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# PHANTASM AND AN ATTACK ON THE EPOCH. AN OVERVIEW OF JÓZEF PIŁSUDSKI'S IMAGE IN POLISH FEATURE FILMS IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF POLAND

## INTRODUCTION

Thirty years after the collapse of communism and alongside a growing tendency to see a national community as a political one, a tradition to legitimise, an alternative to the communist standard, came to the fore in Poland. In the centre of that tradition was Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935) and the events of 1918 that gave Poland its independence. As proved by empirical research, the changes in the collective memory (understood here as incentives to transform the symbolic public awareness) that occurred throughout the 1970s and 1980s made a “coded announcement” of institutional and systemic transformations that were about to happen in Poland after 1989.<sup>1</sup> What is more, Piłsudski has been and invariably remains, a national phantasm, a myth, a peculiar charism identified with regaining independence

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<sup>1</sup> I am referring here to Barbara Szacka's trailblazing research from *Czas przeszły: pamięć i mit*, Warsaw 2006, pp. 210–212. See also: *idem*, *Pamięć zbiorowa* [in:] *Wobec przeszłości. Pamięć przeszłości jako element kultury współczesnej*, ed. A. Szpociński, Warsaw 2005, pp. 22–24; *idem*, *Historia i pamięć zbiorowa*, “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2005, vol. XLVII, z. 4, pp. 8–14 and M. Halbwaschs, *Społeczne ramy pamięci*, translated and introduced by M. Król, Warsaw, 2008. In mid-1980s, Warren I. Susman was considering wider relations between cinema and history and distinguished between four areas: 1) cinema (as an institution and medium) as a product of history; 2) film as a recorder, a seismometer of the times in which it was created; 3) film about the past, its interpreter; 4) film's impact on the reality, it transforms the present day. The third of those areas, or perspectives, encapsulates the opportunities to shape the remembrance policy and explain the processes of history by “delivering” various interpreting visions (for example through editing, dialogues and cinematography) Cf. W.I. Susman, *Film and History: Artifact and Experience*, “Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies” 1985, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 26–36

(“the great builder”, “the father of independence”, “the leader of the nation”, “the great Marshall”, “the commanding officer” and so on) and the victory over the Bolsheviks in 1920 (an exemplar of anti-communism) in the collective experience of a national community.

This article’s objective is to analyse historical films devoted (directly or indirectly) to Piłsudski, and capture the evolution of perception and “depiction” (both visual and contextual) of him in the Polish cinematography from the period of the People’s Republic of Poland, on the example of selected films (case studies).<sup>2</sup> In this article the author uses first of all films, treated here as a historical source (audiovisual), discussions in the press on the process of their making and critical judgement (truthfulness to the historical facts, real course of events, contemporary reminiscences). The author presents the circumstances in which each work was produced, the link between the plot and the official interpretation, as well as the part the cinema played in creating society’s historical awareness. Some questions that need answers include how history was shown on the screen, how self-aware were the members of the audience, and how significant their audiovisual historical experience was. Equally important turned out to be the attempt to find out to what extent the film was the subject of political interference, and hence how distorted it was, how “filtered through” by propaganda or the official interpretation of history. Did it remain in line with historical narrative of its time (historical storytelling) or was it an autonomic (also authentic) picture in line with its makers’ intentions? What strategy did film makers adopt? What was its dominating factor: autonomy or ideological conformism (perhaps willingness to win favours with the authorities)? Or perhaps the film makers presented their own vision/visions of history in line with their personal convictions, or their own interpretation of the past? We could agree with Joachim Trenkner who said the following:

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<sup>2</sup> These words of Marek Henrykowski seem convincing: “There is no way of imagining a historical film without references to a particular event or series of events that are in one way or another recorded by the history. From the perspective of construction, they play a crucial role, the role of spans. While leaving the coasts of the present with the director of a historical film and moving with him to the other side, we do not travel on the spans but across the bridge, this ingeniously constructed fiction of the film. However, within this film genre a travel to the past is only possible thanks to this necessary fact-based foundation”. As in: M. Henrykowski, *Film jako źródło historyczne*, Poznań 2005, p. 59. About documentaries as a historical source wrote among others: *Media audiowizualne w warsztacie historyka*, ed. D. Skotarczak, Poznań 2008); D. Skotarczak, *Wśród filmowych źródeł do historii Polski Ludowej*, “Porównania” 2010, vol. 7, pp. 141–150; R. Wagner, *Film fabularny jako źródło historyczne*, „Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 1974, no. 2, pp. 181–194; A. Sikorski, *Uwagi o specyficznym charakterze filmowego źródła* [in:] *Problemy nauk pomocniczych historii. Materiały z II konferencji poświęconej naukom pomocniczym historii*, Katowice 1973; W. Hughes, *Ocena filmu jako świadectwa historii*, “Film na Świecie” 1980, no. 260, pp. 23–43; P. Witek, *Rozbite lustra historii. Rozmyte ślady historii. Metodologiczne problemy audiowizualnej koncepcji źródła historycznego* [in:] *Historia wobec źródeł. Historiografia klasyczna i nowe propozycje metodologiczne*, ed. J. Kolbuszewska, R. Stobiecki, Łódź 2010, pp. 91–105; *idem*, *Kultura – Film – Historia. Metodologiczne problemy doświadczenia audiowizualnego*, Lublin 2005; P. Litka, *Historyczny film* [in:] *Encyklopedia kina*, ed. T. Lubelski, Cracow 2003, p. 407; J. Wojnicka, *Film historyczny* [in:], *Słownik wiedzy o filmie*, ed. J. Wojnicka, O. Katafiasz, Bielsko-Biała 2006, p. 369; Z. Machwitz, *Fabularny film historyczny – problem gatunku*, “Folia Filmologica” 1982, no. 1; *Film i historia. Antologia*, ed. I. Kurz, Warsaw 2008 – especially the following essays: Hayden White and Marc Ferro; H. Karczowa, *Reportaż filmowy i kronika jako źródło historyczne*, “Studia Źródłoznawcze” 1971, vol. 16; T. Fürstenau, *Film historyczny; dokument czy dzieło sztuki*, transl. G. Rafalska, “Film na Świecie” 1980, no. 4 (260); P. Kowalski, *Historia w melodramatycznym kostiumie, czyli historyczny film fabularny* [in:] *Problem teorii dzieła filmowego*, ed. J. Trzynadłowski, Wrocław 1985); E. Durys, *Film jako źródło wiedzy historycznej*, Warsaw 2019; R.A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*, Harvard University Press 1995.

“[...] feature films are not academic studies, screenwriters must be given a free hand in adopting historical materials for the needs of the cinema. However, by declaring that their ambition is to present real events, film makers impose constraints on themselves; while having the full freedom of interpretation and selection of means, they cannot falsify history, otherwise, the film loses its intellectual honesty. By the virtue of impacting on the imagination of mass audience, it turns into a dangerous tool”.<sup>3</sup> We should naturally be aware that film productions in communist countries, as each and every form of art (also plastic arts, literature, theatre etc.), were not free from interferences of the state authorities (or actually party authorities). By the force of the circumstances they had to correspond with the calendar of ‘thaws and freezes’ and political developments that made a direct impact on artistic activities.

The questions posed above provoke at least indirectly to ask one more question, namely: can the historical film be a source used in historical research? There was a big debate on that in the 1960s and 1970s<sup>4</sup> but the author would like to focus only on a few reflections to bring some order. Two issues were mostly pointed out during those debates. Firstly, to what extent is a historical film embedded in the awareness and hence how does it present a short period of history in a wider context? Secondly, what is the “distance” between the presented events and the present times, and hence how does the film create the vision of history “here and now”?<sup>5</sup> “A film that recreates an epoch, an event, or a figure based on the pictures from film chronicles recorded in that epoch can be an only real and historical film in the true sense of that term [...] Historical film, at least here and now, is produced from real pictures of the history. The one that we call a historical film however is usually only a drug, a desperate and futile escape from our problems: the past is used as a reviving yearning for the already made gesture, the future as an utopia of wishes coming to life, the present as a victory over time and our everyday responsibility” as Lino Micciche explained in “Kino” magazine.<sup>6</sup> In Poland, however, attention was drawn to the “political and ideological” scalpel’s cuts. For example, in Tadeusz Łepkowski’s opinion presented in the discussion organised by the “Film” magazine (about *Polonia Restituta*): “The history in the film is much more sociotechnical and service-like than chronicles due to its power, commonness and ability to impact on people [...] Film remains under overwhelming economic and political pressure, and in our times under the pressure of the state ideology. The role of the historical picture is to canvass rather than explain”.<sup>7</sup> We can therefore assume that although they tell a story about the past, historical films are in a sense contemporary. They allow us to grasp the dynamics of changes in the collective memory because the reception of a work of art (here, a film) changes through time.

<sup>3</sup> J. Trenkner, *Operacja Walkiria*, transl. W. Pięciak, “Tygodnik Powszechny”, 3 II 2009.

<sup>4</sup> P. Kurpiewski gives more details in his: *Historia na ekranie Polski Ludowej*, Gdańsk 2017, pp. 4–9.

<sup>5</sup> See for example: A. Garlicki, *Film wobec świadomości historycznej*, “Kino” 1975, no. 10, pp. 25–26; J. Tazbir, *Film – ostoja tradycyjnej historiografii*, “Kino” 1975, no. 10, pp. 27–29.

<sup>6</sup> L. Micciche, *Film i historia*, transl. W. Wertenstein, “Kino” 1981, no. 7, pp. 26, 39.

<sup>7</sup> T. Łepkowski, *Wokół prawdy, fałszów i przemilczeń. Kilka uwag o filmowej historii*, “Kino” 1981, no. 9, p. 18. Łepkowski’s view corresponds with Pierre Sorlin’s methodological interpretation. Cf. P. Sorlin, *Klio na ekranie albo historyk w mroku*, “Film na Świecie” 1980, no. 4, p. 53.

In this article the author applies history and political science (or more broadly social science) research methods. The dominating ones are: the historical method (source analysis and evaluation of sources) and systems analysis. Among adopted research techniques dominates analysis and evaluation of sources (especially audiovisual and press), which allowed us to reconstruct the issues within the scope and chronology of the research field. It seems absolutely justified to confront facts, events and situations as presented in the films with works that maintained the historical standards and source materials, while bearing in mind the specificity of film as a medium. By restricting ourselves to evaluating sources we would reduce and limit opportunities to explore various film discourses, alternative interpretations, contents and rhetorical terms (for example metaphorical, symbolic, mythologizing). Therefore we should first of all pay attention to the context (circumstances, conditions) in which the film was produced (political, social, ideological, organisational, production-related, and other contexts).

However, the author decided not to use the characteristic methodology for film studies research that focuses on film production techniques and aesthetics, or ones typical for epistemic models used in media and culture studies (or cultural anthropology) such as: phenomenology, structuralism, semiotics, psychoanalysis, feminism, cognitivism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction. Similarly, the author abandoned the category of description, characteristic for this type of research, e.g. adaptation, intertextuality and intermediality.

Researchers in cinematography as well as in social and human sciences have so far shown no deeper interest in Józef Piłsudski. There were only some exceptions, such as reviews and minutes of editorial discussions about newly released history films that appeared in film industry trade press and a few popular overview pieces<sup>8</sup>. Some films featuring Piłsudski as a leading character were also discussed parenthetically in more general deliberations by Piotr Kurpiewski and Jerzy Eisler.<sup>9</sup>

## “FROM FREEZE TO THAW” – FILM TRAJECTORIES OF THE MEMORY OF THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC

It was natural for the interwar cinema to reach for Piłsudski. However, most of those productions adopted the manner of Polish romantic poetry (slightly nostalgic), reporting, or propaganda<sup>10</sup>. Józef Piłsudski had been absent in the cinematography of the People's

<sup>8</sup> See for example: M. Borkowski, *Wojsko w filmie polskim*, Warsaw 2000; (aw) [W. Adamik], *Piłsudski w filmie*, "Antena" 2001, no. 42, p. 5; J.F. Lewandowski, *II Rzeczypospolita w filmie powojennym*, "Film" 1988, no. 42, pp. 16–17; *idem*, *Piłsudski i kino*, "Film" 1988, no. 33, p. 14–16; Cz. Mykita-Glensk, *Pierwsza wojna światowa w filmie polskim* [in:] *Inter arma cantant musae*, Częstochowa, 1995/1996, pp. 137–147; J. Semilski, *Wojsko w przedwojennych filmach*, "Myśl Polska" 1994, no. 5, p. 2; H. Słabek, *Filmowy spór o tradycje. Tradycje walk o niepodległość w filmie polskim po 1957 r.*, "Dziś" 1998, no. 5, p. 59–66.

<sup>9</sup> R. Kurpiewski, *Historia na ekranie Polski Ludowej*; J. Eisler, *Zamach stanu*, "Pamięć.pl" 2016, no. 5. A popular science session entitled *Piłsudski w kinematografie* organised in the atmosphere of political détente of autumn 1988 by the Silesian Film Society went almost unnoticed.

<sup>10</sup> The so-called Legion and independence film productions included among others: *Obrońcy Lwowa* (*Defenders of Lviv*, 1919. The film was shown under its alternative title: *Tamara*). Director and writer: Antonina

Republic of Poland until late 1970s, owing to the fact that the memory of the Second Polish Republic was being regularly eradicated by the communist authorities. Interwar years were presented from a unilateral perspective as an “epoch of class struggle”, persecution of the opposition (“martyrology” of the communist movement), poverty and indigence. The summary analysis of the modern history of Poland presented in school textbooks blamed the Sanation for the defeat in the war (1939–1945) and presented the Second Polish Republic as a country with huge social inequalities, pauperised society, under strong influence of the Church, a state fighting against any progressive ideas, exploiting the poorest groups, and brutally pacifying any signs of social unrest. The followers of Piłsudski were labelled “political bankrupts”, “fascists” and “trouble makers”. The Second Polish Republic was described as “wasted years”, a country “ruled by a fascist clique of political bankrupts” supported by an alliance of “bourgeois and landowning” elements. The systematic, wide-scale action to eradicate the figure of Piłsudski from the public space involved not only removing artefacts – symbols of remembrance (statues, museums, street names etc.) but also, or perhaps first of all, squaring up with the past through evolving historical revisionism (Piłsudski as an “anti-role-model”, “velvet dandy from Zalavas [Polish: Zułowo]”, “dilettante not refraining from blackmail”, “swindler”, “Austrian informer”, “born, unscrupulous mercenary, full of disdain towards his own people”, “traitor to the Polish cause”, “fascist dictator”). Such tendencies carried on for

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Pietrykiewicz (pen name Nina Niovilla); Director of Cinematography: Albert Wywerka, Production: Studio: Powszechne Towarzystwo Filmowe (PETEF); *Męczeństwo ludu górnośląskiego* (*The Martyrdom of the Upper Silesia's people*, 1920. The film was also shown under alternative titles: *Nie damy ziemi skąd nasz ród* (*We will not give up the land where we come from*) and *Krwawa walka na Górnym Śląsku* (*Bloody Fight in the Upper Silesia*). The film was commissioned by Poland's Ministry of Culture and Art. Released: Warsaw, 20/11/1920 Director: Władysław Lenczewski; Writer: Zygmunt Bartkiewicz; Director of Cinematography: Stanisław Sebel; Production: Polfilma. No copies of the film survived); *Dla ciebie Polsko* (*It is for you, Poland*, 1920, Director: Antoni Bednarczyk; Writer: Marian Józefowicz; Director of Cinematography: Stanisław Sebel; Production: Centralny Urząd Filmowy, Polfilma). In 2009, the film was nominated to the “Film” monthly awards “Złota Kaczka” for “the best history and costume drama on the 100th anniversary of the Polish cinema” and the most well-known part of that series shot “on the spot” – *Cud nad Wisłą* (*Battle of Warsaw*, 1921, Director: Ryszard Bolesławski; Writer: Adam Zagórski; Cinematography: Zbigniew Gniazdowski; Production: Studio Orient – Film). All those silent films adopted a simple martyrological narrative imbued with myths, black and white sets of good and evil characters, and a note of educational mannerism, characteristic for this genre. The first Polish narrative film devoted solely to Piłsudski was a biographical sketch under the title of *Komendant* (*Commanding Officer*, 1928, Director: Henryk Bigoszt). It had, however, never been shown to the public and no copy survived till present days. According to press reviews, it was the first documentary following Piłsudski – in that role Antoni Piekarski – along the path to independence, and featuring the epopee of the Legions and the first months following the regaining of independence in 1918. The film shows Piłsudski neither as a politician (or ideologue), nor a skilful and experienced player, but rather as a soldier whose attitude channels all yearnings and hopes of the nation. The Marshall's and his loyal comrades' commitment to socialist agenda was skilfully omitted, or as some would prefer to call it, oversimplified. To the audience, Piłsudski appeared to be a saviour, a symbol of the country's reconstruction and cross-party unification. This trend is also followed by a few films that directly refer to the tradition of independence and feature Józef Piłsudski as a background character. The following films deserve special attention: *My Pierwsza Brygada* (*We Are the First Brigade*, 1928); *Na Sybir* (*Exile to Siberia*, 1930); *Dziesięciu z Pawiaka* (*10 Condemned*, 1931); *Śmierć Okrzeja* (*The Death of Okrzeja*, 1923); *Polonia Restituta* (1928). The deeds and merits of Józef Piłsudski are also emphasised in a few short documentaries, such as: *Marszałek Foch w Polsce* (*Marshal Foch in Poland*, 1923); *Odstąpienie pomnika ks. Józefa Poniatowskiego* (*Unveiling of Prince Józef Poniatowski's statue*, 1923), and propaganda films: *Jesteśmy gotowi* (*We are Ready*, 1939) and *Silni, zwarci, gotowi* (*Strong, United, Ready*, 1939).

a long time, surviving the interchanging “thaws” and “freezes” of the political calendar. When it came to the revitalisation of some periods of Poland’s history, the relaxation of an ideological girdle came slowly and unevenly.

Initially with a bit of humility and later with more courage, the films that came out in Poland just after the events of October 1956 not only began to put the true, grim reality of the People’s Republic of Poland straight, but also simultaneously reached for topics from up-to-that-point distorted history. The “black legends” of the Home Army, the Polish underground state, the Warsaw Uprising, and the defence war of 1939 were abandoned. However, that panorama of history still lacked film productions devoted to the most important figures of the Second Polish Republic.

This unfavourable climate did not change before the decade of Edward Gierek (1970–1980). Alongside films devoted to the complicated history of Silesia and Greater Poland Uprisings a search for deeper rooting in history started. Contemporary problems were also kept in sight while historical perspectives and contexts were penetrated. History remained a tool of explaining the present and, although the communist party declared its commitment to the freedom of art, it simultaneously pointed out that pluralism should be used to develop the socialist awareness. The resolution adopted on 14 July 1981 during the 9th Special Convention of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PUWP) reads: “This convention supports the rule to treat artistic creative activity non-instrumentally and provide freedom for creators, and cognitive and aesthetic values. The Party does not give up its ideological and artistic preferences. Polish United Workers’ Party will continue to sympathise with such works of art that contribute to the construction of socialist awareness of Polish society, the culture of Poland’s left, and bravely and critically approach historical and contemporary issues from the point of view of socialist ideals.”<sup>11</sup>

From mid-1970s, filmmakers gradually began to reach for more recent history. The Second World War was recalled in films: *Gdzie jesteś Panie Prezydent* (*Wherever you are, Mr President*, Andrzej Trzos-Rastawiecki, 1978); *Ptaki ptakom* (*Birds to Birds*, Paweł Komorowski, 1976); *Olimpiada ’40* (*Olympics 40*, Andrzej Kotkowski, 1980); *Akcja pod Arsenalem* (*Operation Arsenal*, Jan Łomnicki, 1977); *Godzina “W”* (*“W” Hour*, Janusz Morgenstern, 1979) and *Urodziny młodego warszawiaka* (*The Birthday*, Ewa and Czesław Petelscy, 1980). Separately, there were popular and well-received TV series such as *Z biegiem lat, z biegiem dni* (*As the Days Come and the Days Go*, 1980) by Andrzej Wajda and Edward Kłosiński, the story of two families from Cracow set between 1874 and 1914, and especially an 11-episode series *Polskie Drogi* (*Polish Ways*, Janusz Morgenstern, 1976–1977) directed by with beautiful music by Andrzej Kurylewicz. The film culture of the late 1970s and early 1980s abounded in a range of popular films referring to the interwar period. Most of those, however, were nostalgic, “psychologising” films with some dramatic tensions (for example *Sprawa Gorgoniowej*/*The Gorgon Case*, Janusz Majewski, 1977; *Hotel Pacific*, Janusz Majewski, 1975; *Znachor*/*The Quack*, Jerzy Hoffman, 1982) or comedy films welcomed by the audience (such as *Hallo Szpicbródka, czyli ostatni występ króla kasiarzy*/*Hi Szpicbródka. The last performance by the king of safecrackers*,

<sup>11</sup> Z uchwał IX Nadzwyczajnego Zjazdu PZPR, „Film” 1983, no. 10, p. 3.

Janusz Rzeszewski and Mieczysław Jahoda, 1978; *Vabank 1*, Juliusz Machulskim 1981, or *Kariera Nikodema Dyzmy/The Career of Nikodem Dyzma*, a seven-episode TV series by Jan Rybkowski and Marek Nowicki), which were full of contradictory meanings and nuanced ideological and political content.

## PIŁSUDSKI – A STATESMAN BEHIND THE VEIL OF A POLITICAL MURDER DEATH OF A PRESIDENT (1977)

In 1978, the approaching 60th anniversary of regaining independence provided Polish cinema with an opportunity to explore.<sup>12</sup> Almost at the same time, the legacy of interwar currents of political thought, from socialism to the National Democracy, was also alive in the underground social life of the democratic, although ideologically diversified opposition. A special role in clearing away the rubble of the memory was attributed to Marshall Piłsudski. For some people he remained a republican and socialist, for others an anti-communist, the “father” of the victory in the war against the Bolsheviks in 1920. In the collective memory, nevertheless, he was first of all a symbol and icon of an independent Poland.

The topic was approached by Jerzy Kawalerowicz, one of the most outstanding Polish directors and the author of such works as: *Celuloza (Celulose, 1953-1954)*; *Matka Joanna od Aniołów (Mother Joan of the Angels, 1960)*, and *Faraon (Pharaon, 1966)*, and an

<sup>12</sup> Independence Day (11 November) was removed from the list of national holidays. Instead, 22 July (the so-called Day of Poland's Rebirth) was chosen as a new celebration of Poland's regained statehood. It was a day when the Polish Committee of National Liberation in Lublin published in 1944 its manifesto that provided a mandate for the communist system and authorities, although in fact Stalin signed that document two days earlier. There were consistent attempts to belittle the date of 11 November by organising celebrations of the Bolshevik Revolution (7 November although according to the Russian calendar the revolution started at night of 24/25 October 1917) and to a lesser extent commemorating the anniversary of the establishment of a Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland (6–7 November 1918). The anniversary of the so-called Great October Socialist Revolution was celebrated in an especially pompous manner (academies and lectures at schools, institutions, workplaces, military parades, ceremonies at the Polish-Soviet Friendship Monument, Polish Soviet Brotherhood of war etc.). The anniversary was not only the climax of the months of Polish-Soviet friendship but it was meant to prove the Bolsheviks seizing power was a key factor in deciding the fate of Poland's independence (the myth of Lenin as a “father of Poland's independence”). It was only at the 50th anniversary of regaining independence when the strategy of the communist authorities gradually evolved. More emphasis was put on the significance and contribution of the Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland and Polish socialist tradition to the construction of Polish independence. The state authorities again soften their attitude when the first consolidated opposition groups that reached the tradition of celebrating independence day were revealed in the 1970s (e.g. an article in the regime press remembering the events of November 1911 and the figure of Piłsudski). The climax came with the live broadcast of Edward Gierek's speech in Sejm (6 November). The state celebration then took place together with the anniversary of the revolution, and December celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Communist Party of Poland and 30th anniversary of the Polish United Workers' Party. During the “carnival of Solidarity” independence day was celebrated semi officially. In 1981 the party delegations laid a bunch of flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw. A year later when martial law was imposed, the same place was visited by a delegation from a façade, regime-supporting organisation Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth as well as party and state officials. At the end of the 1980s (especially in 1988) the public sphere became more open for celebrating the anniversary of independence and also remembering Józef Piłsudski. The opposition groups organised their own independent celebration in 1977–1989.

influential figure in Polish cinematography as well. Since 1955, Kawalerowicz run – with some breaks – Zespół Filmowy Kadr (since 1972 Studio Filmowe Kadr), one of the greatest film production companies of those times. He also co-funded and then chaired The Polish Filmmakers Association (in 1966-1978, and then as an honorary chairman since 1981).<sup>13</sup> From 1954 he was a member of the communist party, which he joined at the insistence of Wanda Jakubowska, a popular director. As a “party member” he was perceived as influential, which is proved by for example his participation in the Presidium of All-Polish National Unity Front (1981-1983), Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth, and then the National Council of the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth or the fact that he held a seat in the lower chamber of parliament.<sup>14</sup> Despite his political engagement, he was considered an author trying to maintain his autonomy and freedom of artistic expression. He often gave his professional colleagues a great deal of artistic freedom and shielded them from communist authorities with his “red ID”.<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of 1980s, when Polish cinematography functioned in the environment of dynamic turmoil, Kawalerowicz together with Andrzej Wajda took the helm of the Committee for the Protection of Cinematography (Komitet Ocalenia Kinematografii), established in 1981 by the Polish Filmmakers Association and the Committee of Film Production Workers of the Independent and Self-governing Trade Union “Solidarność”. The latter’s task was to develop a new, grassroots autonomic model of cinematography. The proposal presented by the Committee at the Forum of the Polish Film Festival in Gdańsk met with kind response from the authorities (September 1981). Despite that it was never carried out because the martial law was introduced in December 1981 and similarly to other artistic and film associations, Polish Filmmakers Association and Committee for the Protection of Cinematography were suspended.<sup>16</sup>

The first idea of a history film about the beginnings of the Second Republic of Poland might have emerged in 1968. Jerzy Kawalerowicz and Bolesław Michałek, a famous Polish film critic and screenwriter, began to work together on a film production about the 1922 presidential elections. However, such productions were not looked at favourably in the post-March 1968 political climate and the works were suspended.<sup>17</sup> The topic returned in the mid-1970s with the approaching anniversary of independence and the green light given by the political apparatus allowed to finally deliver the project in 1977. The national premiere of *Death of a President* took place in October 1977. The authors tried to replicate the events of 1922 on the screen as faithfully as possible. In order to do that they used the documents such as stenographic records of parliament, press statements and memoirs. The suggestiveness of the image was underpinned by a perfect set design and above all

<sup>13</sup> See more: *Księga Kadru: o zespole filmowym Jerzego Kawalerowicza*, ed. S. Zawisliński S., S. Kuśmierczyk, Warsaw, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> See more: *Faraon kina*, ed. M. Dipont, S. Zawisliński, S. Warsaw 1997; J. Rek J., *Kino Jerzego Kawalerowicza i jego konteksty*, Łódź 2008.

<sup>15</sup> M. Wojtczak, *O kinie moralnego niepokoju... I nie tylko*, Warsaw 2009, p. 431.

<sup>16</sup> E. Zajiček, *Poza ekranem. Polska kinematografia w latach 1896–2005*, Warsaw 2009, p. 277–278.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. R. Marszałek, *Koniec żywotów świętych?*, “Kino” 1978, no. 10; T. Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego 1895–2014*, Cracow 2016, pp. 472–473.



the actors' performance. It should be emphasised that the film by Kawalerowicz and Michałek featured a wide range of Polish actors: Zdzisław Mrożewski, Marek Walczewski, Jerzy Duszyński, Tomasz Zaliwski, Edmund Fetting and Henryk Bista.

The plot of this fact-based epic film is built around the parallel lives of Gabriel Narutowicz – the first president of free Poland – and his murderer Eligiusz Niewiadomski – an artist, painter and theoretician of art. They crossed their ways at an exhibition of Polish paintings in Zachęta gallery, the scene of the regicide. From a slightly different perspective, the fact that Kawalerowicz used a “documentary” visual style brought the following film sequences together into a strongly persuasive and suggestive chronicle of events.

Although the main part of the film is focused on Narutowicz, Niewiadomski and political elites, there are also other main collective protagonists: the streets of Warsaw versus the National Assembly (joint chambers of parliament) with its political games, discussions and rows. This is not, however, a classic adaptation of Narutowicz's biography. His academic, social and political activity is almost totally absent from the film.

Let us, however, return to Piłsudski, who is here far from a primary character. In this film Piłsudski performed by Jerzy Duszyński is a rather silent figure who only watches political events. He does not aspire to be a national hero. This role is somehow reserved for president Narutowicz, whose tragedy attracted the sympathy of the audience while also building his authority as a statesman. Dialogues involving the Marshall are constructed in such a way that he comes across a secretive and private person, lost in his thoughts, keeping his views to himself and avoiding getting involved in conflicts. He does not despise democracy, but he also does not attack his political rivals although the circumstances are as favourable as probably never before. It seems that Piłsudski as the Leader of the Nation did not want to be connected with any side of the conflict before the president – the head of state – was sworn in. He remains above him, a non-partisan cross-party statesman. That cool and slightly dispassionate image of Piłsudski changes only with the raising divisions in the society fuelled on the one hand by socialists and on the other by the national right, with Niewiadomski's fanatic democracy-hating monologues as a counterpoint. When the action develops, Piłsudski rises to become a restrained, moderate and reasonable politician, he does not abuse the words of criticism towards democracy, for which he was famous for. In the film he is shown as a conciliator, a man of compromise, able to seek the common ground for the national interest in the moment of national importance. Therefore we might argue that the first post-war film creation of Piłsudski is far from the martyrological and patriotic perspectives of the interwar cinema as well as the grotesque and corrupted post-war narratives, especially historical ones. We do not encounter Piłsudski as “the Builder of the Independent Poland” or “the Leader” Similarly, in line with Marxist historiography, the authors of the film did not connect him with fascism or a disdain for democracy. On the contrary, the apparent emotionlessness and certain passiveness changed only due to the dynamics of a narrative of a feature film, though resembling a para-documentary, that made the background character of the Marshall grow into the role of a statesman concerned about the fate of his motherland. Piłsudski's image created by Kawalerowicz and Michałek is not exaggerated. They built it bottom-up, slowly and

with moderation, trying to avoid too much of the pomp, pathos and dramatization. It is true that to the audience Piłsudski could come across as a ceremonial and elevated personality but there was no exaltation. The Marshall remained outside the dichotomous perspective of hate and love.

Although the picture by Kawalerowicz could be perceived as an assault on the right – after all as personified by Niewiadomski (and also General Józef Haller) it is a collective anti-hero of the film – it did, however, perhaps subconsciously, show democracy as a system based on political pluralism, free public opinion and free elections, which in the People's Republic of Poland seemed an impossibility. The film questioned the stereotype of Poland as a tolerant country, “a country without stakes”, where no regicides had ever happened, but where a murder of its First Citizen (a president) was committed at a time when the joy and enthusiasm of many generations of Poles had not cooled down yet. That is a likely reason why the piece by Kawalerowicz and Michałek was quickly appreciated by the audience.<sup>18</sup> However, it seems that the nostalgia for mythologised picture of the Second Polish Republic set in the collective memory, although simultaneously systematically falsified by the communist authorities, could have been more important. In my opinion, Kawalerowicz and Michałek remained resistant to both those trends: myth (or cult) and black propaganda. We must remember that the tragedy of Narutowicz is the reverse side of the tragedy of Niewiadomski. Their “parallel lives” are connected by the tragedy of the whole nation. And so it looks like in this film. No judgements, accusations or interpretations. The suggestiveness of the image, excellent performance of the actors, and masterfully written dialogues tell “what it really was like” but in a toned down and untroubling manner. The audience is allowed to make their own interpretations of the “real story”.

Kawalerowicz's film had been shown in cinemas across Poland for two years. It also featured in cinemas in Western Europe (Germany, France, the UK, Spain, Italy and others). It met with positive reviews from film critics,<sup>19</sup> which resulted in many awards.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> In 1977, the film was seen by 924,000 viewers. *Polskie filmy na czele coraz słabszej stawki*, “Film” 1978, no. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. e.g. A. Ledóchowski, *O naprawie Rzeczypospolitej*, “Kino” 1978, no. 4; *idem*, *Strzelałem do symbolu*, „Film” 1977, no. 36; J.B., *Zapis historii czy świadomości historycznej?*, “Film” 1978, no. 14; *Wizje przeszłości. Rozmowa z Marianem Wojciechowskim*, “Film” 1978, no. 37; *Wstęp do dyskusji*, “Film” 1978, no. 40; Z. Kałużyński, *Tolerancja*, “Polityka” 1977, no. 35; J. Zatorski, *Śmierć prezydenta*, “Kierunki” 1977, no. 36; M. Sandecka, *Varia. Kronika wydarzeń*, “Kino” 2006, no. 471; L. Bajer, *Realizm ascetyczny*, “Kino” 1977, no. 142; *Sprawozdanie z produkcji filmu Śmierć Prezydenta*, “Film” 1977, no. 36; *Śmierć Prezydenta*, “Filmowy Serwis Prasowy” 1977, no. 18; J. Wróblewski, *Upiory historii*, “Polityka” 2007, no. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Among others: at Polish Film Festival in Gdańsk (1977), “Samowar” award at the Film Enthusiasts' Review in Świebodzin for the curiosity of the Polish cinema of 1977 that paid tribute to the 60th anniversary of regaining independence (1978), for direction at the Berlin International Film Festival (1978), the critics award at the Cordoba International Film Festival (1978), award for direction at the Working People's Film Festival in Czechoslovakia (1978), “Syrenka Warszawska” for fiction film during the 10th Summer Film Festival in Łągowie (1978) and the special prize at the International Film Festival in Cádiz (1979). See: *Samowar 77 dla Śmierci prezydenta i Z biegiem czasu*, “Film” 1978, no. 37; *Srebrny Niedźwiedź dla Śmierci prezydenta*, “Film” 1978, no. 12; *X Lato Filmowe w Łągowie*, “Film” 1978, no. 29; *Przemiany reżyserii*, “Film” 1978, no. 23. The film was also shown at the Review of Polish Film in Milan (1978) and International Film Festival in Barcelona (1978). Cf. *W Mediolanie*, “Film” 1978, no. 14; *Na festiwalach w Hiszpanii*, “Film” 1978, no. 43.

## PIŁSUDSKI – A DICTATOR. COUP D'ÉTAT (1981)

Ryszard Filipiński's *Coup d'état* presents a different, more – or perhaps too much of – a suggestive image of Piłsudski. So far it has been the only fictionalised picture of the so-called May Coup that took place on 12 May 1926. The film still meets with a mixed reception and brings about strong emotions. It is difficult to make an unambiguous judgement whether this is a reliable story about the May Coup and the government of Sanation or rather a bitter, vulgarised picture (also through the language used by Piłsudski) of political elites of interwar Poland that remains far away from historical truth.<sup>21</sup> The truth seems to lie somewhere in between. There is no doubt that extremely negative assessments (also today), perhaps a bit harmful and unfair, were caused by two issues: the political times when the film was produced and then shown in cinemas as well as the biographies of its authors. There is no doubt that *Coup d'état* was the most important film in the Filipiński's directing career, who earlier had been known to the wider public mostly as a very gifted film (and theatre) actor, performer of important roles in films by Andrzej Wajda, Czesław Petelski, Jan Rybkowski, Wanda Jakubowska, Roman Polański and Janusz Morgenstern. He was also a director at the People's Theatre in Nowa Huta (1975–1979), a manager of Zespół Filmowy "Kraków" and then "Iluzjon". His political activity brought about extreme emotions, not related to the fact that he was a member of Polish United Workers' Party. A significant number of Polish filmmakers joined the communist party. More doubts were raised by political views of Filipiński and Ryszard Gontarz – a screenwriter and film consultant. Filipiński, a very gifted actor also appreciated by his colleagues, belonged to an informal pressure group aspiring to strengthen the role of the communist party in the state, and argued against all attempts to liberalise the system. In 1976, together with Ryszard Gontarz they signed (and co-edited) the so-called Letter 2000 to the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, where they called for moral renewal of the party and open fight with revisionism, becoming the spokespeople of the 'national culture'. He saw the enemies of the People's Republic of Poland not only in the ranks of opposition, or liberals in the party, but also among the powerful people of Jewish origin. As soon as in the late 1960s, he began to sympathise with Mieczysław Moczar's national, communist, and in fact anti-Semitic fraction.<sup>22</sup> In the later period, after 1980, he frequently shared his views publicly in

<sup>21</sup> *Coup d'état* (1980), 158 minutes; Director: Ryszard Filipiński; Second Director: Janusz Weychert, Henryk Depczyk; Assistant director: Grażyna Szymańska, Janusz Ratzko, Urszula Degurska; Writer: Ryszard Gontarz; Director of Cinematography: Jacek Stachlewski; Camera operator: Roman Suszyński; Production Designer: Czesław Siekiera; Set Decorator: Marek Iwaszkiewicz, Jadwiga Skrzepińska, Edward Papierski; Costumer: Renata Kochańska, Agnieszka Domaniecka; Music: Piotr Marczewski; Sound engineer: Krzysztof Wodziński; Film edited by: Jerzy Pękalski; Make-up Supervisor: Mirosław Jakubowski; Producer Zespół filmowy "Profil".

<sup>22</sup> The national and communist tendencies that led to a merger of nationalism, national tradition and authoritarianism in Polish film culture were described by Mikołaj Kunicki, *Heroism, Raison d'état, and National Communism: Red Nationalism in the Cinema of People's Poland*, "Contemporary European History" 2012, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 235–256; *idem*, *Optimism against all odds: Polish National Identity in War Films of Jerzy Passendorfer*, "Sprawy Narodowościowe. Nowa Seria/Nationalities Affairs. New Series" 2017, no. 49. Nationalist legitimisation of communism was described by: M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy*

“Rzeczywistość” – a mouthpiece of the conservative wing of the party. He also collaborated with an anti-Semitic Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne “Grunwald” although he never joined it.<sup>23</sup> Gontarz’s biography is even more complex. He joined the Polish Workers’ Party just after the war. Then he was a member of the Polish United Workers’ Party and collaborated with the secret police (under the code names “Jasiński”/“Wolanin”). He became infamous for vulgarised anti-Semitic commentary in the times of propaganda of March 1968.<sup>24</sup> The second consultant of the film was Professor Jan Borkowski, a famous historian of the Second Polish Republic (researcher in the history of the people’s movement), also a collaborator of the secret police, and then the Institute for Training Academic Staff/Institute of Social Sciences at Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party.<sup>25</sup> Despite its cognitive and artistic value, all of the above mentioned facts were a burden on the film.

Making an unambiguous judgement of the film could be difficult as it was released in April 1981 (almost exactly a day before the 55th anniversary of the May Coup), amid political crises sparked off by the events in Bydgoszcz where activists from the Solidarity movement were beaten up. The film was released in the circumstances of, in fact, a diarchy of the communist party and Solidarity. Already after the introduction of martial law (13 December, 1981), critics underlined the similarities between the coup d’état carried by Piłsudski and the decision made by the communist authorities. It was suggested that Filipiński’s work gave an impression of legitimising General Wojciech Jaruzelski’s decision. These parallels seem far-fetched. Still though, *Coup d’état* could have been seen a metaphor of the Polish People’s Republic, a country with a façade of democracy, ruled by a narrow elite of powerful people supported by the army, a dictatorship that uses terror and violence towards its political opponents.

There is no doubt that all those political burdens could not distort the judgement on the acting. Filipiński’s creation of Piłsudski was excellent, which was emphasised even by film critics.

Initially Filipiński was preparing to produce a full and complex film about Piłsudski, the first biographical picture in Polish post-war cinema, presenting Piłsudski’s path

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*komunistycznej w Polsce*, Warsaw 2005; K. Tyszka, *Nacjonalizm w komunizmie: ideologia narodowa w Związku Radzieckim i Polsce Ludowej*, Warsaw 2004.

<sup>23</sup> The conservatives in the party, called the hard-liners, concentrated around various organisations and clubs, such as: Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne “Grunwald”, “Warsaw 1980”, the Party Forum in Katowice and the Discussion Forum of Warsaw Communists, and the Discussion Forum of Party Intelligentsia. Prominent PUWP’ activists were also linked with those circles, such as Tadeusz Grabski, Stefan Olszowski, Albin Siwak and Andrzej Żabiński. They also had their own national papers, such as “Płomienie”, “Barwy” and “Rzeczywistość”. J. Kazimierski, *Katowickie Forum Partyjne*, “Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość” 2013, no. 2, pp. 209–232; P. Gasztold-Señ, *Koncesjonowany nacjonalizm. Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne Grunwald 1980–1990*, Warsaw 2012; *idem*, *Towarzysze z betonu: dogmatyzm w PZPR 1980–1990*, Warsaw 2019.

<sup>24</sup> F. Dąbrowski, *Ryszard Gontarz. Funkcjonariusz UB, SB, dziennikarz PRL*, “Biuletyn IPN” 2008, no. 3, pp. 21–25. P. Gasztold, *Nadgorliwość “marcowego” propagandzisty. Zawile losy Ryszarda Gontarza* [in:] *Marzec i po Marcu. Wpływ kryzysu Marca ’68 na środowiska naukowe i kulturę Polski ludowej*, ed. P. Benken, T.P. Rutkowski, Warsaw 2019, pp. 248–277.

<sup>25</sup> T. Rutkowski, *Nauki historyczne w Polsce 1944–1970. Zagadnienia polityczne i organizacyjne*, Warsaw 2007, p. 376; *idem*, *Jan Borkowski – kontrowersyjny historyk ruchu ludowego* [in:] *Słamszona nauka? Inwigilacja środowisk akademickich i naukowych przez aparat bezpieczeństwa w latach siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych XX wieku*, ed. P. Franaszek, Warsaw, pp. 288–323.

from a commitment to socialist activities, through the Legion chapter and the interwar politics. Finally, however, perhaps due to the unfavourable political atmosphere he opted for that period of Marshall's life that caused strongest doubts and controversies.<sup>26</sup> While Filipski's performance was excellent, it also falsified the role. The historical layer is the main shortcoming of the film.

Which Piłsudski could we see in the film? Defiantly not the "Commander" or the "Commander in Chief". He is a rather ruthless, brutal and oppressive dictator who fought with the opposition and destroyed the foundations of the state with premeditation and a cool head. Interestingly in its subsequent scenes up to the last one the entire film reflects the real course of events from autumn 1925 and a manifestation of a few hundred officers (most of them former soldiers of the Legions) under the command of General Gustaw Orlicz-Dreszer in Sulejówiek. The doubts are only raised by the interpretation. The project by Filipski and Gontarz shows an unambiguously negative and strongly exaggerated image of Piłsudski and the Sanation, at times discouraging in its impudence and suggestiveness. An example of that are the scenes with leaders of opposition imprisoned and tortured at the tower of Brest. In one of the scenes a former Prime Minister Wincenty Witos is pushed by guards while carrying a bucket of faeces to dump. In another we can hear a groan of a man beaten up ruthlessly with truncheons in a cell with the sounds of a Legions song *My pierwsza brygada...*, forbidden in the Polish People's Republic, chanted in the background. In one of the first scenes, embracing the narrative on the first days after the coup, we can see Colonel Mieczysław Więckowski<sup>27</sup> who facing the choice between loyalty to Piłsudski and loyalty to the uniform commits suicide by shooting himself.

By showing the first months of politics after the coup, the authors of this feature film unmask in their opinion real intentions of Piłsudski while he uncompromisingly cracked down on hostile generals and opposition politicians. Jerzy Zdziechowski a treasury minister from Witos' government is brutally assaulted in his own home. Piłsudski – ruthless, merciless and simultaneously consistent in destroying the rule of law is also presented as a traitor to socialist ideals, disloyal not only to the socialists – from his den – but first and foremost to his comrades on the path to independence. His infidelity is expressed in a scene where he (already as a prime minister) meets with landed gentry (conservatives) in the Radziwiłł's property in Nieśwież.

The "post-May" Piłsudski is a demiurge of politics of those times, its creator. All his assistants and supporters are only pieces on the political chessboard, moving at Piłsudski's will. President Ignacy Mościcki is a puppet and a figurehead, General Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski, on the other hand, is a weak-willed brown-noser incapable to perform administrative functions. The entire Sanation elite as directed by Filipski consist of careerists and claqueurs or political fanatics. Piłsudski treats them as doormats, gives orders, moves them from one position to another, appoints and dismisses. Real power is

<sup>26</sup> J. Eisler, *Zamach stanu...*, p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> **Mieczysław Nicefor Więckowski** (1895–1926) was a colonel at the general headquarters of the Polish Army, recipient of the Order of Virtuti Militari, former member of the Legions and Piłsudski's supporter. During the May Coup he decided to take his own life in order to avoid the necessity to pick a side.

in his hands. Piłsudski, or in fact Filipiński, does not only put on the clothes of a dictator, a despot – but also adopts his language. In the film we can frequently hear such words as: “prostytuanta” [a blend of the words “konstytuanta” (constituent assembly) and “prostitute”], “słajdaczały Sejm” [“shitty” chamber of parliament], “everyone milks Poland like a cow” and so on. Piłsudski calls Witos, a three-time prime minister and a leading politician of the Second Polish Republic, “a jerk without a tie” and simply despises opposition politicians if not with the words then in his gestures.<sup>28</sup> Filipiński and Gontarz go even further. For them Poland after May is no longer a democratic country. And perhaps they are right, when we take into consideration the modern understanding of democracy. What is more, however, it is not authoritarianism but totalitarianism (if not “Polish fascism”) with battled parliamentary opposition, imprisoned politicians, destroyed rule of law, brutally pacified strikes and manifestations. Here it is worth to ask oneself a question: who is a positive character in that film? Neither nationalists, nor people’s activists, but still the establishment, symbols of pre-May alliance of landed gentry and big landowners supported by rich peasants, “political bankrupts”, also responsible for the coup. Although they are tormented and oppressed, the authors’ hope that the “fascist dictatorship” would be abolished lies only with the left (socialist and communist). They are undoubtedly the collective protagonist of the film – a defender of universal values, democracy and justice. In the film the viewers can frequently see rallies with workers carrying red flags and banners with slogans popular in post-war Poland such as: “Long live People’s Republic of Poland”, “Long live socialism”, “We want bread and work”, “Fascism out”.

As already mentioned, it is hard to make an unambiguous judgement of the film made by the Filipiński–Gontarz duo. In terms of sticking to facts, it did not after all depart from the truth. However, it was burdened with ambiguity of the message, manipulation of the image of Piłsudski as well as the political atmosphere of its release. Therefore, already at that time it received rather harsh judgements from the critics and met with viewers’ indifference.<sup>29</sup> Even good, and at times excellent, actors’ performance (especially Filipiński’s), design, outdoor cinematography, camera work and music were not enough to cover the one-sidedness of the message. At a time when Piłsudski was so heavily mythologised by Poles and admired in the democratic opposition circles, on the big screen he appeared deprived of his esteem, secret longings of the society and was presented as a ruthless dictator and despot. In a review immediately following the film Jerzy Holzer wrote that the authors did not want to “remind us about Piłsudski”, but rather to make him repugnant through a purposeful manipulation of history. The film exaggerated a lot, abused unquestionable facts while interpreting them. It is difficult to understand the reasons of this uncontrolled hatred towards Piłsudski and his supporters, perhaps

<sup>28</sup> R. Filipiński, R. Gontarz, *Zamach stanu: scenopis filmu fabularnego*, Łódź 1978.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. e.g. *Zamach na epokę. Dyskusja z udziałem: Mariana M. Drozdowskiego, Piotra Lossowskiego, Jerzego R. Szaflika, Henryka Jankowskiego, Kazimierza Koźniewskiego i Barbary Mruklik*, “Kino” 1981, no. 185; Z. Klaczyński, *Jej ból, jej gniew...*, “Film” 1981, no. 13; *Wokół Zamachu stanu. Dyskusja z udziałem: Zbigniewa Klaczyńskiego, Jana Tomickiego, Ryszarda Gontarza, Piotra Staweckiego*, “Film” 1981, no. 20; *Pozycja artysty*, “Filmowy Serwis Prasowy” 1981, no. 16; *Sprawozdanie z produkcji filmu Zamach stanu*, “Film” 1977, no. 36; *Zamach stanu*, “Filmowy Serwis Prasowy” 1981, no. 4.

peculiarly entangled in the understanding of contemporary world – Holzer wrote after the release.<sup>30</sup> Hence, it was a “good and bad” film to quote an apparently mutually exclusive phrase used recently by Jerzy Eisler.<sup>31</sup> Obviously, critical opinions about *Coup d'état* were partly eased by state rewards the film received, for example at the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia [1980].<sup>32</sup> For Filipki personally, the film turned up to be the disaster of his life. His acting in films of prominent directors had been forgotten; nobody discussed his excellent creation of Piłsudski in a “bad” film about him. Banished he gave up work in the film industry for years and came back only after the collapse of communism (after 1989) when he reoriented his ideological commitments.

### PIŁSUDSKI IN ROMAN DMOWSKI'S SHADOW. POLONIA RESTITUTA (1981)

Bohdan Poręba's *Polonia Restituta* written by Włodzimierz T. Kowalski was the last big film production in the People's Republic of Poland featuring Piłsudski.<sup>33</sup> Already in his first films, Poręba, a famous film and theatre director, a screenwriter and columnist, was keen to reach to historical issues (partisan fights, the history of the Polish army during the Second World War, the struggles of General Maczek's First Armoured Division). He was made famous by the film *Hubal* (1973), welcomed by the party (a private screening was organised for General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the head of the Ministry of National Defence). Poręba received many state (and also ministerial) film awards. Reviewers and the audience were, however, more critical. Since 1975, Poręba had been the artistic director of Zespół Filmowy “Profil”. It was established on the initiative of the Department of Culture at the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party to carry out the communist party's cultural policy in the area of film production. Hence it enjoyed some financial privileges. On the other hand, it was meant to counterbalance the young generation of dynamic authors, who opposed the state authorities, which led to many disputes and antagonisms. Janusz Kijowski, then a member of the Zespół “X”, put it accurately: “Of course we, that is ‘Tor’ and ‘X’, had a common enemy. It was Bohdan Poręba's Zespół Filmowy ‘Profil’. [...] That is because ‘Profil’ had a clear national and socialist, post-Moczar, line. It was a place which absolutely did not fit into our cinematography. People gathered there thought about ideology and patriotism but with a note of brown colour: about Jews, masons who allegedly flooded our public life; about ‘dejewification’ of the

<sup>30</sup> J. Holzer, *Zamach na historię*, “Tygodnik Solidarność” 1981, no. 4, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> J. Eisler, *Zamach stanu...*, p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> However, the decision caused many controversies. In protest, Krzysztof Kiesłowski, a member of the jury, tabled *votum separatum*. Cf. M. Wojtczak, *O kinie...*, p. 237.

<sup>33</sup> *Polonia Restituta* (1981), Director: Bohdan Poręba; Writer: Włodzimierz T. Kowalski; Co-Production: Deutsche Film (DEFA), Filmové Studio Barrandov; Hungarofilm, Lenfilm Studio, Mafilm, MAFILM Dialog Filmstudió, Zespół Filmowy “Profil”. The film was nominated to the Golden Bears at the Polish Film Festival in Gdańsk (1981) and in 2009 he received a nomination to the award of the “Film” monthly – “Złota Kaczka” for: The best historical and costume film at the 100th anniversary of the Polish cinema, as well as the best actor of Polish historical and costume films for Krzysztof Chamiec and Janusz Zakrzewski.

cinematography despite the fact that it was not long after 1968. It was impossible to talk with people from 'Profil'. They did not listen to any arguments. What they did was based on some sort of a priori guidelines, I don't know whose. Perhaps they developed them themselves. [...] And they unjustly accused us of being manipulated by Jewish or spying cosmopolitan circles [...] Zespół Filmowy 'Profil' is a dark stain on the history of film production companies. It turns out that in each beautiful utopia there is a place for the rabble".<sup>34</sup> Poręba himself explained that the establishment of "Profil" was meant to "balance the trends" in cinematography that from his point of view were damaging: "Zespół Filmowy 'Profil' was created in an attempt to balance Polish cinematography and in wider terms, culture and influences that were far from Polish national culture. I can recall a conversation with the head of the Culture Department of PUWP's Central Committee. Having been nominated for the head of 'Profil' he told me: 'You are getting this unit in order to create a team of Poles in cinematography'".<sup>35</sup>

Like many other Polish filmmakers, Poręba was a member of the Polish United Workers' Party and within it he supported the nationalist and conservative faction. A member of Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne "Grunwald", Poręba was believed to be one of its main ideologues. Professor Kowalski, on the other hand, who regularly held the post of historian in subsequent governments (he received his habilitation in 1968), was an expert in modern history, the history of diplomacy and Polish-Soviet relations. He was the favourite of the public and ran a regular TV programs on history.<sup>36</sup>

The work on a film featuring the struggle for independent Poland had already started in 1978. It was meant to be a two-stream plot with global and historical narrative featuring real figures from the history intertwined with the "private" lives of a fictional Pawlak family. Already in 1979, Poręba emphasised that it would not be a hagiographic picture that apotheosized the heroes from those times but rather a film that demythologised the process of regaining independence. This is what he said in an interview for "Film" monthly: "The film will allow us to debunk many myths and also show how they were created. First and foremost we need to objectify the myth that we were given independence either by a "good

<sup>34</sup> M. Wojtczak, *O kinie...*, pp. 58–59.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 340. It must, however, be noticed that despite Poręba's clear ideological and political entanglements, a few important, politically neutral, films were produced by "Profil" (e.g. films of Leszek Wosiewicz, Lech Majewski, Ryszard Czekala). Perhaps, as suggested by Tadeusz Lubelski, this was to serve the purpose of "authenticating" the unit. Cf. T. Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego: twórcy, filmy, konteksty* (Katowice-Chorzów 2009, p. 414. See also: J. Szczerba, *Nie żyje Bohdan Poręba – reżyser "Hubala"*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 27 I 2014; *Poręba chce zmartwychwstać. Z Bohdanem Porębą rozmawia Grzegorz Sroczyński*, "Duży Format" ("Gazeta Wyborcza's" weekend insert), 4 III 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Screenwriter Włodzimierz T. Kowalski worked on a few Polish feature films. Beside *Polonia Restituta*, others worth mentioning include: *Operacja Himmler* (*Himmler Operation*, 1979); *Katastrofa nad Gibraltarem* (*The Crash Off Gibraltar*, 1983) and TV theatre performances *Przed Burzą* (*Before the storm*, 1977) and *Poczdąm* (*Potsdam*, 1975). The assistant writer of *Polonia Restituta* was Professor Ryszard Frelek, a party historian, diplomat and politician (several times elected to the Sejm in PRL), who moved up the party career ladder starting as a senior instructor at Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (1962–1968) and then a head of the Foreign Department at Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (1971–1975). During the production of the film he was already a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party and from 1980 its secretary (from July 1981). W. Janowski, A. Kochański, *Informator o strukturze i obsadzie personalnej centralnego aparatu PZPR, 1948–1990*, Warsaw 2000, p. 166.



grandfather” President Wilson or even by Piłsudski himself. Nobody gave us independence, it was determined neither by the forces of Piłsudski, nor the Haller’s army and it was not due to our diplomacy in the West either. It was a chain of various circumstances. Our diplomacy was in fact amateurish. Piłsudski was a military commander, Paderewski – an artist, Dmowski – be it a man of a high intellectual calibre – still only a self-taught diplomat. [...] Therefore we were not given anything. Wherever a chance turned up, a Polish army was created. [...] we will show the Legion des Bayonnais, and the enlistment from the US, and the red regiments from Warsaw – the people who followed the revolution [...] There will be many historical figures in the film. We will touch something that has been unjustifiably treated as a forbidden fruit. We want to reflect on who they were, what reasons stood behind them. They were after all very complicated characters, defined by many circumstances. It seems to me that there is nothing embarrassing in telling the truth about them, it would be neither defamation nor a glorification.”<sup>37</sup>

The two-part film *Polonia Restituta* was produced by Zespół Filmowy “Profil” in co-production with Mafilm Dialog Film Studio (Budapest), DEFA – a feature film studio (Berlin), Barrandov film studio and Lenfilm (Leningrad). It was the first post-war film production that documented the most important processes (political, social and economic) and events that were at the heart of Poland’s rebirth. The scenes were shot in Poland, France, the UK, Germany, and the US. The film featured a pleiad of established actors (such as Janusz Zakrzeński, Krzysztof Chamiec, Edmund Fetting, Józef Pieracki, and Jerzy Kaliszewski). The music was composed and performed by Czesław Niemen.

In principle the film was meant to present at least three parallel perspectives in the struggle for independence: diplomatic, military and revolutionary. Each was personified by historical figures: Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Roman Dmowski, Józef Piłsudski and the collective protagonists: socialists and communists. In the background there was a private thread around the Pawlak family. The winding path to independence and the “complex and broken Poland” was personified by the choices (and attitudes) of two brothers: Tadeusz (Andrzej Precigs) and Franek (Zygmunt Malanowicz). The former believed in the personality of brigadier Piłsudski and joined the Legions, the latter was attracted by the ideals of communism and revolution.

Let us move back to the European history. A significant part of the film runs alongside two narratives. The first being Paderewski’s diplomatic demarches regarding the Polish issue and Dmowski’s realistic strategy pursued with consequence although evolving through the time. The authors of the film did not hide their affinity for the leader of the National Democracy (Polish nationalists). Dmowski was shown as one of, not to the say the main, architect of the independent Polish state and its borders. His orientation towards Russia, shown before and during the first phase of the Great War is not a Russophile attitude at all. It is clearly visible that Dmowski, a regular at the Tsarist’s saloons, treats Russia as a lesser evil, and believes that it is in the Russian Empire’s interest to give its reassurances to the Polish issue. He puts forward a stage-by-stage program. It is outlined in the following sequences of the film that together form a coherent concept of Polish policies: first, cultural

<sup>37</sup> “*Polonia Restituta*”. Z Bohdanem Porębą rozmawiała Elżbieta Dolińska, “Film” 1979, no. 16, p. 7.

and economic autonomy (a conversation with Sergey Sazonov, the Foreign Minister of the Russian Empire), then a joint fight against the Germans, and then full independence and construction of Greater Poland with an access to the sea. This concept is brought together when Western Europe and the United States recognise the Polish National Committee as the official representative of Poles, and then in the second part of the film at the Versailles Conference, where Dmowski rose to become the architect of the Polish issue. Poręba makes Dmowski a statesman, a great European politician. Perhaps he lacks the charisma of Piłsudski, but – as clearly visible in many scenes featuring Dmowski – he is a perspicacious, self-confident, thoughtful and mature politician.

Józef Piłsudski, or rather his image in the narrative layer presented by Poręba, is constructed based on contrast – antinomy. Piłsudski is not presented as a full-blooded politician. He is often impulsive, hot-headed, acts instinctively and often unpredictably. In the subsequent scenes he becomes a typical 19th century protagonist shaped by the romantic poetry, oddly perceived politics based on deeds. It is difficult to attribute any world view or ideology to him. He refers to them rather instrumentally or instinctively, which is clearly visible in his relations with socialists. The closer we get to 1918, the cooler they become. While recruiting for his Legions, Piłsudski counts on his socialist comrades, but when he returns from Magdeburg he does not lend his trust to the cabinet of Ignacy Daszyński (the socialist leader), which is met with anger among the socialists and the pro-independence left. It gets even deeper when the Leader declares he will no longer be linked to any political party. Then when the Regency Council hands the power over to him he is not against putting the red flag on the Royal Castle in Warsaw as this is the “will of the working people”.

Simultaneously, Piłsudski seems to prefer the politics of *fait accompli* and tries to talk Stefan Żeromski, a respected Polish writer, into it. Żeromski was critical about the appointment of the Supreme National Committee by which the Legions were to be created. They also cannot reach an agreement on the future borders. A couple of times in the film Piłsudski leaves the decisions on the future of the territory under Prussian partition to the Western countries. We encounter *fait accompli* policy once again when the US joins the war and the Russian Empire falls. At that point Piłsudski tables a motion of self-dissolution of the Provisional Council of State and demands that a Polish government should be established. “Time for making Poland without Poles is up” – he says. He distances himself more and more from the circumstances of the Polish issue. At the same time he seems to be a politician seeking alternatives. He mobilises the Polish Military Organisation, the nucleus of the future army, before the oath crisis. He is aware that refusing to give an oath of allegiance to the German Emperor will mean internment. Following his return to Warsaw from the Magdeburg Fortress, after the government of Jędrzej Moraczewski (a socialist activist) has been appointed and takes the helm, Piłsudski’s role in the film is overshadowed by Dmowski and his diplomatic demarches. The authors of the film focus mainly on the battles over the borders, preparation for the uprising in Greater Poland and Silesia and struggles over the shape of borders at the Versailles Conference. Home affairs move to the background, and Piłsudski and his role follow suit. It seems that in the eyes of Poręba, Piłsudski is first of all a commanding officer of the Legions,

with charisma, authority and enjoying the obedience of his soldiers. He is also keen on compromise and agreement while lacking a deeper political perspective. He is a type of an archaic politician, a 19th-century man, brought up in the tradition of irredentism, with no long-term thinking. It is perfectly visible especially when Piłsudski is surprised by the course of events following 11 November 1918, when he has no action plan (besides demanding social reforms and imminent elections to the Sejm). He makes decisions day by day, adjusting his strategy to changing circumstances.<sup>38</sup>

The two-episode film of *Poręba* was first shown in May 1981. Almost a year later, a seven-episode serial under the title *Polonia Restituta* was also produced. It was shown on TV after martial law was abolished in 1983 and went almost unnoticed by film critics.<sup>39</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As it has already been mentioned, neither historians nor film scholars have so far focused on the representations of Józef Piłsudski in film. In Polish cinema throughout the years (until 1989), the film character of Piłsudski had evolved significantly. In the Second Polish Republic few filming exercises presented him as a statesman, “the father of independence”, the most prominent politician, and the Chief Commander. His transformation into a “living saint” – a quasi-religious icon of free Poland – was reinforced by expectations and tastes of viewers but first and foremost by the governing camp’s (Sanation) policy on history backed by expanded state propaganda. In the People’s Republic of Poland, Piłsudski was almost entirely eradicated from the public view. Associated with fascism, bankruptcy, “bourgeois Poland”, a symbol of the policy responsible for the September 1939 defeat, he was admitted back to the public view, though reluctantly, during the thaw that followed the death of Joseph Stalin. In the cinema, however, the figure of Piłsudski turned up quite late, namely in the 1970s under the rule of Edward Gierek, the first secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party (20 December, 1970 – 6 September, 1980). There were some certain conducive circumstances. On the one hand, the state’s official policy attempted to revitalise the celebrations of the Independence Day (1918), and some objectivised academic articles on the history of the Second Polish Republic came later. On the other, for a large part of the society (including emerging anti-socialist opposition) the figure of Piłsudski became an icon, and at the same time, an imagined phantasm – a symbol of anti-communism and generally (intuitively) perceived freedom. Such were the moods that drove the attention of film makers to the history of the Second Polish Republic. However, they realised that making an objective, “true” picture about Piłsudski

<sup>38</sup> B. Mruklik, *Historia z fotoplastykonu*, „Kino” 1981, no. 8, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> At the end of the 1980s during a relative political thaw, two more films worth mentioning were also released. The first was produced in 1988, almost two hours’ long documentary *Wymarsz* (*Marching Off*, Wincenty Ronisz) and the other: *Rzeczpospolitej dni pierwsze* (*The first them of the Polish Republic*, 1988) directed by Roman Wionczek and written by Ryszard Frelek who was also Counsellor in the Poland’s embassy in Athens. The latter has never been shown in cinemas. Polish public TV broadcast it in January 1989 but the viewers were not impressed. Perhaps simply because it was a failed film with a low budget, poor screenplay and cost-effective cast.

was still impossible due to political, ideological and censorial barriers. Therefore they used him in the global historical or contributory (occasional) narratives.

In terms of politics/history and Piłsudski as their biggest creator, the three film productions analysed here, namely: *Death of a President* (1977), *Coup d'état* (1981) and *Polonia Restituta* (1981), are the most representative pictures in the cinema of the People's Republic of Poland. Although Piłsudski's representation was a supporting role in Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *Death of a President*, this was conducive to simultaneously creating his image as a prudent and moderate politician. In the one-sided *Coup d'état* he is portrayed as a brutal dictator and tyrant destroying the remains of a democratic state. And though a link to fascism was not even mentioned once, the viewers could have made comparisons with the post-May 1926 system. *Polonia Restituta*, on the other hand, is a biographic (individual as well as global/multi-generational) story of the "Polish issue" in the Great War (and in 1918) intertwined with the parallel lives of Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski. The comparison set out in the film showed Piłsudski as just one of the "fathers of independence", and his role and significance did not differ from those of Dmowski, Paderewski or General Haller. While Kawalerowicz's work was free from ideological entanglements (as far as it was possible), the films by Filipki and Poręba were widely seen as unsuccessful, although skilful in falsifying the past. The fact that both productions turned out to be very costly (also due to poor turnout of viewers) was also significant. In an economic crisis it caused tensions and conflicts in the ranks of the Association of Polish Filmmakers.<sup>40</sup>

All these film narratives remained in line with historical truth. Contemporary perspective, however, reveals a problem with their interpretations of history and its creators. And such is the case of Piłsudski, presented in each of those films in an incomplete and subjective manner, as a "either/or" model (statesman versus dictator).

Works of Filipki and Poręba especially subscribed to the official narrative of history, while simultaneously making an impression of an objective and honest "story". They resembled a film lecture in history (dialogues compatible with the source message, using subtitles to explain location and time of the presented events, and so on). When both films came out, historians almost unanimously agreed that they are very schematic and sometimes vexatious in their message (especially *May Coup* whose task was to make Piłsudski and Second Republic of Poland repugnant). What is equally important, their production did not involve the most recent studies in contemporary history (such as the works of Andrzej Garlicki, which were at that time believed to be balanced and objective). First and foremost, it seems that it was a "story" about history that was different from what the audience expected to see. If we assume that each film is treated as a historical source, is unambiguous and objective, but at the same time "emotionalises" history and "dramatizes" it, it must inevitably impact on the audience's emotions. Projection and identification make the audience "live the life of the characters" from the screen. They identify with them, suffer the same quandaries, dilemmas and problems. As a medium, film dynamises

<sup>40</sup> Bohdan Poręba's *Polonia Restituta* (cost: 105.7 million zł), Ryszard Filipki's *Coup d'état* (76.4 million zł). To compare, the cost of film productions in that time amounted to: *The Deluge*: 100 million zł, *Nights and Days*: 120 million zł, *The Promised Land*: 30 million zł. Cf. M. Wojtczak, *O kinie...*, p. 255.

(stimulates or weakens, shocks or delights) experiences, emotions and sensations. From the perspective of emotions and experiences, the films by Filipiński (first and foremost) and Poręba could enrage and did enrage. Although they were based on historical sources (reliable memoirist accounts and documents) and true to the actual course of events, they created a totally different image of Piłsudski to the one from the collective memory of the Polish society. It seems that the cultural remembrance, understood also as a culture of remembrance, could be perceived as a certain semantic construction, or an imagery space impacted on by various contexts, from history, through politics to world views. Explanations given by Krzysztof Pomian seem crucial to understand that. In the context of cultural studies he wrote: “Memory remains in especially close relations with the physical as well as social, semiotic and thinking space. It concerns the individual memory located within the mind of each specimen, and simultaneously outside of it: in notes, pictures, signs and other mnemonic tools. Perhaps even more, it concerns the collective memory kept not only by individuals but also in the form of objects by institutions [e.g. cinematography – author’s note] which are its depository”.<sup>41</sup> In the collective memory of Poles, during communist time as well as now, Józef Piłsudski remained not only one of the national heroes, but also a symbol of his times and free and independent Poland. And this is regardless of the fact that in his biography there are ambiguous (somewhat controversial) episodes (for example *May Coup*, fighting against his political opponents).

In the films by Filipiński–Poręba duo, to the viewers Piłsudski appeared to be a brutal and sometimes sadistic dictator possessed by the lust of power, an old man who cannot stand any opposition, who treated even his loved ones as puppets on the political stage, or a lacklustre politician who entered the chronicles of history by accident, indecisive, evasive person, making reckless, intuitive decisions. What is more in *Polonia Restituta* Piłsudski becomes an anti-role-model of patriotic politicians, in contrast to Roman Dmowski. The audience could ask themselves not about Piłsudski’s achievements and merits, but about what he renounced (such as his alleged “indifference” towards western borders of Poland before the final decisions of the Paris Peace Conference).

Separately, another question is whether films by Filipiński and Poręba (and by Kawalerowicz to a lesser extent) were author’s own, autonomous “stories”. First and foremost, all three films are alternative histories that coped with the past through a right selection of scenes, dialogues, sets of facts, or music, which are only apparently objective. It is most clearly visible in Filipiński’s *Coup d’état*. We encounter here “stratification of the past” a subjective selection of events, their meanings, symbols and even artefacts from the public sphere (e.g. Baricades, Brest’s prison, dirty metropolitan streets). So did Filipiński and Poręba give in to the suggestions of the authorities? And if so, to what extent? Did they create a film “obsequious” to the communist party, which was in line with the official narrative of history (that obviously changed and evolved throughout time) The answer is easy only on the surface. They gave in to the political pressures of their times. What is more, they took on an attempt to legitimise the deeds of the authorities or in broader terms justify their

<sup>41</sup> K. Pomian, *Pamięć podzielona: miejsca pamięci w Europie jako zjawisko polityczne i kulturowe*, “Przegląd Polityczny” 2008, no. 89, p. 4.

times in general. They cannot, however, be accused of conscious and pushy falsification of history and overlooking certain facts or distorting them. That is because there is no exaggerated “fictionalisation” and neither is there an attempt to accustom the audience with the ‘the truth of the screen.’ As actively engaged “people of the system” with certain national and communist views and at the same time authors who could do more than others, they created symbolic films which said more about their reality than history, which they tried to portray. It seems that they interpreted history in line with their own key. They did not abandon allusions or contextually and worked always in accordance with their own convictions and visions of interpreting history. Hence their works were “two-fold” and the borders between the two were marked out by on the one hand being truthful to the historical facts, and on the other not hiding at all their interpretative message, which did not falsify the history but at best manipulated it. This by the way is not a special ailment in Polish cinematography during communist times. A Polish director from the younger generation Łukasz Barczyk (born in 1974, the author of – among others – a controversial film *Hiszpanka* which action takes place during the Greater Poland uprising 1918–1919) and hence free from the burden of the “times of the People’s Republic of Poland” asked about the relations between historical narrative and reality said: “I started learning history in the People’s Republic of Poland. When I was still at school they started to teach it differently. History always serves somebody. It is seized by politics. But history belongs to everybody. It does not have a single or a double face. It has millions of them. It is only individual. Its collective picture is interesting for me only in the contexts of its circles. The whole rest is just an illusion created by minds of those who describe it and try to seize it to use their own purposes. Artists, as all human beings, have the right to their own view on history, They should not produce propaganda, but they have the right to use history to inspire others. They have the right to reflect their own present in the mirrors of the past”.<sup>42</sup>

What was the “truth from the screen”? It was described very accurately by Tadeusz Łepkowski. In one of his pieces he wrote that Polish history film are in most cases true to the facts but purposefully change their meanings and sense in line with the requirements of the propaganda. At the May 1982 session entitled *Film a świadomość historyczna (Film vs historical awareness)* by the Institute of Theory, and History of Film and Television somebody said that each film is in principle historical apart from a historical film.<sup>43</sup>

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## Phantasm and an Attack on the Epoch. An Overview of Józef Piłsudski's Image in Polish Feature Films in the People's Republic of Poland

To the present day researchers in cinematography have not expressed any deeper interest in Józef Piłsudski. There are only texts devoted to newly released history films (such as reviews and minutes of editorial discussions in film magazines) and a few popular overview pieces. In national community's collective experience, Marshal Józef Piłsudski invariably remains a national phantasm – an imaginary myth, a specific charism identified with the regaining of independence ("the great builder", "the father of the independence", "the leader of the nation", "the great Marshall", "the commanding officer" etc.) and the victory over the Bolsheviks in 1920 (exemplum of anti-communism). This article consists of two internally complementary parts. In the introduction the author presents the figure of Piłsudski in the interwar cinematography (1918–1939). The main part is then devoted to the analysis of three major feature films from the People's Republic of Poland period (*Death of a President*, 1977, *Coup d'État* 1981, *Polonia Restituta*, 1980), in which Marshal Piłsudski is a key figure involved in the narrative about history. This part of the article focuses on the falsification of the historical picture (historical figures, events, processes), the image that in effect was far from the historical truth and in line with the guidelines of the ruling communist party. Attention is also paid to the film makers' and scientific consultants' entanglement in the communist system. The analysis is based on source materials (scenarios, press publications) and subject literature.

#### KEYWORDS

Józef Piłsudski, independence, feature film, People's Republic of Poland, falsification of history, communism

## Fantazmat i atak na epokę. Przegląd wizerunku Józefa Piłsudskiego w polskich filmach fabularnych w PRL-u

Do dnia dzisiejszego badacze kinematografii nie wykazują głębszego zainteresowania Józefem Piłsudskim. Istnieją jedynie teksty poświęcone nowo ukazującym się filmom historycznym (takie jak recenzje i protokoły dyskusji redakcyjnych w czasopiśmie filmowych) oraz nieliczne popularne prace przeglądowe. W zbiorowym doświadczeniu wspólnoty narodowej marszałek Józef Piłsudski pozostaje niezmiennie narodowym fantazmatem – wyobrażonym mitem, swoistym charyzmatem utożsamianym z odzyskaniem niepodległości („Wielki Budowniczy”, „Ojciec Niepodległości”, „Wódz Narodu”, „Wielki Marszałek”, „Komendant” itp.) i zwycięstwem nad bolszewikami w 1920 r. (exemplum antykomunizmu). Niniejszy artykuł składa się z dwóch wewnętrznie uzupełniających się części. We wstępie przedstawiono sylwetkę Józefa Piłsudskiego w kinematografii międzywojennej (1918–1939). Następnie główna część poświęcona jest analizie trzech ważnych filmów fabularnych z okresu PRL-u (*Śmierć prezydenta*, 1977, *Zamach stanu* 1981, *Polonia Restituta*, 1980), w których Marszałek Józef Piłsudski jest kluczową postacią zaangażowaną w narrację historyczną. W tej części artykułu skupiono się na zafalszowaniu obrazu historycznego (postaci, wydarzeń, procesów historycznych), obrazu, który w efekcie był daleki od prawdy historycznej i zgodny z wytycznymi rządzącej partii komunistycznej. Zwraca się także uwagę na uwikłanie twórców filmu i konsultantów naukowych w system komunistyczny. Analiza oparta jest na materiałach źródłowych (scenariusze, publikacje prasowe) oraz literaturze przedmiotu.

#### SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Józef Piłsudski, niepodległość, film fabularny, Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, fałszowanie historii, komunizm

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