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## **Film in the Shadow of History Józef Lejtes and Polish School**

National history has always been one of the crucial topics in Polish cinema. Almost from the beginning of its existence films have been depicting storms of historic changes. Why does the situation look like that? The answer could be either obvious or not easy at all. At first, it is worth to realize that Polish history was cruel, painful, dramatic and complicated, which is of course not a convincing, final argument. Many countries experienced cruelty of fate, were forced to struggle for their independence, suffered from inconveniences of wars. But expectations and the role attributed to fine arts deeply rooted in national variant of romanticism are typically “Polish”. Creating and upholding national identity, which for years was in danger of disappearing, seems to be considered as an act of courage and the way of manifesting patriotism. As a result, one of the main aims of literature, painting and then, from the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, cinema was to support “spirit of Polish character”. Paradoxically, or maybe as a consequence of “being on duty”, film directors quite often rebel against romantic paradigm and instead of paying tribute to the motherland by guarding national unity, they were trying to deconstruct and show the weakness of national mythology, which was glorifying lonely and utopian heroism of individuals. As a result, film directors, whose works will be discussed as case studies, were in some respect the heirs of literary heritage of romanticism aware of its power and long lasting influence.

What is more, Polish cinema was quite often depicting these moments of history when bravery of the nation or the individual was particularly spectacular but at the same time obviously hopeless as the chances to win were low. So the significant type of protagonist is a hero sacrificing his life on the altar of motherland despite being aware of the cruel destiny. His fate is to lose and either die unnecessary or live in the shadow of history, brood on it. Polish cinema often refers to “moments of history” such as national uprisings [Kosciuszko’s (1794), February (1863), November (1830–1831), Warsaw (1944)] or wars [mainly II World War (1939–45)] – times when Polish society was unsuccessfully but with determination rebelling against occupant or invader. What is more, history for those who somehow managed to survive, turns out to be particularly traumatic experience but surprisingly not mainly because of the necessity to face the defeat. The real problem will be caused by remembrance. Combatants of history will never manage to escape from their painful memories of the past and even living in the years of freedom and peace it will be alive in their minds, still shaping their behaviour. As a result, the bygone events remain the factors constituting their identity, determining the present and giving the meaning to their existence. The lack of participation in traumatizing historical experience might cause the sense of alienation, of not belonging, of not being part of Polish society, which provokes exclusion.

However, in the history of Polish cinema there are films which describe and try to portray times of glory, days of victory and national pride. If somehow they were released, their artistic but not necessarily technical level is lower, and they are rarely considered to represent intellectually ambitious cinema, which doesn’t mean that they are not box office success, the mass audience has always been eager to watch historic films about the times of kings, knights and great battles. The good examples are Aleksander Ford’s *Knights of Teutonic Order* (1960), Jerzy Hoffman’s *Colonel Wołodyjowski* (1969), *The Deluge* (1974), *With Fire and Sword* (1999), *Battle of Warsaw 1920* (2011) to name but a few. Although they are epic and visually well crafted, I will not consider them further, as the aim is to concentrate on cinematic works presenting history as a fatal, shadowing force, existing as imperative in nation’s life. What’s more, in the movies selected for the essay,

history is a main subject matter, a topic which is not only temporal and circumstantial background for romance or adventurous plot.

One of the most popular film genres in Poland after the First World War and then during the next ten years were patriotic films. The genre flourished in newly reborn country still in need of the factors helping to confirm its statehood. Most of the patriotic films of those times refer to I World War and stressed the role of Legions and Józef Piłsudski in regaining independence. Other films depicted Polish-Soviet war of 1920 as Russia, a former aggressor, still could possibly threaten Polish autonomy. Generally, they can be divided into two categories: political melodramas (produced to gain as much audience as it was possible, with attractive but sentimental script and without any artistic ambitions, most usually love stories in which politics and history were important obstacles) and historical reconstructions (concentrated on mitologization of Legions and Piłsudski, most of them released after May of 1926, when marshal Piłsudski organized *coup d'état*, often presenting January Uprising and revolution of 1905 to emphasize that Poland regained independence in 1918 as a result of desperate attempts of young patriots) (Lubelski, 2008).

Among many stereotypical works worth consideration and examination there are patriotic films of Józef Lejtes, Polish film director with Jewish roots and due to that fact suffering constant problems with censorship and discrimination. Lejtes managed to present his own vision of history or, more precisely, vision of an individual in history. His main idea was to make ideologically involved films and to escape from entertaining cinema, very popular in the twenties, based on, as Lubelski writes, vulgarized romanticism (Lubelski, 2008). He didn't want to neglect the role of individuals in history, as many Soviet film directors of that period did, and was far from changing historic truth in order to support a political point of view. What is more, he appreciated the works of Baruch Spinoza (the God is the most important in the world and everything depends on him), Wilhelm Wundt (an individual has his own will and is indissolubly connected with history) and psychoanalysis of Alfred Adler (a man is a small and weak element of the world, but thanks to his free will and the power of his feelings he is able to change the universe and history). To sum up, Lejtes was interested in history

but wanted to show it from the bottom. In this respect, he definitely followed the track of the writer Stefan Żeromski. They both found some of the national uprisings as defeats. In historiography of Lejtes and Żeromski one can easily notice devotion to heroic myth of an individual fighting for freedom of his country, but also rended by emotions.

*Hurricane*, Lejtes's first film, released in 1928, was not entirely successful. Referring to February Uprising, Lejtes didn't manage to show historic truth. *Hurricane* is now considered to be very beautiful visually, but theatrical due to the fact that it abuses frames which resemble Artur Grottger's paintings. The main characters are in fact fake and deprived of psychology (with one exception). The national uprising is accompanied by simple love story of a girl supporting her lover in his patriotic deeds and faithfully waiting for him to come back. Unfortunately Russian soldier falls in love with her and causes her death. Polish fiancé, Orsza, after that painful loss, finds consolation in fighting for independence, which is a typical motif of Polish romantic literature (for example *Dziady* by Adam Mickiewicz). In the movie we can trace only weak efforts to judge the reasons of defeat. Lejtes indicates that peasants wanted to support uprising on one hand, but on the other betrayed insurgents for money. Lack of solidarity, lack of patriotic enlightenment, the anarchy among gentry, were all signalized.

Six years later Lejtes proved his mastery with *Young Forest* (1934). The picture was a big success, both artistic and box office. Its plot was covering school strikes that took place in 1905. During that time Polish students rebelled against the administrative sanction of using Russian language at school. But the year 1905 was also the year of Bolshevist Revolution so the director referred to it, although trying mainly to concentrate on the liberating aspects of the events. The lack of international background, insufficient expression of the idea of solidarity with "Russian brothers" as well as the absence of the idea of defending social equality were strongly criticized. Even though in the final scene Polish students join the demonstration of working class, for many people idea of international solidarity was not clear. Despite some controversies, the film was praised for universal meaning. Contradiction between two antagonistic groups: students and teachers, was not overwhelming and simplified the problem. Psychological background of characters was treated deeply and seriously. There are not

merely “good” and “bad” characters, but instead the attitudes and motivation of what characters do are given to support their ideological choices. The love story is also present in the plot, but it does not have crucial importance. One of the characters changes his opinions and attitude towards the rebellious schoolmates as he falls in love with a girl supporting striking friends. In one of the final scenes he joins the group of Polish students fighting against some teachers and Russian oppression and, as a result, he is accepted by the girl. However, the most interesting are the portraits of teachers. Some of them despite being cruel opponents, they still can admire courage of rebelling students. The teacher of French is depicted as a poor man, whom everybody humiliates and laughs at (students and Russian headmaster). For a moment his personal drama seems to be the leading plot. Other teachers are also interesting as they are just the people who believe in different ideas. History divides nations and individual people, that is why Lejtes *Young Forest* consists of collective scenes and more private episodes.

Other historical films made by Józef Lejtes are worth mentioning for a different reason, which is the turbulent history of their production. In some cases director's intentions rather than the final results of his work should be analyzed. *The Battle of Raclawice* (1938) and *Barbara Radziwiłłówna* (1936) make good examples as they were changed by censorship and producers at the level of working out a script. *Barbara Radziwiłłówna* was supposed to be a story about a powerful woman, the symbol of her times. She was a rowdy kind of person, eager to make intrigues, involved in many love affairs and ready to conquer the world. But the producers did not agree for such a leading protagonist and the audience saw a completely different portrait of her. In the film *Barbara Radziwiłłówna* becomes a martyr and a saint. She is rather a melodrama heroine and history just creates the background. The fact based truth is only hypothetical. What makes the movie valuable is a conflict between the crown and wife. Zygmunt II August is a king and a husband, while Barbara is a queen and a reasonable person who does not want to separate him from his folk. The film also exemplifies the notion that the country can be well governed only by powerful, responsible and strong-minded individuals which was in fact a reference to the political situation in Poland in the thirties, precisely indicated

social yearning for such a figure as Marshal Józef Piłsudski. As for *Battle of Raclawice*, the film lacks sings of psychology and does not make any allusions to the situation of the country. It is just a kind of historical chronicle. Originally Lejtes wanted this work to express his opinion about the cause of national defeats. His intentions were going towards stigmatizing the disregard of the role of peasantry. The main character was supposed to be Bartosz Głowacki, a man from the folk, a symbol of defense of motherland. But again, the script was dramatically changed. As a result, the film was turned into a cheap, sentimental and tear-jerking melodrama, where personal drama involves competition between two officers about a girl. Although plot was far from sophistication, two famous actors (Grażyna Barszczewska and Witold Zacharewicz) played the leading roles, which effectively attracted the audience.

Surprisingly, Lejtes also tried to explain his vision of history in non-historical films. First of them, *Under Your Protection* (1933), was officially directed by Edward Puchalski (Catholics were suspicious and didn't want to entrust religious topic to a Jewish director). The film tells the story of a pilot who after the accident suffers emotional and psychological breakdown, but then he is reborn thanks to his faith and love. He can not accept the fact, that he is not able to fight for his motherland and share life with his beloved woman any more. Eventually, his strong faith in support of Matka Boska Częstochowska, patroness of all Poles, saves him. The most important parts of the film show religious solemnities at Jasna Góra (the most important sanctuary in Poland), where a miracle takes place. The atmosphere of unity seems to be very important. For Józef Lejtes religion was an important factor able to unite Polish people of different social backgrounds, and the unity is important for upholding national identity and, if necessary, regaining freedom. Although the plot was weak, the audience admired the film for its unique emotional power and they were really touched by what they saw. As one of the film critics wrote: "a cinema was changed into a church, the audience were kneeling and praying". *Girls from Nowolipki* (1937) made in the thirties, but relating to the twenties, is the adaptation of Pola Gojawiczyńska's novel. Despite that fact it aimed to tell the story of modern times, Lejtes wanted to emphasize disappointment, hopelessness, and uncertainty of future (the same elements can be found in Stefan Żeromski's

novels and short stories). A very realistic picture, as for the social circumstances, was presenting common and everyday life of four girls living in one house in Nowolipki (district of Warsaw), but all of them have to cope with the fate of history. Having their dreams and expectations, they sometimes win sometimes lose. Their decisions, however, depend not only on personal choices, but they are also influenced by the moment of time they live in, which is accidental and unpredictable. Desperately looking for happiness and security they can not avoid mistakes (Cybusz, 1991).

Józef Lejtes was not only trying to express his own opinion about national history but also to create a new kind of mythology. His protagonist (very alike to those romantic figures much less to characters in Żeromski's novels) can not live other way than in the shadow of history, involved in its events and twists of fate, giving their existence the meaning.

After the Second World War the need for depicting what had just happened was obvious. But Polish audience, due to communist propaganda and so-realist aesthetic determining political and artistic aspects of reality, had to wait several years in order to be offered intellectually absorbing and historically convincing movies. Most of the films released soon after the war were either escapist (for example comedies about times of occupation (*Forbidden Songs*, 1947, dir. Leonard Buczkowski) or ideologically infected, mainly glorifying the role of Russians in regaining freedom (*Ostatni etap*, 1947, dir. Wanda Jakubowska). The come back of the spirit of romanticism, its already highly mythologized tradition and history of national uprisings, ought to be connected with formation of directors called Polish School. After the strikes in Poznań in October 1956, Władysław Gomułka, a liberal and a politician of the communist party (PZPR), regained power. What is more, Polish society was disappointed by the times of Stalinism and tired with artificial and dull so-realist art. The atmosphere was stimulating, the times of change were supposed to come with new authority. New generation of directors born before war (mainly in the twenties), stigmatized by its experience, were rebelling against their colleagues, leftist directors. Although Polish School as formation wasn't heterogeneous – they represent different attitude to history as well as modern times. What is more, their films are different from the aesthetic point of view – some general common features can be indicated as rejection of simplified

and falsified vision of reality (Hendrykowski, 1998). Considering their films relating to history, most of them were depicting Second World War or a short period after its end. For the first time it was possible to show life and history of people from AK, who were fighting under the command of Polish government in London. The main topics were; the humiliating role of the defeat in September 1939, Warsaw Uprising, hopelessness of any efforts to liberate the country, occupation times. In many cases romantic heritage was eagerly introduced and turns out to be influential. Strictly historical movies applied a variety of genres: war dramas (*Free City*, 1958, dir. Tadeusz Różewicz) and historical epos (*Knights of Teutonic Order*, dir. Aleksander Ford), black comedies (*Bad Luck*, 1959, dir. Andrzej Munk). In many others, which are often set in the period after the war traumatic experiences of the recently bygone past, destroys characters' lives in a number of ways [*The Last Day of Summer*, 1958; *All Souls' Day*, 1961, dir. Tadeusz Konwicki]. But what is most important in majority of films of Polish School, as Tadeusz Lubelski observes, the use of the strategy of psychotherapist, as they deeply influenced national consciousness and were helping Polish people to realize that romantic mythology is full of lies and mystifications (Lubelski, 2000).

The directors of Polish School quite often adapt books published after 1946 into movies, so modern authors such as Jerzy Andrzejewski, Kazimierz Brandys, Józef Hen, Marek Hłasko, Bogdan Czeszko, Jerzy Stefan Stawiński of the same generation influenced cinema. For example Jerzy Józef Stawiński wrote the scripts for such important films as Andrzej Munk's *Man on the Tracks* (1956), *Eroica* (1957), *Bad Luck* (1959) or Andrzej Wajda's *Canal* (1957). Stawiński himself took part in September campaign, Warsaw Uprising, spent some time in German stalag, and cooperated with Polish underground. Polish School directors adapting his works were not trying to show historic reality, but they were more interested in highly mythologized ideas about history, mainly II World War. Their aim was to show the state of mind of Polish society after traumatic experience. However, sometimes working with the same scriptwriter, their vision of history, was very different and open to polemics. For example, the same event of Warsaw Uprising looks quite different from Wajda's and Munk's point of view (*Canal* and *Eroica*). Wajda's vision glorifies courage, sacrifice and show



people who have to choose between national duty and personal happiness. As a result, they become victims of history. Munk's characters are more realistic and pragmatic, the director does not depict heroes but common people facing history, forced simply to survive.

*Canal* is a story about the last day of one of the AK troops, who has to escape from occupied part of the city to the other district, where Germans are not in control yet. But the only way to get out of the trap is to go down to the city sewers. Most of the film takes place in their dim, swampy canals. When soldiers are on the surface, they seem to be optimistic and believe in possibility of survival and winning. But when they finally face the darkness of stinking sewers, they already know that there is no hope for future, no hope for them to stay alive. So, in fact, a dark vision of defeat permeates Wajda's movie. Sewers are full of gutters, dead bodies, and German bombs. It is a world from a nightmare: dark, full of madness and despair. As the viewers from the beginning are aware of the fact that all the characters will pass away (the information is given by the voice over in the opening sequence) they don't ruminate what will happen, but why things have to go that way. The pessimism initially introduced is undismissible and overwhelming. The general visual style originating from expressionist aesthetics as contrasts of darkness and light, as well as strange perspectives of camera are in use reinforces the *noir*-like mood of hopelessness. The film can be read as well as the allegory of a dying city which destroys its citizens. But some historical inaccuracies were introduced. For example, the final scene does not include Soviet army idly standing on the other bank of the river and observing the fall of the Warsaw Uprising. Wajda also didn't try to show the circumstances of the situation and didn't want to indicate the reasons of this painful defeat. Political situation was better than in times of Stalinism, but still not comfortable enough for artists. Universal meaning predominated historical context and the hopelessness of the fight was a generally expressed idea. Wajda's characters are not only brave people (this is not their most important feature of personality) but mainly responsible and patriotic. Their exceptional heroism is, however, useless. The audience shows sympathy to them as they are aware that they were not only victims of war and history, but also of political manipulation. Wajda depicts the kind of heroism typical for Poland, daring and unreasonable from rational

point of view. Even if chances are small, fighting is a necessity, a kind of undisputed dogma. AK soldiers were trying to defeat Germans with pistols being aware of the fact that they have more weapons (for example tanks and planes), judging situation rationally, any way was an unquestionable waste of time (Gazda, 1997).

The first part of Andrzej Munk's *Eroica (Scherzo alla Polacco)* also refers to Warsaw Uprising. The film is tragic and grotesque at the same time. Given depiction of common life during uprising does not bring romantic myths and does not leave space for heroism. The main character Działowski is a common, civil man, but a kind of opportunist as well. He lives with his wife at the outskirts of the Warsaw in a beautiful house. His war everyday routine is to sell or buy something in order to earn money for living. However, he becomes a hero by chance. When we see him for the first time he is coming back home from Warsaw Uprising being clearly aware of the defeat to come and to refuse to participate in it. We might even be disappointed and suspicious about his careless behaviour, pragmatic thinking and lack of any patriotic engagement. Later in the story, he decides to play a role of a messenger between AK and Hungarian soldiers stationed in his village (Zalesie) in order to provide insurgents with a cannon. The deal seems to be a reasonable solution, both helpful and worth effort. Działowski, a typical smart alec takes the risk of organizing things. but finally his voluntary deeds turn out to be useless. Nobody admires his action, in a result, his bravery must be considered as unnecessary. The second part of the film is a different story with similar consequences. Polish officers captured and imprisoned by Germans in the camp are able to survive only because they strongly believe that one of their friends managed to escape. But it is not true, only a carefully constructed myth. Lieutenant Zawistowski is still in the camp, hidden by his friends in the attic. The fake legend, however, brings hope to the imprisoned officers. The romantic myth of Zawistowski's heroic escape allows his companions to preserve mental sanity and morale. In the end, Zawistowski dies in the attic because of being cold and feeling lonely. There are no actual, measurable results of his devotion, as well as there are no substantial results of Górkiewicz spontaneous courage and rational action. Munk as a director evidently keeps distance from the romantic ideas and romantic mythology dominating Polish

consciousness. He prefers bitter satire showing that heroism is not always needed and important (Stolarska, 1997).

The same point of view, containing similar perspective comes with *Bad Luck*. The action takes place between the twenties and the fifties. The protagonist, Jan Piszczyk, is again the everyman desperately wanting to participate in the events happening around him. But followed by bad luck, he becomes a victim of history. Similarly to Dzikowski, Piszczyk is an antihero, but not so smart and rather a conformist than an opportunist. His main fault is that whenever he turns to politics, he tries to follow the trends. To put it simply, he plays a perfect ideological chameleon, but very unlucky one. His metamorphoses come always too late. So Piszczyk tries to be an engaged anti-Semite and ideal communist bureaucrat, as well as a perfect scout and a faithful soldier. In the end, we meet him in prison, from which he is telling story of his misfortunes. His painful and deeply disappointing life paradoxically made him a man who does not want to be free anymore. The way history goes, the rules it follows are impossible to understand and highly confusing (Stolarska, 2005).

As mentioned before, the directors of Polish School also made films describing Polish reality and the state of mind of AK soldiers after the II World War, when the organization was still struggling to gain control over the country under the reign of communist party, whose authority was introduced with ZSRR liberation march. *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) by Andrzej Wajda and *Nobody's calling* (1960) by Kazimierz Kutz are pivotal examples. The first one, now considered an iconic achievement of Polish School and artistic cinema, is well known and easily recognized abroad. However, the reception of the film in times of its premiere in Poland was rather cold. It was strongly criticized by the communist party. Aleksander Ford was claiming that the movie has many counter-revolution accents, but Jerzy Andrzejewski, the author of the book on which the film was based, organized a special screening for party intellectuals and managed to change bad atmosphere around Wajda's work. The action takes place in small Polish city, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1945 – the official day marking the end of the Second World War and the beginning of a new era and the spring time. The time encapsulated in 24 hours concentrates on the last moments in the life of Maciek Chelmicki, the AK soldier. As he is ordered to kill

a new communist party regional leader, Szczuka, the life time choices of a still very young man at the edge of his life have to be made. However, he stays in the town not in order to celebrate the end of the war in the city hotel, significantly called “Monopoly”, but to carry out the execution. There we see the past and the future of Poland. The future is represented by AL and Soviet soldiers walking on the streets, members of communist party and political opportunists from the city. The past is personified by very few solitary AK soldiers, their supervisors and a small group of pre-war intellectuals and aristocracy, which film strongly derides. At the beginning, Maciek (played by Zbigniew Cybulski), belongs to the past. His life was determined by the war and he remembers it almost with tenderness, what can be observed as he slides burning glasses of vodka over the bar counter to commemorate his dead companions. Maciek does not remember any other reality than the reality of war times, which constitutes his identity. The first attempt to kill Szczuka turns out to be a failure, but Maciek at that time does not hesitate, considering the action a natural consequence of war duties. During the night he spends in the hotel, where Szczuka stays, Maciek meets Krystyna and falls in love. His perspective changes, his life from now on is not only the past but brings hope for the future – normal, private, possibly happy personal existence. So he becomes disrupted, as many Polish romantic heroes. On one hand, the duty to save his motherland calls him, on the other hand, he is tempted by the perspective of life with Krystyna. Finally, the shadow of history wins, a very recent one in that case. Maciek, deeply rooted in romanticism, sacrifices his life on the altar of Poland. Early in the morning he kills Szczuka somewhere in the dark, back street, but then he is shot by Polish soldiers and we see him dying in convulsions on the pile of rubbish, a symbol of unnecessary heroism. He is a victim of fate he cannot avoid. Whatever he chooses, nothing is guaranteed. His life in post-war communist Poland as well would sentence him to exclusion. The shadow of war and the shadow of history would determine his life anyway. In this movie, Zbyszek Cybulski, a legendary Polish actor playing Maciek, resembles James Dean. He wears sunglasses and jeans; he is more from the end of fifties than from wartime. His dandy style reminds us of useless people. The film is also highly symbolic in its visual style. For example in one of the scenes a cross is hanging upside down. Is this allusion

to Jesus Christ sacrifice not necessary any more? In the end, in “Monopol”, already drunk Polish intellectuals are dancing Polonez and the orchestra is playing out of tune. In Stanisław Wyspiański’s play “The Wedding”, a similar dance of the representatives of the society referred to hopelessness. In the moment when Maciek shoots Szczuka, we see fireworks display on the dark sky. Peace is only illusionary, and history stays in the shadow (Hendrykowski, 2012).

Contrary to Wajda, Kazimierz Kutz depicts heroes who managed to survive war. They are usually simple, ordinary people resigning from romantic actions and often, due to that decision, lonely and isolated. They survived because they hoped for regular, normal and simple future. In fact, Kutz is more interested in human post-traumatic psychology than in historical events themselves. The characters created by Wajda put romantic gestures above life. Kutz’s characters have quite different philosophy of life. Bożek, the main character of *Nobody’s calling*, refuses to kill a communist and he is chased by his fellow soldier-friends from AK. So he does what Maciek Chelmicki from *Ashes and diamonds* wanted to do. Bożek decides to rebel against romantic tradition of Polish heroism. That is why he must escape and during the film he is hiding in a small town in Western Poland. This territory was regained after the Second World War and at the beginning it was a region where many displaced, mutilated people settled, coming from different parts of the country. Bożek is looking for oblivion of the history and meets Lucyna among other women. They fall in love in the shadow of history. Their feelings are so deep, that their contact with surrounding world is weaker and weaker. Both of them are young and attractive, which makes them different from the other people and general mood of the times. Their love is born against the circumstances, in kind of emotions that just shouldn’t happen. So the couple becomes more and more isolated and lonely. Even though finally Bożek leaves the town and Lucyna, afraid of people who chase him – personification of shadows of history – he will probably come back as his feelings for the girl are strong. The town depicted in the movie looks sad. Dark and gloomy, full of destroyed walls, empty houses and streets make an explicit monument of war cruelty and the damages it caused. But it also becomes a metaphor of the state of mind of main characters. The pace of the film is slow, there is almost no action,

the black and white shots are very static and emptier with every minute, almost perfectly ascetic. *Nobody's calling* resembles works of new wave directors, such as Antonioni and is much different than Andrzej Wajda's highly symbolic visual style. Wajda's frames, on the contrary to Kutz's ones, are always cramped with full of the meaningful objects. The movie can be considered as an alternative version of *Ashes and Diamonds*, the complementary story addressing the same problems (Ostrowska, 2005).

Also Tadeusz Konwicki – a writer and a film director, as Wajda and Munk belonging to so called “Columbus Generation” – found it necessary to diagnose post-traumatic condition of young people, who were lucky enough to survive the war. Although in his first novels the fascination with communist doctrine is obvious, his later works show the disappointment as well as different poetics. None of his films, however, reflects his youthful fascinations shadowing in Konwicki's early prose. In 1966 the artist was dismissed from Polish United Workers' Party as a result of signing a letter of protest against Leszek Kołakowski's exclusion from Party ranks. *The Last Day of Summer* (1958), Konwicki's full length feature debut, co-directed with Jan Laskowski, was a mature work, now considered by the historians of Polish cinema to represent *auteur* cinema and alienated masterpiece of New Wave aesthetic. The low budget film tells the story of an anonymous young couple, who met one day at the beach. Obviously, they fall in love with each other, but they reject this mutual feeling as both of them remember war and they are unable to trust the other person. Moreover, their behaviour is shaped by the fear of future events that may possibly separate them as the war separated many people. Staying apart is the choice of reason marked by the past. Although the war is already over, it still exists in their mind and makes them emotionally disable and full of inhibitions. The only visual signs of war are the planes nose-diving in the sky above the beach. We don't know the names of the characters, as well as we are not provided with any details about their lives and past experiences. The Girl just seems to be more disappointed and not eager to trust anybody. The sound of the planes reminds her of her fiancé, a pilot. Then the boy says: “For the first time in my life I want something for myself”. Both of them subconsciously know that love is the only thing that will make their life better and less lonely. Nevertheless, establishing relationship is impossible, the voiceover words

suggest that clearly: “There were disruption, hatred, mutual aversion and grimace. There were dead ends of the streets and plain faces of walls (...) We were called out of cattle carriages – a flock driven by roars and beating. And next to us only dogs’ paws, dogs’ paws, dogs’ paws. I know I shouldn’t behave like that, I know. But when a friend wants to touch me with his hand I hide my head as if he was going to hit me. I hide from human gestures. I am escaping from any kinds of reflexes of tenderness”. The film belongs to psychological, non-heroic trend of Polish School (Michałek, 1964). Cosy as it seems, it is still open for interpretation and gives many opportunities for finding a meaning. Shadows that are chasing the characters might be different but if read in the historical context exemplify shadows of war.

*All Souls’ Day* (1961) adapts a similar pattern, showing Konwicki’s obsession about the topic. Again, a couple of hungry lovers, Michał and Wala, cannot forget the war, which nearly destroys their relationship. But this time the representation of the past and the present is less enigmatic. In three retrospections we see Michał’s memories connected with women he loved and now glorifies, as he glorifies the past. “Listek” – a woman and a guerrilla lieutenant at the same time – is fragile and delicate, dying in absurd way becomes for her troops somebody special, a symbol of a better world. Michał is also remembering Katarzyna, first-aid nurse, the heroine from guerillas songs that soldiers used to sing. Met after the war, Katarzyna turns out to be just a common woman that he, however, can not communicate with. Wala lives with the death of her fiancé she feels responsible for. The new beginning for both of them is connected with the necessity of rupture, cutting off from the past and history standing on their way. The past, no matter how mythologized or painful it is, becomes an obstacle and a burden (Malisz 2005).

The twilight of Polish School was not the result of the crisis of the aesthetics or the exhaustion of topics, but with the change in political moods. The communist Party felt threatened and couldn’t agree to broaden the margin of freedom. The conflict between artists and the party was steadily growing. The communist authorities wanted to regain control over production process. The pessimistic tone of these films were strongly criticized, some of them suffered problems with distribution and many were deliberately stopped from participating in international film festivals. The beginning

of the sixties finally brought the disappearance of the phenomena. Tadeusz Konwicki's *Salto* (1965) is considered to be its swansong. The main character called Kowalski-Malinowski (two most popular surnames in Poland, a reference to Everyman) arrives by train in an unnamed, surrealistic Polish town and pretends that he spent here all war, hiding in one of the houses. But in fact nobody remembers him well, even the owner of the house seems to be sceptical. What is more, he is still claiming to be chased and in danger as if the war has never ended for him. What Malinowski-Kowalski is afraid of, a thing that scares him, are the people shooting at him, which happens in his nightmares. Once they are Nazi soldiers, some other time AK troops, but they always recall war memories. His gesture seems to be funny, ridiculous, irrational, theatrical. Talking a lot about suffering and taking all the sins on him, Kowalski-Malinowski, played by Zbigniew Cybulski, strikes a pose of Polish romantic hero and becomes a parody of Maciek Chelmicki at the same time. He strongly believes in his own delusions, such as the one, that he can redeem people with his dead. As the objective reality is mixed with oneiric, subjective states of mind, the character often changes his opinions. Once he believes he comes from the town, but five minutes later claims to be in the place for the very first time. The world of *Salto* is pathetic, sublime and absurd at the same time. It is false and true at the same time. In the film nothing can be taken for granted. Misleading narration does not give answers. The audience can not be sure if Kowalski-Malinowski lies blatantly and that he made up all the stories about his past to pretend a war combatant or not. In one of the first scenes he wants to demonstrate scars on his chest but gives up that idea. However, later on, when his shirt is accidentally unbuttoned, the body turns out to be covered with them. In the last scene the main character is escaping from the town the same way he came before, but a woman is looking for him. She introduced herself as his wife, whom he left alone with young children and no money to survive. Kowalski-Malinowski is a man destroyed by the war, no matter whether he was a hero or a coward during that time (Kaniecki, 2007). The shadows of the past are with him, still controlling his inner world and making him unable to play a role of a decent father and husband. From the generic point of view, the above-mentioned films are psychological war dramas as traumatic war past is irremovable, essen-



tial experience, a nightmare which does not allow characters to fall in love and live a normal life. The protagonists are usually burnt out and suffer the sense of entrapment.

The films of Józef Lejtes and Polish School directors discussed above, exemplify the reaction of national cinematography to two distinct historical events: Great War which brought independence, freedom, and the Second World War which brought the country official autonomy, but controlled by enslaving political system. That is the reason why Lejtes was searching for shadows of history, forming the cause of weakness of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic in the more remote past, but Polish School artist turned towards events still vivid in their memory.