

PREFACE

The Importance of Andrzej Wajda

John Orr & Elżbieta Ostrowska

The veteran Polish director Andrzej Wajda has proved himself one of the great figures in European cinema during the second half of the twentieth century. This volume of essays by international scholars is a celebration of that achievement. It follows on from a commemorative conference on his work in cinema and theatre held at the University of Łódź in October 2001 and also from his special Lifetime Award at the 2000 Oscar ceremonies in Hollywood. It is a studied retrospect that proceeds from the famous wartime trilogy of the 1950s through to his recent version of *Pan Tadeusz* (1999), the epic poem of Poland's foremost poet of the nineteenth century, Adam Mickiewicz. His long career reminds us, in a post-Cold War situation, of that tangled relationship between cinema and politics we now sense in countries as diverse as Iran and China, yet was for over thirty years an everyday feature of cultural life in much of Central and Eastern Europe. The foreword to this volume is in fact Wajda's own assessment of some aspects of his career, made in his address to the Łódź conference. But it is also more than that. It is a set of speculations that centres around Poland yet moves beyond it, addressing the general fate of European cinema, past, present and future.

The critical essays that follow all address key aspects of his work, and his continuing importance for us all. John Orr outlines the constant play on irony and defiance that builds into Wajda's film aesthetic his continuing confrontations with Polish history and the cultural constraints of the communist state under which he lived for so long. His essay also highlights the fertile hybridity of Wajda's aesthetics, his ability to harness different traditions of realism, romanticism and modernist reflexivity in forging a coherent filmic vision of his native country and its modern predicament. Using Freudian analysis to great effect, Paul Coates looks more specifically at the impact of war traumas on Wajda's variations in film form and on his respective fascinations, too often neglected by critics, with surrealism and kitsch in his 1959 war film *Lotna*. These complex fascinations, when linked to the traumatic events of Poland's wartime experience that he re-fashioned on cinema screens a decade later, give him, Coates argues, a special place in the twentieth-century revival of European romanticism that builds on modernist aesthetics.

The key essays by Polish critics Tadeusz Lubelski and Elżbieta Ostrowska offer us other insights. Lubelski looks at Wajda's self-fictionalisation at key points in his career, where he consciously inserts himself as author into his films. He gives three key examples: Wajda's 1968 film about the making of a film that was also a memorial tribute to one of his favourite actors, Zbigniew Cybulski, *Everything For Sale*; his landmark 1976 fable about Polish politics and image-making, *Man of Marble*; and his 1999 epic *Pan Tadeusz* where the voice-over narrative links the author of the text, Mickiewicz, to the author of the film, Wajda himself. Ostrowska has a different focus. She examines the vital relationship between the micro- and macrocosmic that radiates through his greatest films, between the intimate dilemmas of sex and love and the broader issues of Polish nationhood that always seem to frame and enclose them, and at times to oppress them. Here she explores in detail the two great films set in the immediate post-war period where that relationship is most manifest, *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) and *Landscape After Battle* (1970); and a later wartime film about Polish-German relations, *A Love in Germany*, shot as a co-production in 1983 from the novel by Rolf Hochhuth.

Izabela Kalinowska and Michael Stevenson examine singular themes that recur repeatedly throughout Wajda's career. Kalinowska looks at the Polish meanings of home and exile in Wajda's cinema, seen as a function of repeated human dislocation throughout recent history and of its psychological fall-out. She focuses on the sense of homelessness prevalent in the post-war generation

that Wajda's films had brought so powerfully to light. Yet she also explores the mythical world of home in Wajda's history films, particularly the manor house, or gentry home, of *Promised Land* (1974). In this film, she contends, it functions as a myth of original wholeness for a lost intelligentsia in a communist Poland of the 1960 and 1970s. Stevenson, by contrast, deals with the enduring problem of Polish-Jewish relations and the Holocaust experience in Wajda's work, right from his startling 1954 debut *A Generation*, a film of wartime resistance unjustly neglected, to his controversial work in the 1990s, the feature films *Korczak* (1990) and *Holy Week* (1995). He sees Wajda's concern with Holocaust experience as consistent and conscientious, despite the adverse criticisms he has often encountered and shows the durability of his concern from his earliest to his most recent work in examining Polish-Jewish relations in all spheres of life.

After his wartime trilogy, the most widely known of Wajda's films internationally have been the *Man of Marble/Man of Iron* diptych. Arguably the most political of Wajda's films, they are also artistic markers between 1976 and 1981 of the rise and fall of Solidarity as the major opposition movement to the Polish communist state. From these two films Maureen Turim singles out the use of the historical flashback as a key narrative form. Inspired by *Citizen Kane*, Wajda, Turim contends, takes the historical flashback to new levels of complexity in its use of documentary footage, filmic reconstruction and montage. As a device it operates on several levels at once as a filmic challenge to the dominant political ideology of the time. Analysing in more detail the relationship between framing narrative and documentary form in the two films, Bjørn Sørenssen also records at first-hand the audience reaction to *Man of Marble* in 1977 at a cinema in Nowa Huta, the new industrial town that features so heavily in flashback during the film. He concludes that by focusing on the past more than the present, *Man of Marble* has a rhetoric of greater subtlety, and through focusing on the present more than the past, *Man of Iron* has a rhetoric of greater urgency.

Two contrasting forms of Wajda's revisionist romanticism are analysed by Michael Goddard and Christopher J. Caes. Goddard examines Wajda's dialectic of apotheosis and derision by comparing it with that resonating through the theatre of Jerzy Grotowski and in particular his staging of Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* (*Dziady III*). In Goddard's view, Wajda's films, especially *Man of Marble* and *Pan Tadeusz*, show greater continuity with the spirit and the romantic motifs of Mickiewicz than do the distancing devices of Grotowski's stage experiments. In contrast, Caes looks closely at the relationship between romance and masculinity in Wajda's war cavalry

film *Lotna*, highlighting the traumas of the clash between Polish romantic tradition and military modernity at the start of World War Two. He argues that the film re-presents military spectacle with a central ambivalence: on the one hand it is an authentic form of homo-social bonding; on the other, it is an emblem of historical failure with deep psychic consequences for the post-war generation.

One of the great skills of Andrzej Wajda has been his flair for adapting screen narratives from different written sources, fiction, drama and poetry. Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska provides us with a detailed case-study of *Promised Land*, made in 1974 and recently re-edited by Wajda in a new revised print. She elaborates the many differences between Wajda's history narrative and its literary source, the turn-of-century novel by Władysław Stanisław Reymont that deals with sexual, financial and political intrigue in the new industrial Łódź of that period. Tomasz Kłys looks at Wajda's adapting in a different context, television. His popular 1980 television series of Kraków life, *As the Years Pass, As the Days Pass...*, was adapted from texts by Polish modernist writers created between 1883 and 1919. Kłys argues that the television period-drama marks Wajda's original contribution to an important history genre, the ironic epic that produces a 'fascinating dialectic of the sublime and the trivial, of exalted affirmation and caustic satire, of authentic emotion and buffoonish affectation'. Finally, Lisa Di Bartolemeo looks at Wajda's last feature-film of the century, based upon one of the true classics of Polish writing, Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*. She argues that Wajda uses all his filmic powers here to recreate Mickiewicz's sensibility, his deep feeling for nature and nationhood and his lament in Parisian exile for a lost world that he had left behind.

This volume, then, is more than just a collection of critical observations. We believe it is the first English-language commentary on Wajda to cover the major aspects of his work from different critical points of view. We see it as complementing and updating the excellent 1970s monograph of Bolesław Michałek, but also of going much further. The advantage of hindsight allows for reflection in depth on a variety of topics and controversies that Wajda's work provokes, and to see that work taking its course over a full half-century. The volume also makes use of general advances in film theory and criticism so that Wajda can be seen in a fresh light as a figure both truly national and international in the context of world cinema.

For making such a volume possible special thanks must be extended to the Department of Literature, Theatre and Film at the University of Łódź and to all those who participated in the Wajda conference of October 2001.

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