director's ideas and as a result we only know that he is desperately trying to tell us something. That is why when I started working on *Ashes and Diamonds* (*Popiol i diament*, 1958), John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) was my inspiration. Few remember this film now but it is worth seeing. These were the films we wanted to make. It was beautiful; we were impressed by it. The final scene, when the gangster on the run returns home, lies down on the grass and the grazing horses come near him, is brilliantly unique. I have never seen such a scene. But I also mean the entire film, the way it was made, the inspiration it gave me. That is why I believe that I have to applaud American cinema—I owe it a great deal....

Cinema is not only spoken language. It is also an art of images. Here is an example I frequently use: the sequence showing Maciek Chelmicki's death on a rubbish tip brings *Ashes and Diamonds* to a close. I have often been asked how it was possible that the film was released at all. Jerzy Andrzejewski's party membership definitely helped; it would not have been possible otherwise. Regardless of that, for the censors who examined the film the message in the final scene could well have been that whoever rebels against the communist authorities ends up on the rubbish dump of history. Yet when the film was distributed the audience may well have thought, 'Who are these authorities who kill our boy, a resistance fighter, on a rubbish tip? This isn't right.' Both interpretations were possible and that is why the film was released with this amazing scene. Still, a censor phoned me early in the morning of the release of *Ashes and Diamonds* and suggested the sequence should be cut out. I knew, however, that I could hold out a few more hours and then we would see. We made it, the sequence stayed, I am saying this because I believe it is proof that national cinema, which speaks a verbal language no outsider would understand, may speak a language of images with such force that even censorship could not cope. I believe that the cinema of our times, a digital camera in the hands of the director, the Dogme rule that demands a film be contemporary and speaks to the living moment, the quest to use naturalistic language, are all powerful and make sense. Monopolies of both the state and the film industry lose their meaning as this contemporary type of film production develops. Our hopes for European cinema must surely go in this direction.

"Changing Meanings of Home and Exile: From *Ashes and Diamonds* to *Pan Tadeusz*." Izabela Kalinowska

[This essay traces the passage from the homeland lost to a representation of a home regained within the cinematic oeuvres of Andrzej Wajda, a film-maker whose work has rightly been

characterised as that of the ‘essential Pole.’]

World War Two provides the necessary starting point for any consideration of Polish culture of the second half of the twentieth century, and for the analysis of Wajda’s work in particular. Between 1939 and 1945, the Polish lands were subjected to the most extreme forms of foreign exploitation and abuse. As Wajda records in his autobiography, right after the war ‘Poland started tallying war-related losses, and the truth of this matter turned out to be more horrifying than the worst expectations had been’. The immensity of wartime destruction would be for many years a constant reminder of the disappearance of the world as it had once existed. The trauma of the war coupled with the political realities of post-war Poland created a situation where a condition similar to exile affected not only those who settled outside of Poland but also those who remained in Poland. These circumstances have found their reflection in post-war Polish culture, including Polish cinematography. The compulsion to relive the wounding experience of the war underlies all of the most remarkable films of the Polish school of cinematography, including *Ashes and Diamonds* (*Popiol I diament*, 1958). Moreover, a tension between the sacred, mythical space of a lost home and various places of transit and impermanence characterises later Wajda films as well....

In Wajda’s film the hotel provides a fitting metaphor for the all-embracing homelessness of post-war Poland.

Only one home has been left standing in the world of *Ashes and Diamonds*. The remnants of the town’s pre-war high society gather in the apartment of Mrs Staniewicz (Halina Kwiatkowska). ...The film continues the theme of an individual’s homelessness in a world devastated by war. At the same time Wajda seems to be skeptical of any efforts to provide simple solutions to the dilemma of the lost home.

Nina, who, as a fellow traveller describes her, ‘escaped from the living body of the nation’, feels no allegiance either to her Polish or her Jewish heritage. She looks forward to a life free from the burdens of past traumas and liberated from the constraints of a group identity determined either by religion or by nationalism. In *Ashes and Diamonds*, Maciek had expressed hope for finding such freedom when talking to Krystyna among the ruins of the church. But, in the end he decided to stay true to vaguely defined loyalties. This decision resulted in his death.

The 1999 adaptation of Adam Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz* forms the next stage of Wajda’s cinematic quest for the lost home. More precisely, this film marks the journey’s point of arrival. Superficially so seamless and ‘glossy’ that it could rival any Hollywood production, *Pan Tadeusz* continues the author’s dialogue with Poland’s past and present. Wajda does not merely tell the story of Tadeusz’s return home. The film-maker invites his audience to revisit a text central to modern Polish culture and thereby to return to the place of that culture’s origin. According to Wajda’s own account: ‘I felt now that after nearly ten years of freedom the moment had arrived to try and answer the following questions. Where have we come from? Who are we? Where are we headed?’ Mickiewicz, who spent most of his life in exile, wrote *Pan Tadeusz* in order to resurrect, in the lines of the poem, his long-lost Lithuanian home.

...In *Pan Tadeusz*, the ‘inbetweenness’ that hangs like a curse over the main protagonists of *Ashes and Diamonds*, *Landscape After Battle*, and to some extent, *Promised Land* and *The Young Ladies of Wilko* becomes a much appreciated home for the present. The past no longer casts a shadow. Instead, it becomes a wellspring for a positive redefinition of identity. The myth of a home regained replaces the myth of a home lost.

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