Between *Auteur* and Advocate:
Polish Film and the Legacy of Romantic Nation-Building

by

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For R. D. V.

Acknowledgments

I have often said that between the three different higher educational institutions in three different countries in which I have been fortunate to work and study, University of Michigan was by far the top candidate. This is still the case, and I am sad to think that I will have to leave the walls of U-M soon.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates how the question of national responsibility under Communism in Polish culture interrogates the Western notion of the *auteur*. Whereas in the 1950s French critics applied the term to a masterful artist whose individuality permeates all aspects of the cinematic work and who is largely in control of the otherwise collective processes of filmmaking, in Poland the term came to signify a filmmaker who, above all, had to engage with two incompatible ideological imperatives. The first, represented by the official pro-Soviet government, expected film productions to promote communist values within Poland and internationally. The second urged artists to cherish the "greatness of the Polish nation" and preserve the legacy of Romantic nation-building and its values that originated in the first part of the 19th century. I argue that the filmmakers of the Polish Film School (1955-1965), often admired as *auteurs* by Western film critics for their stylistic achievements, actually had to negotiate between an intrinsic need for individual expression and the pressures of two antagonistic ideologies.

Beside offering a more nuanced definition of the *auteur*, a major concept in global film theory, my contribution also lies in exploring the legacy of Romantic nation-building through the long cultural and intellectual tradition of the artist's role in Polish society. I begin with an investigation of the Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz and his role in formulating the myths that later came to determine Polish nationhood. I trace this legacy in Interwar cinema through the work of avant-garde Polish critics and filmmakers who grappled with resolving the tension between art-for-art's-sake, derived from French criticism, and socially-committed cinema promoted by Soviet Constructivism. Then I turn to the controversies over French *auteurism* as the concept was introduced into Polish film criticism in the 1950s I conclude with case studies analyzing the films made by renowned directors Andrzej Wajda and Tadeusz Konwicki. I argue that the role of Polish Film School filmmakers was closer to the notion of the Romantic *wieszcz* (poet-prophet, national bard) than to the Western idea of the *auteur* and his personal and individual vision.

Introduction

In the immediate post-WWII period critics associated with *Cahiers du Cinéma* journal including Alexandre Astruc, François Truffaut and André Bazin developed ideas about cinema that – with no exaggeration – changed the way we watch, understand, teach and write about film. They coined the term *auteur*, which signified a filmmaker whose individuality, personal worldview, and cinematic style permeate through his/her work, and who "authors" a given film much in the same way as a writer authors a novel. In his popular book entitled *100 Ideas that Changed Film,* David Parkinson emphasizes the revelance of the notion of *auteur*: "Few concepts in screen history have proved as significant or contentious."[1]

Indeed, André Bazin and the rest of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics quickly influenced film culture not only in France but also in other parts of the world.[2] The Eastern Bloc was not an exception, but there was something exceptional in the way French ideas operated in Poland that, when considered carefully, questioned what the term *auteur*, originated by the French, actually meant in Poland at this time.[3] Due to communist ideology, the unique organization of the Polish film industry, heavy censorship, and over a century-long legacy of fighting for independence, Polish filmmakers found themselves in a unique situation in which to manifest their artistic individuality meant to reconcile the visions of two opposing camps: those of the

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[1] David Parkinson, *100 Ideas That Changed Film* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2012), p. 160.

[2] Barry Keith Grant, *Auteurs and Authorship. A Film Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

[3] André Bazin's selected articles were quite often translated and printed in film magazines in Poland. In fact, Bazin even visited Poland in 1956. Zygmunt Kałużyński, a very influential Polish critic, writes that Bazin's film theory is perhaps much superior to that of Eisenstein and Kracauer. See Zygmunt Kałużyński, "Manifest nowego kina," *Film*, no. 1 (1964): 6–7. Also, Alice Lovejoy writes about Bazin's popularity in Eastern Europe. See Alice Lovejoy, "From Ripples to Waves: Bazin in Eastern Europe," in *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife*, ed. Hervé Joubert-Laurencin Dudley Andrew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 302–7.

Soviet-oriented censors, *and* those of the advocates for Polish national consciousness. The investigation of what it meant to be a Polish *auteur* in the late 1950s and early 1960s (and even today) serves as a starting point for a much broader inquiry concerning mechanisms for developing national mythology and the complex role that creative individuals perform in any given society. Although artistic creation is very often based on unrestrained artistic impulses, this case study of Polish filmmakers and writers demonstrates that individual creative visions oftentimes are subordinate to concrete collective expectations. In short, the artist's imagination has to contend with more powerful forces, particularily in cinema, an art form that requires considerable economic investment.

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary study of the tensions between the expectations placed on artists by those committed to their particular version of the Polish national "recovery project," and the creative individuals themselves, whose rejection of such political pressures in favor of obligation-free art often resulted in ostracism and heavy criticism. Much of the research on the topic reveals that throughout the 19th and much of the 20th century the Polish state would not have survived under numerous occupations without the effort of artists who propagated and cherished the idea of Polishness. However, I argue that this process of turning artists into advocates for the Polish cause came at a serious cost, as it significantly limited the freedom of artistic expression and imposed certain modes of artistic creation. In other words, while many artists actively engaged in the Polish national "recovery" project, they nevertheless ended up desperately oscillating between their intrinsic desire for unrestrained artistic expression, and the burden of national responsibility that required them to shape their works to certain specifications.

My research indicates that this pressure to collectively preserve "the Polish spirit" impacted not only the life and work of Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and other major figures of the 19th-century Romantic Period in literature, but also permeated film art in interwar, and especially postwar, Poland. Due to the long legacy of fighting for independence, along with other political factors, postwar filmmakers like Tadeusz Konwicki and Andrzej Wajda, although labeled *auteurs* (i.e. filmmakers who "make films as they please"), had few chances to manifest their artistic individuality, as they had to negotiate their artistic uniqueness, while simultaneously appealing to the nation and appeasing state censors. This is where my dissertation intervenes into global debates on film theory: a central aim in each of my case studies of Polish filmmaking under Communism is to nuance Western notions of an *auteur* as defined by individualistic traits only.

The main goal of Chapter One is to investigate the historical role of an artist in Polish culture in order to demonstrate the link between the Romantic idea of a poet-prophet (*wieszcz*[4]) and the late 1950's French-originated notion of the filmmaker (*auteur*). The chapter explores how the Polish Romantic notion of an artist developed throughout the 19th century and through the end of World War I – that is, when Poland did not exist on the map of Europe. According to the 19th century Polish Romantic legacy, an artist's task was not only to create aesthetically valuable literary pieces or artifacts, but more importantly to advocate for Polish independence. The writings and the social role of Romantic national *wieszcze* (poet-prophets) such as Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki provide an intriguing window into the way that Polish art developed concurrently with the national "recovery" project. What is more, exploring the reasons behind the initial rejection of Słowacki, contrasted with Mickiewicz's "celebrity" status among his Polish countrymen, helps to delineate certain expectations placed on creative individuals. In the end, it was Mickiewicz who imposed specific modes of artistic creation for generations to come, including for postwar filmmakers.

Chapter Two explores how this Romantic idea of being an advocate for Polish independence came into play in the Interwar period, at the time when Poland regained its sovereignty. Did the fact that Poland was finally a free country remove the burden from artists' shoulders? I place particular importance on filmmakers and

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4. The Polish word *wieszcz* does not have a precise English equivalent; it describes a poet, or a national bard, who also exhibits some prophetic faculty.

film theorists, an emerging group of artists who initially view the new medium supposedly free from any national expectations. I argue that they nevertheless gradually adapted to the Romantic ethos of artistic creation only to then conform to the collective demands of the newly recovered Polish state. The writings of Karol Irzykowski, Poland's most notable Interwar film theoretician, offer a compelling case study demonstrating the tensions between two concepts that dominated film theory in Interwar Poland: on the one hand Irzykowski draws from French/Western thought such as Louis Delluc's notion of *cinéaste* (an individual expressive film artist); on the other, however, he oftentimes is very dismissive and ironic in referencing French theorists, insisting that film is the product "of a team that – just like ants or beavers – works intuitively."[5] Such oscillation between admiration for unrestrained French artistic expressiveness (Jean Epstein as well as Delluc) and the Soviet notion of "socially constructive films" (the film group START - The Society of Art Cinema Enthusiasts) provides a direct connection to postwar disputes over the term *auteur*. The analysis of the works of the Polish Avant-Garde filmmakers, Franciszka and Stefan Themerson, also serves to demonstrate the general shift from fascination with obligation-free art toward more utilitarian film forms in the Polish interwar period.

In Chapter Three I investigate how the notion of the *auteur* appeared in Polish film culture (in comparison to "French auteurism") and how it was used from the late 1950s until the mid-1960s. I argue that the meaning of *film autorski* (auteur film) significantly changed as a function of whom it referred to. In other words, in Polish film criticism, the term meant one thing when it applied to French filmmakers and something else in discussions of Polish directors. For that reason, I will investigate the place that André Bazin, the key critic championing the *nouvelle vague*, occupies in Polish film culture. The way in which Polish critics positively refer to Bazin, compared with the rather harsh criticism of the French New Wave directors, sheds some light on the political tensions around auteurism. In fact, all of the issues highlighted above mirror the political situation in postwar Europe.

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[5] "… całe dzieło wydaje się raczej wynikiem twórczości zbiorowej … pracującego może takim instynktem, jaki ożywia bobry czy mrówki." If not otherwise stated, all translations are mine. Karol Irzykowski, *Dziesiąta muza. Zagadnienia estetyczne kina* (Warszawa: Filmowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1957), p. 19.

Chapter Four investigates how and why the medium of cinema took up the role that literature had previously played in a formation of Poland's nationhood after World War II. I draw on the notion that due to the specificity of the film medium, it was more difficult to censor images than words. Since state censors were not accustomed to reading movies, they placed particular emphasis on dialogue. In effect, different filmmakers succeeded in subverting official ideology by including politically correct dialogues and ideologically ambiguous images. Although they managed to trick state pro-Soviet ideologues, however, they had to succumb to a different type of pressure – that which was coming from the "freedom fighters" interested in regaining true Polish sovereignty. The chapter's major figure is Tadeusz Kowicki, whose low-budget films were directed according to very specific principles, and best fit into Western definitions of an *autuer*. Nevertheless, through the close analyses of his three films *The Last Day of Summer*, *All Souls' Day*, and *Somersault*, alongside his extra-textual statements, I argue that, ultimately, Konwicki as a filmmaker was submissive to concrete collective national expectations.

In Chapter Five, I juxtapose Konwicki's directing style and extra-textual role with that of Andrzej Wajda, the most prominent postwar Polish filmmaker. Using archival materials and film reviews of the time, I argue that Wajda consciously turned himself into a *wieszcz* of the cinematic medium. His fascination with grand, national topics, and the legacy of Romantic tradition transformed him into an advocate of Polish tradition and history both domestically and internationally. I argue that this prestigious role came at some cost: in order to make films in the communist film industry, Wajda had to reconcile the Romantic legacy with a communist worldview by adopting notions of completely different aesthetic and ideologic provenance. He ended up oscillating between these two contrasting ideologies, mediating each of them through his unique visual style, oftentimes resulting in stylistically uneven productions. I demonstrate this dynamic further through close reading of Wajda's first four films: *A Generation*, *Kanal*, *Ashes and Diamonds* and *Innocent Sorcerers*.

Timeframe, Methodology and Theoretical Foundation

Although my thesis is mostly concerned with filmmakers working in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in the sections devoted to the postwar period, I talk broadly about the time from 1952 until 1989. While I acknowledge that the political situation in the Polish People's Republic – or PRL – was constantly changing, certain mechanisms for filmmaking did not change much throughout the communist period.[6] In the section on censorship, however, I focus explicitly on the late 1950s and early 1960s since many key policies on cultural activity were put into place at that time.

My interpretation of the postwar period is highly informed by the close analysis of literary, epistolary and scholarly works concerned with 19th century Polish Romanticism. The fact that in the 19th century Poland was torn between three Empires has serious consequences for our historical investigations today. Mickiewicz published his first collection of poems in 1822, at a time when Poland did not exist on the map of Europe. Because of the three partitions of 1772, 1793 and 1795, Poland remained divided between Russia, Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire throughout the 19th and into the 20th century. Norman Davies writes: "Although several attempts were made in succeeding years to restore Polish statehood, none of the ephemeral creations of Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic diplomacy was endowed with true sovereignty or succeeded in reuniting all the Polish people under one rule."[7] Thus, it is impossible to talk about a cohesive Poland as such – at that time there was no Polish state at all; the political and economic situations of people living under three

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6. The Polish People's Republic was the name of the Polish state between 1952-1989, and, generally speaking, describes Communist Poland. Throughout the text I will also use the shorter version of the name: PRL (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*).

7. Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 138.

different occupations greatly differed from one another. What is more, the populations of the Polish lands occupied by Russia, Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, respectively, were very heterogeneous: in addition to Poles, there lived considerable numbers of Jews, Russians, Germans, Ukrainians and Byelorussians. Due to these circumstances, my reading of the Romantic phase in Polish culture and the role that artists played therein is predominantly based on literary texts, correspondence and artists' (often vague) biographies. Davies writes about 19th century Poland: "The essential sources of [Polish] history have to be sought less in social, political, and economic affairs than in the realm of culture, literature, and religion – in short, in the world of the Polish spirit."[8] In this project, I have thus chosen not to deploy "Polish" and "Poland" ahistorically, as homogeneous terms. Rather, I draw on Davies' notion that, after the third partition in 1795, "Poland was just an idea – a memory from the past, or a hope for the future."[9]

Using Davies' idea here, however, does not come without reservations. The strand of historiography to which Davies belongs is founded on the very concept that Romanticism brought to prominence, i.e. the notion of Poland as a martyr among nations. In their own right, Davies' Polish histories carry forward the Romantic legacy, and position Poland in the familiar narrative of being caught between western and eastern invaders. While this approach still presents a useful (and necessary) way of thinking about Polish history, it entails significant limiting consequences when speaking about the arts. First of all, its structure highlights situations in which Polish artists had a difficult time identifying with either western or eastern cultural traditions. In their effort to manifest national singularity, they struggled to create art that is uniquely Polish and belongs neither to the West, nor the East. Second, the ongoing threat (real or not) emanating from Russia and Prussia imposed a certain mode of working that made Polish art submissive to Polish ideological priorities. In other words, Polish art mattered as long as it promoted the idea of national identity, preserved local history, and celebrated Polish traditions. Even the most ardent propagator of "art for art's sake," the writer Stanisław Przybyszewski, eventually succumbed to the unwritten pressures of advancing Polish singularity (*Szlakiem duszy polskiej,* 1917).

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[8] Ibid., p. 139.

[9] Ibid.

While Davies' framework still serves as an important base for this project, it is Jan Sowa's methodology and reinterpretation of Poland's "official" historical narration that I draw upon most often. In his pioneering book *The Phantom Body of the King: Peripheral Wrestling with Modern Form* (*Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*, 2011), Sowa argues that since the 16th century (thus, almost two centuries before the last partition) Poland was a phantom state characterized by numerous "lacks." These "lacks," which ultimately caused its division between the more developed West and "wild" East, had a significant impact on Poles' self-identification, and their complexes in all aspects of political and cultural life. Sowa, then, unlike Davies, sees Poland as less of a victim of various imperial appetites, but rather as a state whose geopolitical position, and state organization, brought it to its downfall, and for a long time delayed the introduction of capitalism. As a result, Poland (like other Central European countries) became a *niewydarzone państwo*, the term which encompasses both "incomplete" and "underdeveloped," and literally means a country which "has not fully happened."[10] In short, Poland has never fully "happened" and remained a peripheral territory oscillating between two well-defined cultural spheres. For that reason, Sowa argues, all projects aiming at establishing Poland's affinity with the West (less often with the East, which is yet another interesting question) is based on the erroneous notion that Poland belongs to one of the sides. In fact, it belongs to the circle of *niewydarzone państwa* which is a cultural entity distinct from the West and East, and defined by constant oscillation, as it longs to become "the perfect Other" to the West. In my reading of postwar films by Wajda and Konwicki, I use this concept of oscillation to show how this momentum became

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10. Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą.* (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), p. 18.

the major principle of artistic creation in Poland. However, the choices these artists made in their work were not only about oscillating between West and East, but rather between three different factors: that which is "uniquely" Polish, that which was applauded by the occupying authorities, and each of their own, individually-defined artistic impulses, or "I." By the individual "I," I understand artist's personal philosophy, views, and styles as distinct from the either/or of preservation of Polish autonomy versus the satisfaction of communist ideology.

Beyond Sowa's innovative approach to Polish history and sociology, I emphasize his role as an interpreter. Sowa states:

> In using historical perspective in my descriptions and explanations, I simultaneously adapt an *interpreter's* perspective rather than discoverer's. I do not attempt to search for new data which would reevaluate the image of certain epochs. Rather, I want to reconfigure and reinterpret facts, processes and events that have been already described in historiography.[11]

My goal is similar. While researching the way in which the term *auteur* surfaced and operated in Polish film culture can be called a small discovery, I employ it as a starting point for rethinking our knowledge of Polish postwar cinema. Contrary to the common claim that the events of World War II completely interrupted the continuity of Polish cinema, I use the idea of oscillation as a linking factor between pre- and post-war film, and Polish tradition in general.

I consider my main contribution to global film theory to be a new understanding of the concept of *auteur* in the Polish context. At the same time, associating Romanticism with the Polish Film School, is nothing novel.[12] As early as

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[11] "Stosując historyczną perspektywę opisu i wyjaśniania, przyjmuję jednocześnie perspektywę *interpretatora*, a nie odkrywcy. Nie chodzi mi więc o poszukiwanie nowych danych, które zrewidują obraz jakiejś epoki, ale o rekonfigurację i reinterpretację faktów, procesów i zjawisk już opisanych w historiografii," Ibid., p. 50.

[12] "Polish Film School" is a term describing a group of Polish filmmakers who created movies approximately between 1955 and 1965 (different scholars designate different dates), and who brought a new fresh quality to Polish filmmaking. The term was coined as early as 1954 by Aleksander Jackiewicz. There are two Polish terms to describe this phenomenon: *polska szkoła filmowa* and *szkoła polska*. Similarly, English-language criticism uses "Polish Film School" and "Polish School" – for the sake of clarity I prefer the latter term.

1966 Zbigniew Klaczyński asserted in one of his articles that the movement had created a renaissance out of the Romantic tradition in Polish culture.[13] Many earlier reviews of the period (see Chapters Four and Five) also stressed the use of clearly Romantic codes prevalent in cinematic works. In their analyses of Polish film history, more contemporary scholars – especially Paul Coates – also associated the period of the Polish Film School with Romanticism.[14] But while their comparison is based solely on film textual analysis, I supply these parallels with an investigation of the extra-textual role that artists played in Polish society and their impact on development of a national mythology.

Questions of nation-building and nationalism, which appear in my thesis, are informed by Brian Porter-Szűcs' work on Polish nationalism. Porter-Szűcs, like Sowa, attempts to go beyond Polish martyrdom, and points to its common misconceptions and negative implications for Polish political and cultural life. In his book *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth Century Poland* (2000), Porter investigates the nature and origins of Polish nationalism. He cautiously warns against "a *single* narrative of nationalism and nation-buildingg," as it overlooks many different ways and discursive contexts in which a nation can be brought into play.[15] To support his claim, Porter-Szűcs analyzes how the notion of what it meant to be Polish changed in the 19th century (especially after Positivism). Keeping in mind his caveats, I nevertheless employ the phrase "nation-building" in more general terms to refer to Polish national mythology, i.e. assuming there indeed exists one common (mainstream) narrative thread, which delineates key components of Polish identity. These components include celebration of sacrifice and victimhood, belief in Poland's unique role in historical processes (Messianism), and Catholicism. Although this list is by no means exhaustive, and certainly has been modified at certain points in history (as Porter asserts), I highlight these particular features, as they continue to serve as reference points in discussions on Polishness today. The aim of my project is to show the continuity of the Romantic tradition, and its legacy, as well as to inquire into how this tradition has imposed certain expectations and limitations on creative individuals to serve specific nation-building agendas. The concept of oscillation, then, links not only pre- and postwar Polish cinema but, above all, complicates the idea inherited from Romanticism that art is "authentic" only when considered to be advocating for a Polish cause rather than simply manifesting creativity.

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[13] Zbigniew Klaczyński, "Pokusy wyobrazni," *Kino*, no. 12 (1966), pp. 13-16.

[14] Read more in Paul Coates, *The Red and the White. The Cinema of People's Poland* (London: Wallflower, 2005). Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002). Tadeusz Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego* (Katowice: Videograf II, 2009).

[15] Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 59.

The question of artists' contribution to building a nation's identity inevitably brings to mind Benedict Anderson's concept of *imagined communities*. Anderson's term means that any community (including a nation) exists through imagined bonds that tie real people/citizens (who will never know each other) with abstract convictions of belonging to a certain community. I read postwar Polish films drawing on this idea, but I develop Anderson's concept by supplementing it with Arthur G. Neal's thoughts on what constitutes the existence of said imagined communities, which he described in his book *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Extraordinary Events in the American Experience* (Chapter Four and Five).

Investigating the role that artists play in nation-building processes leads to my queries about the notion of *auteur*. In order to highlight the differences between the Polish and French usage of the term, I start my theoretical enquiry with an analysis of the three fundamental texts on auteurism by Bazin, Truffaut, and Astruc. I compare them with film criticism in Poland, tracing the ways in which *auteur* was understood in the press of the time, and what this reveals about the position of Polish filmmakers in postwar Poland.

Since my project covers two centuries, and the lives and works of many creative individuals, I have had to make certain decisions with respect to the selection of historical sources. This was a particularly challenging task for my discussion of the Romantic period, as it is – due to the popularity of Mickiewicz and Słowacki – one of the most (if not the most) discussed epochs in Polish culture. I have chosen to concentrate on the scholarly works of Maria Janion, whose erudite and comparative studies of Romantic authors is the starting point for my own reading and understanding of the phenomenon of Romanticism in Poland. In my discussion of Mickiewicz, I largely draw upon Juliusz Kleiner's monumental research, as well as Mickiewicz's own letters. In my discussions of the Interwar and postwar periods, I have relied the most on primary sources, personal letters, film reviews and articles from the period, occasionally supplying my analysis with more contemporary scholarship. I am fully aware that the selection process of what to include, what to leave out, and which artists to refer to in proving my point is inherently biased; nevertheless, I hope that this project may still be of some use to those interested in similar topics.

What Romanticism Has in Common with the post-World War II Polish People's Republic

A few words must be said to explain the rationale behind my attempts to draw a direct connection between 19th century Romantic writers and mid-20th century filmmakers in Poland. While this parallel is perhaps the most intriguing (and the least obvious), and will be investigated in the following chapters, the key analogies between Romanticism and the postwar Polish People's Republic apply, above all, to historical and political circumstances.

The first analogy between the above two periods of interest applies to the rather arbitrary way of delineating the timeframes of these two eras. Both periods lasted roughly the same length of time, i.e., for about forty years. The year marking the beginning of Romanticism in Poland is generally taken to be 1822; it was the year when one of the now most renowned Polish writers of the period, Adam Mickiewicz, published his first collection of poems entitled *Ballads and Romances* (*Ballady i romanse*). Romanticism in Poland ends in yet another symbolic year – with the suppression of the 1863 January Uprising that was fought against the Russian Empire. No matter how accurate both dates are, they do highlight two key determinants of Polish Romanticism: one is bound up with the figure of Mickiewicz, the first Polish *wieszcz* and the chief advocate for Polish freedom as manifested by both his passionate writings and his own political activity; the other refers to the continuous struggle for Polish independence that appeared then to be ending in defeat. Those two dates not only provide a precise definition of the period of Polish Romanticism, but also highlight the fact that in the common consciousness, art occupied a position parallel to politics.

Although political events, rather than cultural ones, outline the timeframe of the socialist Polish People's Republic (the adoption of the 1952 constitution marking the post-WWII Soviet domination of Poland and the Solidarity movement's political victory in 1989 marking its end), for many, the year '89 had other symbolic features as well. In fact, the premiere of Tadeusz Konwicki's film, *Lava: A Tale of Adam Mickiewicz's 'Forefathers' Eve'*, which is an adaptation of Mickiewicz's famous anti-Russian drama, took place in 1989. According to the poet Stanisław Barańczak, the premiere of Konwicki's movie was the most important artistic event of 1989.[16] Thus, the symbolic date, marking the end of communist rule and the beginning of democratic Poland, coincided with the first film adaptation of Mickiewicz's "holy" text, as if to signal that the *wieszcz's* dream of a free Poland had finally come true.

The extent to which *Forefathers' Eve* is a "sacred text" can be understood even from the way different artists have used it in their works as a symbol of subversiveness and a manifestation of patriotism. In *Shivers* (*Dreszcze*, 1981), Wojciech Marczewski shows a scene in which a schoolteacher of Polish literature recites a passage from *Forefathers' Eve III,* ostensibly to let his pupils know that they are not allowed to know the text; he is not allowed to teach it either, but "as Poles [they] should know it." Although his pupils show very little interest in Mickiewicz's works, they listen attentively when the teacher recites the “sacred text.” In fact, during certain periods under communism, publishing and staging *Forefathers’ Eve* was not allowed; stories about Russian atrocities committed against Poles in the nineteenth century (and that is what the drama describes) were perceived as too similar to what the Soviets were doing during the communist period to allow for their free circulation. Thus, these texts became manifestations of the independent Polish “spirit:” a thematic association readily picked up on by subversive artists. The premiere of Konwicki’s adaptation of *Forefathers’ Eve* not only created a sense of continuity between Romanticism and Poland in 1989 but also stressed the relevance of the Romantic tradition in modern times.

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[16] Stanisław Barańczak, *Breathing Under Water and Other East European Essays* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987).

The way in which cultural events designate the outlines of Polish historical periods is only one of the parallels linking Romanticism with the era of PRL. What is perhaps more significant is the lack of political autonomy and freedom of speech that both periods share. As mentioned earlier, in the 19th century Poland was divided between three neighboring powers marked by a few attempts to regain sovereignty. Most of those attempts, however, ended very tragically for Poles; two uprisings, one in November 1830 and the other in January 1863, turned out to be quixotic upheavals that cost many human lives. The 20th century equivalent of suffering on a similar scale was the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, which resulted not only in great human loss but also in the nearly complete destruction of the Polish capital. It was precisely those events that significantly shaped the Polish imagination and became powerful symbols of ultimate sacrifice and deep patriotism. At the same time Poland itself, a country that remained without formal statehood for 123 years (until the end of the First World War), came to see itself as “the Christ of nations.”

The idea of Poland as Christ, which was first introduced into national consciousness by none other than Mickiewicz himself, shapes the national imagination to this day so much so that it has become a cliché. In Mickiewicz’s *Books of the Polish Nation and Polish Pilgrimage* (Adam Mickiewicz, *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego*, 1832) the poet states:

> And on the third day the soul shall return to its body, and the nation shall rise from the dead, and shall free all the nations of Europe from slavery (...). And as with Christ's Resurrection from the dead all bloody sacrifices have ceased, thus, after the resurrection of the Polish nation, shall all warfare among Christians come to an end.[17]

Not only is the notion strongly associated with Catholicism, it also highlights the importance of sacrifice in the name of another. Both ideas will be decisive in delineating what "a Polish spirit" is with regard to what creative individuals were expected to express in their works.

Nonetheless, the worship of sacrifice and the idea that Poland is paving the way to freedom for other enslaved nations was prevalent in the communist period as well. The Polish October of 1956, the March events of 1968, and finally the rise of the Solidarity movement that eventually sparked the collapse of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe, were the manifestations of how the "Poles do it." Although the Polish October was less turbulent than the Hungarian Revolution of the same year, some historians argue that it had stronger impact on the politics of the Communist Bloc.[18] Similar opinion is shared on the successful strike at the Gdańsk Shipyards in 1980, which gave rise to the Solidarity movement. When in December 1981 martial law was imposed in Poland, the American president, Ronald Reagan, gave a speech asking the American public to support the struggles of the Poles. He stated that the Soviet authorities "fear the very freedom that the Polish people cherish." Reagan called the Poles "a proud and ancient nation" and described Poland as "a land of deep religious faith."[19] The image of Catholic Poles stubbornly fighting for freedom was one readily promoted not only within the nation itself, but also abroad.

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17. Adam Mickiewicz, *The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation* (James Ridgway, 1833), p. 20-1.

18. Ivan Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe, 1944-1933: Detour from the Periphery to the Periphery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 115-16.

19. *Ronald Reagan - Address to the Nation on Christmas and the Situation in Poland*, accessed October 21, 2014.

During the Romantic period there was no doubt that the Russian Empire was a foreign invader, while Soviet rule in postwar Poland was nicely disguised as a “brotherly union.”[20] Despite this, the USSR was an easily identifiable enemy because it was the only one. Earlier, during the Romantic period, the enemies were threefold: Russia, Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But it was the Russian atrocities or allusions to them that Mickiewicz and other Romantics extensively depicted in their works: *Forefathers’ Eve*, *Konrad Wallenrod* and *Pan Tadeusz* (all by Mickiewicz) are just a few examples. Juliusz Słowacki, (a second Polish *wieszcz*) also provides quite graphic descriptions of the Muscovites. In his drama *Horsztyński* (1835) the poet writes:

> When I was taken to captivity… In the evening, it was in the evening… two Muscovites led me to the chapel – I remember… the cemetery was shaded by lime-trees… it was terrifying at the cemetery! Twenty of my soldiers were buried in graves up to their necks. Muscovites would scythe their heads… and these heads would roll under my feet…[21]

A third *wieszcz*, Zygmunt Krasiński, hated Russia passionately as he saw the Empire, to use Maria Janion’s words, as “the personification of Asian barbarism and Mongolian cruelty.”[22] The notion that Russia represents the backward and primitive East, while the Polish nation appeared as a part of the culturally Christian West, was a common motif employed by both artists and politicians. All in all, the bloody suppression of every sign of disobedience, the implementation of laws aiming at Russification

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[20] Debates on whether Poland between 1952-1989 was or was not occupied by the USSR continue to this day. Various scholars explore this question using colonial/postcolonial approaches. For my project here, I understand the period of PRL at least as a “cultural occupation,” as there were very specific laws (the organization of the film industry, as well as the character of censorship) which aimed at shaping national tradition.

[21] “Kiedy mię wzięto w niewolę… wieczorem, wieczorem to było… dwóch Moskalów prowadzili mię do kaplicy – pamiętam, cmentarz cały ocieniony lipami… na cmentarzu – okropnie!… dwudziestu moich żołnierzy, zakopani w mogiłach po szyję. Moskale kosili głowy… skoszone głowy toczyły się czasem pod moje nogi…,” Juliusz Słowacki, “Horsztyński,” in *Dzieła*, ed. Juliusz Krzyżanowski (Wrocław, 1949), p. 249.

[22] “Zygmunt Krasiński nienawidził Rosji z całych sił – jako uosobienia azjatyckiego barbarzyństwa i mongolskiego okrucieństwa.” Maria Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), p. 191.

(although comparable with Germanisation under Prussian rule), and the threat of Siberian imprisonment became symbols of Polish suffering and anti-Russian sentiment.[23] Also noteworthy is the fact that numerous literary depictions of Russian oppression were not simply works of fiction — they contained very accurate historical details. In her thorough article, entitled "*Forefathers Eve* as Historical Source," Krystyna Ratajska demonstrates that Mickiewicz's drama aims at an extra-textual, historical reading and that this is what gives the text an informative function.[24] In other words, Mickiewicz's suggestive scenes describing young Poles on *kibitkas* (a type of covered Russian sledge) on their way to Siberia, brutal tortures during interrogations, as well as sudden disappearances of citizens, were not simply literary motifs, but a comprehensive testimony to the time.

Due to the terrible experiences of the 20th century, similar symbols filled the national consciousness in communist Poland. Soviets were equated with Russians. Norman Davies notes:

> Almost every Polish family guards memories of friends or relatives who were deported to Siberia in 1939-40; killed in Soviet captivity during the War; assaulted during the Liberation; or arrested by the Soviet security forces for belonging to the wartime Resistance or, in the 1950s, for being a 'foreign spy and *provocateur*.' Although the horrors of the German Occupation were even more severe, it was the memories of Soviet crimes which persisted, simply because the Soviet threat had not diminished. No Pole who knew his country's history, strewn with wars and insurrections against Russia, could doubt what the penalties for rebellion would be.[25]

Although Davies states that the "patronage" of the USSR was the main reason why Poles feared their eastern neighbor, it is rather clear that the powerful images of Russian brutality created by notable artists such as Mickiewicz also had a share

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23. Norman Davies, *Boże igrzysko. Historia Polski*, vol. 2 (Krakow: Znak, 1996), pp. 98-157.

24. Krystyna Ratajska, "III część Dziadów jako źródło historyczne," in *Dziady Adama Mickiewicza. Poemat, adaptacje, tradycje*, ed. Bogusław Dopart (Kraków: Universitas, 1999), pp. 323-36.

25. Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present*, p. 34.

in creating anti-Soviet sentiments after the war. The impact of Romanticism on the Polish national imagination remains an enduring theme among scholars and historians.

The lack of freedom, traumatic experiences, the Russian "enemy," as well as the important status that Romantic texts had in both 19th century Poland and the PRL are not the only parallels linking the two periods. The mechanisms of censorship together with close supervision of all cultural activities is yet another analogy that helps to demonstrate the link between the role of the Romantic artist (*wieszcz*) and the postwar filmmaker (*auteur*). Since the close investigation of film censorship in the late 1950s will be the topic of my fourth chapter, in the following section I will provide only a brief characterization of censorship in partitioned Poland.

While censorship differed from one part of divided Poland to another during the Romantic period, the fact that the highest number of literate people lived under Russian occupation made that territory the most vulnerable to serious repressions.[26] Logically, it was there where demand for the written word was the highest. The works of Mickiewicz seemed the key target of tsarist censorship – and for good reason. Although initially the authorities in Congress Poland allowed Mickiewicz's works to be published, they radically changed their mind after the Paris publication of *Forefathers' Eve III*, in which Mickiewicz vividly described Russian atrocities.[27] That, quite naturally, made the authorities furious, and a special committee exclusively designated to evaluate Mickiewicz's works was established.[28]

Forefathers' Eve III was not the only work doomed to circulate illegally beyond official printing distribution. Another of Mickiewicz's masterpieces, the epic poem

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26. Małgorzata Rowicka, "Spokojny sen senatora, czyli o cenzurowaniu przez carat Mickiewiczowskich Dziadów III," in *Niewygodne dla władzy. Ograniczenie wolności słowa na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, ed. Jacek Gzella Dorota Degen (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2010), p. 86.

27. Congress Poland is the official name of the Russian part of Poland that existed between 1815-1832. Although Congress Poland was theoretically a sovereign state, it was connected through a personal union with Russia, and after 1832 incorporated into Russian territory altogether.

28. Bartłomiej Szyndler, *Dzieje cenzury w Polsce do roku 1918* (Kraków: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1993), p. 15.

Pan Tadeusz, was also targeted. This book, which portrays an idyllic picture of Polish nobility, opening with an immigrant's yearning for his beautiful motherland, was labeled "revolutionary and harmful." *Pan Tadeusz* appeared to be so subversive that the authorities in the Prussian and Austro-Hungarian partitioned territories also joined the tsarist regime's efforts in eliminating it from all formerly Polish lands.[29] Nowadays, the book is recognized as the national poem of Poland; it is, to use Treugutt's words, "a Bible of Polishness" – most students know by heart the first lines of the book's famous "Invocation."[30]

Nevertheless, the tsarist regime's relentless suppression of subversive books was not limited to Mickiewicz's works. All printed texts were closely supervised by the Warsaw Censorship Committee, especially those published outside of Congress Poland and Russia. The Committee, officially established in 1843, was tied to the Russian Ministry of Education and consisted of one chairman and eight censors. Their evaluations very often were arbitrary and did not include a persuasive rationalization behind the decision to ban a certain book. The reports were short:

> 1. *Kordian* [by Juliusz Słowacki] and *Przedświt* [by Zygmunt Krasiński] – works published by émigrés whose political inclinations are harmful.
> 2. *Un-Divine Comedy* [Zygmunt Krasiński] – it is characterised by revolutionary traits.
> 3. *The Hymns about Our Land*, *Poems* by Witwicki – written by emigrants and harmful – as almost all of their texts are.[31]

As the reports show, being an émigré was enough to exclude one's work from circulation in Congress Poland. Thus, the repression affected not only the number of published books but – quite literally – the writers themselves.

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[29] Ibid., 123.

[30] "Biblia Polskości," Stefan Treugutt, "Mickiewicz - domowy i daleki," in *Adam Mickiewicz. Dzieła*, ed. Zbigniew Jerzy Nowak, vol. 1 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1993), p. 15.

[31] "*Kordian*, *Przedświt*. Dzieła wydane przez emigrantów polskich, których kierunek polityczny jest szkodliwy. ... *Un-Divine Comedy*. Wyróżnia się kierunkiem rewolucyjnym. ... *Pieśni o ziemi naszej. Poezje* Witwickiego. Napisane przez emigrantów wyróżniają się szkodliwością, jak wszystkie prawie pozostałe ich pisma." Szyndler, *Dzieje cenzury w Polsce do roku 1918*, p. 123.

Although the consequences for creating works out of line with the official ideology were not as serious in the PRL, the Polish Film School of filmmakers could also lose the right to work if they produced “daring” pictures. This – together with their rich references to Romanticism on an aesthetic level – serves as yet another parallel between the Romantic Period and the PRL. There is no doubt that the filmmakers from the 1950s such as Wajda and Konwicki turned toward the Romantic tradition with the idea of questioning its value. They both may have had different approaches, but they nevertheless eventually subscribed to its legacy and solidified its powerful role in Polish culture. The very features of Polish national identity brought to prominence by Mickiewicz did not lose currency in the 20th century – despite criticism and attempts to shift the national narration from the path of Polish martyrology. Each of them, however, managed to not only satisfy two incompatible political agendas, but managed to advance their personal thematic worldviews and philosophies through cinematic style.

Chapter One
The Role of an Artist in Polish Culture: The Nation's Common Good

While the term "individualism," just like most -isms, has a lot of meanings, there is no doubt that it is a term of the nineteenth-century.[32] The rather obvious fear of "individualism," especially in religious and political circles, erupted throughout Europe at the dawn of the Spring of Nations in 1848. The perceived danger of this self-conscious "I" was that it could lead to a disintegration of society, which was, as the Catholic propagandist Louis Veuillot said, "the union of minds and interests."[33] In other words, too many independently-thinking citizens could pose a threat to the political structures established within a nation.

Individualism in the Romantic literary program, however, did not clash with the notion of a unified nation. Quite the contrary: apart from individualism, one of the key postulates of Romanticism was historicism, which was best embodied and "executed" by a nation.[34] In other words, a nation embraced both, individualism (each individual contributed to larger structures of a nation) and historicism (each nation impacted historical processes). But the question of Romantic individualism becomes somewhat more complex when applied to individuals who did not comply with its nation-oriented program. For example, what was the fate of influential artists for whom artistic creation lay beyond the nation and politics? Ewa Łubieniewska, a specialist on Polish Romanticism, highlights the dangers of submitting one's creativity to an ideological program:

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[32] Steven Lukes, *Individualism* (ECPR Press, 2006), p. 19.

[33] Ibid., p. 24.

[34] Maria Janion, "Romantyzm a początek świata nowożytnego," in *Prace wybrane. Gorączka romantyczna*, vol. 1 (Kraków: Universitas, 2000).

> On the inner ideological level, the criterion for measuring authenticity [during Romanticism] was the degree of engagement in the matters of one's century and nation. Here, however, the danger of certain spiritual abuses was even greater: any individual interpretation of concepts such as 'engagement' and 'nationality' ... was treated as an act of conceit and a satanic gesture of rejecting the community. Sometimes the conflict between the actual needs of an individual and the system of social expectations led to dramatic attempts of submitting one's own personality to a program which one didn't fully support ... In effect, dictatorial ambitions of a given program stood in the way of free auto-creation.[35]

Submitting one's artistic "I" to an ideological doctrine – in this case to Polish independence and preservation – became a noble yet very restrictive program. The idea that modesty above all should guide artists in their "service" for the community was inherently contradictory: on the one hand, Romanticism promoted extraordinary individuals, and thus encouraged self-importance; on the other, this individual uniqueness mattered as long as it was submissive to the "common good." The term *wieszcz,* then, although seemingly raising an individual above the common folk, encompasses both unique individual *and* community service that de-individualizes the term. As I will argue in the following chapter, Mickiewicz was the one who created the most emblematic notions of what Polishness entails, and what role Poland performs in world history. Mickiewicz's impact was apparent not only in the creation of national Polish identity but also in the way he shaped literary features of Polish Romanticism. Maria Janion believes that Mickiewicz's early works

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35. "Na płaszczyźnie wewnętrznej, ideowej, miarę autentyczności stanowiło zaangażowanie w sprawy swego czasu i swego narodu. Tu wszakże otwierało się jeszcze szerzej pole do duchowych nadużyć, gdyż wszelka indywidualna interpretacja pojęć takich, jak 'zaangażowanie' czy 'narodowość' ... traktowana była jako dowód pychy, jako szatański gest odrzucenia wspólnoty. Konflikt, między faktycznymi potrzebami i aspiracjami jednostki a systemem społecznych oczekiwań, prowadził niekiedy do tragicznej w skutkach próby podporządkowania własnej osobowości programowi, którego się bynajmniej w pełni nie akceptowało ... Tym samym dyktatorskie ambicje prądu stawiały tamy na drodze swobodnej autokreacji." Ewa Łubieniewska, *Upiorny anioł. Wokół osobowości Juliusza Słowackiego* (Kraków: Universitas, 1998), pp. 27-8.

functioned as the "mother ideas" of all that differentiated Polish from European Romanticism. Although Polish Romantic thought shared many similarities with others, after the November Uprising of 1830, it became filled with Christian motifs, Polish messianism, and it gained a very moralistic character.[36] Mickiewicz's role then was important on both a cultural and sociological level. This pre- and post-November Uprising shift – which I will also investigate using Mickiewicz and Słowacki's correspondence – and how individuals responded to it, will lay the foundation for my later analysis of the Polish *auteur*. This chapter will provide historical background to further delineate an artist's role in the Polish national imagination – as such it does not explore in great detail Mickiewicz and Słowacki's works, and it assumes knowledge of many facts from the Romantic period.

Early Adam Mickiewicz: How to Win the Rule of Souls

Although over 150 years have passed since his death, Adam Mickiewicz still enjoys incredible esteem in contemporary Polish culture and society. One of the most influential postwar intellectuals, Maria Janion, asserts that Mickiewicz's role in Polish culture cannot be compared with anything or anyone. "He is," Janion argues, "and will always be 'the first among the Poles' and 'the greatest Polish man.'"[37] Janion's claim is ambitious, but it nevertheless accurately reflects how Mickiewicz's persona grew into a monumental legend. The number of articles and monographs dedicated to the poet still is increasing and includes such pompous scholarly titular epithets as *Adam Mickiewicz: The Builder of Real Poland, Adam Mickiewicz: A Man of Words and a Man of Deeds, The Architect of the Ark* or surprising projects such as the eleven-volume (!)

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[36] Maria Janion, *Gorączka romantyczna*, 1st ed. (Warsaw: Panstwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1975), p. 75.

[37] "… jest on ciągle i stale – i zapewne tak już pozostanie na zawsze – 'pierwszym z Polaków,' 'największym człowiekiem polskim,'" Maria Janion, *Maria Janion. Prace wybrane*, vol. 1 (Kraków: Universitas, 2000), p. 142.

Dictionary of Adam Mickiewicz's Language. On a more symbolic level, during Germany's occupation of Kraków in 1940, Germans destroyed the statue of Mickiewicz displayed prominently on the main square [Fig. 1.1].

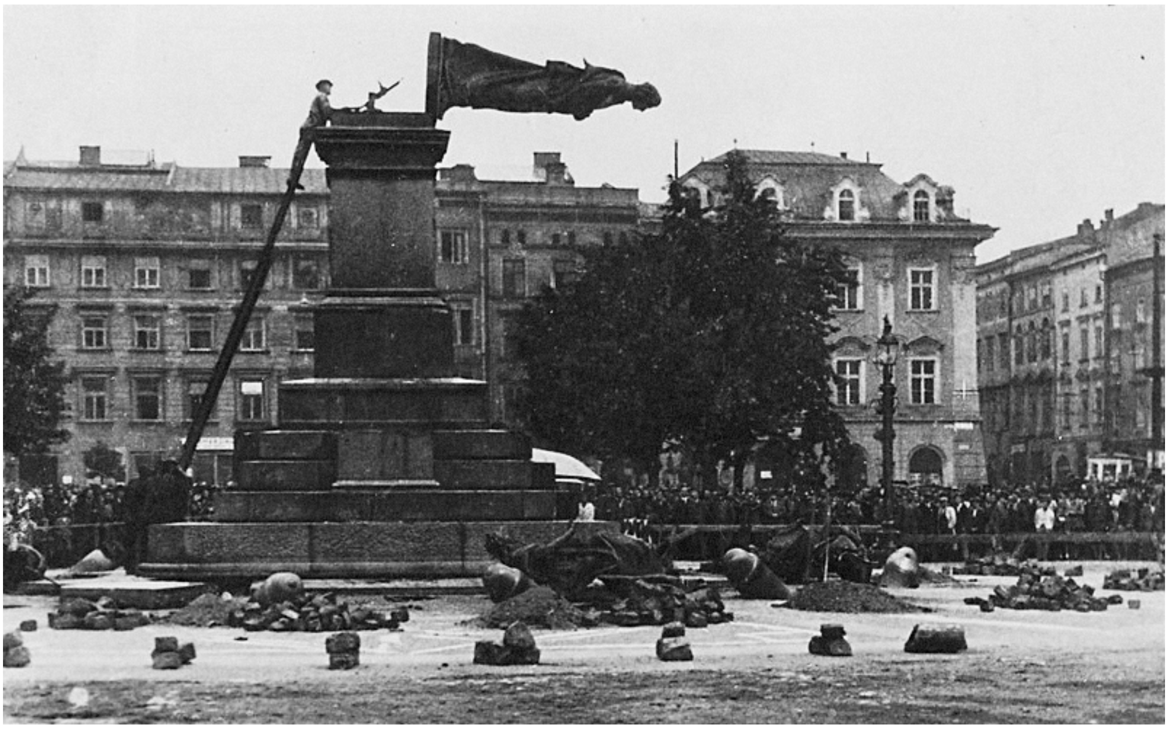

Fig. 1.1: Destruction of Mickiewicz's monument by the Nazis;
Main Square in Kraków, August 17, 1940

But while Mickiewicz's legend is that of a great poet-patriot devoted to national themes, one is tempted to inquire into how he got that label. There is no doubt that the poet quickly succeeded in capturing the sentiments of a stateless Polish nation. But did his devotion to national matters come easily? To what extent did he consider himself a "Polish patriot" whose art was inseparable from the Polish question and to what degree did he attempt to remain an artist of universal value, concerned with the abstract realm of literature? Was there pressure and fear of being rejected if he did not answer to collective needs? A brief analysis of the poet's early literary attempts as well as a review of his personal correspondence provides an intriguing window into the ways artistic production had to negotiate the demands of the national recovery project.

Looking at Mickiewicz's role in 19th century society from today's perspective poses a series of both difficulties and advantages. One difficulty is certainly related to the fact that he lived about two hundreds years ago. The other is connected with the legend of Mickiewicz. Despite some scholars' attempts to de-mythologize him and stress the fact that, for example, this national *wieszcz* changed his faith from Catholicism and became a member of the Towiański sect, the poet continues to function as a monumental national symbol, a symbol that must embody Catholicism.[38] A contemporary scholarly viewpoint, which distances itself from both the Church and the need to solidify the status of grand, national figures, can look at Mickiewicz without pretending that, for example, his "sectarian" phase did not exist or resulted from mental illness.[39] What is more, it can see him as a somewhat more complex individual, rather than the personification of national myth.

The causes and roots of Mickiewicz's role as a "Polish national bard" (*wieszcz*) shed light on postwar debates on the *auteur*. Both concepts are constructed terms shaped by concrete circumstances; both attempt to describe what it means to be an "authentic" artist. Since Mickiewicz's life was contemporaneous with the formation of the modern notion of nationhood, making sense of his life and art forms the foundation of not only the "Polish literary canon," but more importantly, the notion of what an "artist" in Poland should entail and signify. Mickiewicz is a crucial starting point for all inquires into the role of an artist in Polish cultural and political life. He is the prototype of the individual unorthodox artist who responds to the collective needs of the occupied Polish nation; he also extends this specific

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38. Stefan Treugutt, "Mickiewicz - domowy i daleki," in *Adam Mickiewicz. Dzieła*, ed. Zbigniew Jerzy Nowak, vol. 1 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1993), p. 18. In her essay "Wieszcz i słuchacz" Maria Janion writes about Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, a literary critic, who also attempted to de-mythologize Mickiewicz. See Maria Janion, *Maria Janion. Prace Wybrane*, vol. 1 (Krakow: Universitas, 2000), pp. 141-170.

39. It seems that with the change in Poland's government in 2015, Mickiewicz's status as a father of "what is Polish" and his ties to Catholicism regained social currency.

archetype into the film medium when cinema enters its advanced stage of development. Ultimately, he becomes a model that postwar filmmakers will have to either embrace, reject, or oscillate between, but never ignore.

The fact that Mickiewicz figures as the most prominent "Polish national artist" does not mean that there was no image of the Polish artist prior to his emergence. Although literature written in the Polish language dates back to medieval times, the pre-19th century notions of both "Polish" and "author" were different, as only the period of Romanticism saw the development of national authors. But while the same processes took place in other countries, the Polish case was different: during Romanticism Poland had neither a sovereign state nor any laws protecting authors' intellectual property, which resulted in certain deviations with respect to defining the role of an artist.[40]

While Mickiewicz certainly enjoys much esteem in contemporary Poland, numerous accounts left by his contemporaries point in a similar direction. George Sand, a friend to the Polish émigré circle in Paris, left in her diary a great testimony to the impact the poet had on his countrymen. She described an evening in Paris when Juliusz Słowacki "challenged" Mickiewicz to a rhyme improvisation duel. This happened in 1840, thus at the time when Mickiewicz had long before completed his most influential works and had suddenly become silent. The improvisational evening was the most talked about artistic event of the year as Mickiewicz's genius manifested itself again in the form of improvised rhymes. Sand writes about what she heard:

> It is a fact that he spoke so well and said such beautiful things that all gathered entered into a kind of trance. All one could hear were sobs and weeping; some lost their tempers others couldn't sleep at night. Count Plater returned home transformed, in a state of such strange exultation that his wife thought he had lost his mind... All are convinced that there is something superhuman about this

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[40] Krzysztof Lewandowski, "Krótka historia prawa autorskiego," March 26, 2015, http://zaiks.org.pl/220,0,54_krotka_historia_prawa_autorskiego.st_1.

> great man [Mickiewicz], and that he is inspired like prophets are; their [Poles'] superstition is so grand that one morning they will make him a god.[41]

Mickiewicz's personal charisma and his ability to literally hypnotise people with his creativity made him quite a celebrity at the time. But while George Sand wrote about him with some dose of humor and irony, other French intellectuals remained unquestionably under his spell. Burgaut des Marets wrote in 1830 that "a godly fire" burnt inside Mickiewicz's heart, the same fire that had given birth to the immortal genius of Goethe and Byron.[42] When the Polish poet became a professor of Slavic Literatures at the Collège de France, the writer Quinet confessed in a letter to his mother (1844): "He [Mickiewicz] is worthy of attention especially – as it seems to me – because of his moral sublimity. In my opinion he is slightly mystical, but his mysticism is that of a grand and beautiful nature."[43] Nevertheless, it was not his extraordinary persona, but rather his reputation as "a Polish patriot" that secured his place in the limelight. More importantly, it was that very reputation, and his fame, which drew the eyes of Russian authorities. The extent to which they feared Mickiewicz was demonstrated in a letter written by a Kiev count to a close collaborator of the tsar:

> Through some private channels I received information that a Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz, published lately abroad the next part of his work entitled *Forefathers' Eve* which contains hostile and impudent expressions addressed to the Russian government ... Although this vitriolic text, breathing with hatred,

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41. "Jest rzeczą pewną, że tak dobrze mówił i powiedział tak piękne rzeczy, iż wszyscy popadli w pewien rodzaj transu. Słychać było tylko szlochy i łkania, niejednemu puściły nerwy, inni nie mogli zasnąć przez całą noc. Hrabia Plater wrócił do domu odmieniony, w stanie tak dziwnego uniesienia, że żona sądziła, iż zwariował ... . Wszyscy są przekonani, że w tym wielkim człowieku tkwi coś nadludzkiego, że jest natchniony jak prorocy, zaś ich zabobonność jest tak duża, że pewnego ranka zrobią z niego Boga." George Sand, "Dziennik poufny," in *Adam Mickiewicz w oczach Francuzow*, ed. Zofia Mitosek (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1999), p. 113.

42. "...trawiony świętym ogniem," Jean-Henri Burgaud des Martes, "Przedmowa do Konrada Wallenroda," in *Adam Mickiewicz w oczach Francuzów* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1999), p. 42.

43. "Jest godny uwagi – jak mi się wydaje – zwłaszcza z powodu swej wzniosłości moralnej. Według mnie jest odrobinę mistyczny, ale tym mistycyzmem, który odpowiada wielkiej i pięknej naturze," Edgar Quinet, "Wykład w Collège de France," in *Adam Mickiewicz w oczach Francuzów*, ed. Zofia Mitosek (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1999), p. 259.

> does not circulate here, some echoes of the work itself may have mysteriously appeared around. Since I know how Mickiewicz impacts the minds of Poles through his works, I felt obliged to inform Your Majesty about it – for further consideration.[44]

In the letter Mickiewicz is described as someone who is quite good at emotional manipulation. It appears that already during his lifetime, the poet functioned as someone whose art dangerously impacted people's imaginations. He became – within the limits of the 19th century – a kind of celebrity, an artist who speaks charismatically on behalf of awakening Polish identity and who really can pose a serious threat to the Russian Empire. In other words, Mickiewicz solidifies the notion that art and artists are instrumental in shaping society's attitudes and opinions. As I will demonstrate in later chapters, this belief that art and politics are closely interconnected will eventually determine the role of filmmakers in postwar People's Poland.

Early Mickiewicz and What's Wrong with Him

In her essay, entitled, "Is Mickiewicz 'Our Poet'?," Maria Janion briefly reviews the early reception of Mickiewicz's works.[45] Her investigation leads to the conclusion that initially the poet was criticised for writing about rather exotic topics instead of focusing on things Polish. His ballads describing Lithuanian customs as well as sonnets praising the Turkish Oriental, not to mention a new type of patriotic hero created by Mickiewicz (namely a drunk Lithuanian Konrad Wallenrod), were enough to exclude the writer from the circle of "our [Polish] poets."[46] One reviewer insistsed: "*Wallenrod* may be the most beautiful piece of literature ever created – and right now I can agree on that – but it lacks one key element of beauty: it is not *our* work."[47] In other words, the main criterion for evaluating art in Poland seemed to be its reference to Polish matters.

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[44] "Drogą prywatną doszło do mojej wiadomości, że przed niedawnym czasem poeta polski, Adam Mickiewicz, wydał za granicą ciąg dalszy swego utworu pod tytułem *Dziady*, zawierający wrogie i zuchwałe wyrażenia przeciw rządowi rosyjskiemu … Jakkolwiek jadowity i dyszący nienawiścią utwór pomieniony tutaj między publicznością nie krąży … niemniej jednak mogły tu tajemnym sposobem przedostać się z zagranicy odgłosy o tym utworze i dlatego, wiedząc jaki wpływ wywiera Mickiewicz utworami swymi na umysły Polaków, uznałem za potrzebne okoliczność tę dla dalszej rozwagi zakomunikować do wiadomości Waszej Światłości." Bartłomiej Szyndler, *Dzieje cenzury w Polsce do roku 1918* (Kraków: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1993), p. 115.

[45] In this context, the word *nasz* in Polish (and, in fact, in other Slavic languages as well) has a stronger meaning than the English "our." It conveys "our own," "Polish," and "belonging to our tradition and community."

While Janion believes that the criticism of Mickiewicz's early works is the criticism of classicists who do not understand emerging Romantic aesthetics, perhaps it is also possible that the poet was criticized exactly for what he omitted: clear Polish references and literary tropes in his early works. In light of Mickiewicz's reputation as the "Polish national poet" even during his lifetime, these reviews may come as surprising, but they also offer a key to the process of engineering Mickiewicz's reputation, since within a short period of time he shifted from being "not Polish enough," to becoming a national monument.

Despite becoming the foremost "Polish national poet," Mickiewicz's body of work – especially when compared with Słowacki's – includes relatively few finished literary texts. While his political articles, lectures delivered at the Collège de France, and personal correspondence make up volumes of texts, his literary works are disproportionally low in number: he completed three short books of poetry, one epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*, two full-length dramas, and a stylised biblical booklet entitled *Books of the Polish Nation*. What is more important here, however, is that he almost completely stopped writing literary pieces in the mid 1830s, when he was not yet even forty years old. The last twenty years of his life were dedicated to active political engagement extending far beyond Polish matters.

Just as his later activism applied to different nations, Mickiewicz's earliest poems (those which made up his first two poetry books) also reference various cultures, avoiding explicit references to Poland, its tradition, politics, or its current situation. Rather, they express the somewhat hesitant voice of an inexperienced writer preoccupied with what is part of a young artist's world: joy, faith, love, the search for knowledge and linguistic experimentation. However, among Mickiewicz's poems which appeared prior to the publication of his first poetry volume entitled *Ballads and Romances* (1822), two poems brought him wide recognition as a potentially subversive artist: "Ode to Youth" and "To Joachim Lelewel." While both texts can certainly be read as allusions to the despotic occupiers of Poland, it is not readily a key point in either poem.

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[46] Maria Janion, *Maria Janion. Prace wybrane*, vol. 1 (Krakow: Universitas, 2000), pp. 16-20.

[47] "*Wallenrod* może być najpiękniejszym, na ten raz to pozwalam, jednej mu tylko brakuje piękności: brakuje mu, żeby był *naszym,*" Ibid., p. 18.

The ode, which passionately glorifies youth and calls for the younger generation's solidarity and action in opposing "the old," turned out to be too revolutionary to be published in Congress Poland. Numerous copies of the ode started circulating illegally, which increased its subversiveness and notoriety. But while the poem's passionate verses can certainly be read as urging battle (presumably with the Russian oppressor), above all, they celebrate the universal values of the youthful spirit:

> Youth! Up and over the horizons rise,
> And smoothly penetrate
> With Thy all-seeing eyes
> The nations small and great.[48]

In the ode, Mickiewicz not only skillfully uses tropes that became characteristic of European Romanticism ("the world of Soul will come") but also uses motifs taken from antiquity, thus comprehensible to many European cultures ("Who, as a child, detached foul Hydra's head/ In Youth, shall strangle Centaurs even").[49] In short, the ode strikes one as a work of timeless values that contains the common theme of "the new" fighting "the old," rather than clear references to Poland's politics at

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48. Adam Mickiewicz, "Ode to Youth," February 17, 2015, http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ode_to_Youth. Translated by Jarek Zawadzki.

49. Ibid.

the time. The text offers multiple meanings and the fact that Poles read it as a call for action was dictated by the political circumstances of the time.

Mickiewicz's second "threatening" poem, "To Joachim Lelewel," was also not included in his first collection of poems. The text, which glorifies the professional talents of the historian Lelewel, had been slightly trimmed by the censors in order to cool down its passionate language on world history. But just as was the case with "Ode to Youth," the poem was not necessarily a manifesto of patriotic values, but rather a glorification of universal principles. The examples that the poet employs highlight how various nations often had to suffer throughout history. Although Mickiewicz writes: "LELEWEL! ... You are the Polish nation's son," he specifies: "You are from the Niemen river [Lithuania], you are a Pole and European." It is not the supposedly "threatening" tone of the poem that matters here, but rather the fact that Mickiewicz creates a prototype of his "ideal man:" he praises the historian not only for his knowledge, but for his ability to impact people's lives and thinking. The poet writes that Lelewel "fixes hearts" and "enlightens minds."[50] His homage to Lelewel is just a starting point for deeper historical investigation. Ultimately, Mickiewicz praises historical honesty and "the Truth" which every nation should strive for: "The sun of Truth ... holds all lands and people equal." Although the poem clearly formulates the idea of local and national identity, it does not center on the Polish situation.

Although an analysis of Mickiewicz's early works distinctly indicates that the poet was not very preoccupied with politics,[51] the author of a monumental work on Mickiewicz, Juliusz Kleiner, believes that the omission only of "Ode to Youth" and "To Joachim Lelewel" made the poet's first book devoid of distinctive political, social, and revolutionary traits.[52] A close reading of Mickiewicz's early poems and investigation of his personal correspondence, however, reveals something else: despite Kleiner's claims, at the early stage of his career, Mickiewicz was not passionate about Poland's political situation. Kleiner only adds to the body of works celebrating Mickiewicz as "a national poet." To put it differently, although Mickiewicz gained international notoriety thanks to his early poems, he is nevertheless mostly associated with texts concerned with Poland, all written after the November Uprising in 1830, when he was already over thirty years old (*Forefathers' Eve III*, *Books of the Polish Nation*, *Pan Tadeusz*). So what did the young poet Mickiewicz care about, if not Poland?

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[50] "LELEWELU! ... Że ciebie takim polska wydała ojczyzna," "Żeś znad Niemna, żeś Polak, mieszkaniec Europy," "Abyś naprawiał serca, objaśniał rozumy," "A słońce Prawdy wschodu nie zna i zachodu, / Równie chętne każdego plemionom narodu," Adam Mickiewicz, "Do Joachima Lelewela," in *Wybór poezji* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1956), pp. 28–37.

[51] Analyzing all early poems by Mickiewicz is beyond the scope of this project. Juliusz Kleiner, however, asserts that only "Ode to Youth" and "To Joachim Lelewel" have any political traits – I subscribe to this idea.

There is no doubt that at the time in which he created his earliest works, Mickiewicz was in a rather depressed state: after graduating from Vilnius University in 1819 he was assigned to work in Kowno as a high school teacher, far away from the cultural centre of Vilnius and his university friends. Due to his separation from a stimulating environment, the poet exchanged numerous letters with his friends from the Philomath Society. Although the letters by no means can serve as an unquestionable window into Mickiewicz's thoughts, it is even less certain that his later dedication to the Polish cause took shape then, when he was "exiled" in Kowno. It is true that he was a dedicated and engaged member of the Philomath Society, a secret group whose members were imprisoned once its activity was reported to the tsar in 1823. But their key task was to cherish and develop their knowledge (and later shape moral character) rather than plot against the Russian Empire. But even if the Society were a real danger (the Society indeed revised its program in 1819 to include working for bettering Poland's situation), Mickiewicz, overwhelmed by his teaching duties and, most importantly, far away from Vilnius, could not even attend the Philomaths' meetings very often.[53] The poet's health issues, poor economic situation, romantic disappointment in his attachment to his first love Maryla, and the death of his mother, were his main preoccupations in his early youth. Mickiewicz was not at all absorbed in matters regarding the future of Poland.

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[52] Juliusz Kleiner, *Mickiewicz. Dzieje Gustawa*, vol. 1 (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1995), p. 283.

[53] During that period he was away from Vilnius with the exception of the period from July 1821 to August 1822.

A review of his correspondence emphasizes another crucial aspect of the poet's life: his poetic vocation. While in Kowno, Mickiewicz, a sensitive and talented young man, was mostly haunted by the mundaneness of his existence as a provincial teacher. He worried that the lack of intellectual and emotional stimulus would result in his poetic impotence. He bitterly confessed:

> I'm losing hope to win in my wrestling with fate. I thought that by my literary work I could draw some attention to myself … There is no stimulus [to write] … each day is full of work, the rest is boredom … I can jump far but my jumps are jerky and lead where circumstances push. Left to myself, I am terribly small.[54]

The poet's fear of creative impotence was his major preoccupation because that is what he considered the key element of his life. Even soon after learning about his mother's death, the poet wrote that indeed he suffered terribly but also exclaimed (1821): "But do not desert me, my hymns!"[55] Mickiewicz's early works, amongst which figure his most prominent poems such as "Ode to Youth" and "Romanticism," more than any others, manifest the young poet's linguistic capabilities. In his early period of writing, he can be called "a revolutionary" artist, but not in the realm of ideology or politics, but rather in the sphere of literary conventions. Mickiewicz was aware of the outrage his first collection of poems prompted among older, Enlightenment-oriented poets. He wrote in 1822 in a letter: "I am thought of as the patriarch of corruption/impurity."[56] His works were groundbreaking as they paved the way for Polish literature to embody European Romanticism. They were not yet groundbreaking when it came to giving shape to Polish identity and national mythology. One thing is clear, though: Mickiewicz's obsessive fear of not being able to write highlights his need for artistic expression, rather than answering the collective needs of anyone, let alone the entire nation.

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[54] "Coraz trace nadzieję wygranej w zapasach z losem. Myślałem, że pracą literacką zwrócę na siebie baczność … Żadnych zachęceń … dzień cały zajęty, zresztą nuda. … Mogę skakać daleko, ale krokiem nierównym, i tam, gdzie okoliczności popędzają. Zostawiony sam sobie, bardzo jestem mały." Adam Mickiewicz, *Dzieła. Listy*, vol. 14 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1955), p. 159.

[55] "Ale wżdy, pieśni moje, mnie nie opuszczajcie!" Adam Mickiewicz, *Adam Mickiewicz. Dziela. Listy*, vol. 14 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1998), p. 164.

[56] "Ja uchodzę za patriarchę skażenia," Ibid., p. 215.

Apart from Mickiewicz's fear of poetic impotence, another worry appears throughout his early correspondence, seemingly far from politics and close to his profession: the rather common fears of not having his works published, and his search for readership. It is Mickiewicz's issues with publishing his works that eventually turned his attention toward pleasing his readership, i.e. writing poetry that would succeed in capturing Poles' sentiments. The very first of his letters to his former professor Lelewel indicates that Mickiewicz quite clearly asks for Lelewel's recommendation, acknowledging that even the most talented writers cannot achieve much without benefactors.[57] The poet, facing serious issues with the publication of his works, planned to publish them along with others of Philomaths' texts. He was actively involved in that process, but when the project failed, he made an effort to independently publish his own collection of poems, *Ballads and Romances*. Since the publisher was not too keen to acquire Mickiewicz's manuscript, the poet himself organized, as Roman Koropeckyj puts it, "a subscription drive" in order to penetrate the book market.[58] The care with which the poet was involved in the process of publishing was evident later on. Together with his friend Jan Czeczot he closely supervised the publication of the second collection of his poems. After 1824, when Mickiewicz was exiled to Russia for his Philomath associations, one of the proposals he made to the Russian authorities was the establishement of a new literary journal. The journal's goal was to publish works by the most prominent Russian and Polish writers in order to "acquaint" one literature with the other.[59]

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[57] Ibid., pp. 24-5.

[58] Roman Robert Koropeckyj, *Adam Mickiewicz: The Life of the Romantic* (Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 29.

[59] Jerzy Świdziński, *Adam Mickiewicz w opiniach rosyjskich i radzieckich* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1992), pp. 22-3.

It is possible that Mickiewicz's major motivation behind this project was to popularise Polish literature, which would also imply the popularisation of Polishness. Nevertheless, it is also quite likely that he simply wanted to do what he wanted (and did) best: to write and to secure a place where he could print his works. After spending a few years as a schoolteacher in Kowno, Mickiewicz felt that teaching at the provincial school had killed his creativity. Since he was banished to Russia, he wanted to make the most of his forced stay in Moscow; the "plan" was not so outrageous especially in light of Mickiewicz's huge popularity in Moscow literary circles. Absurdly, his close ties with many Russian figures caused a lot of criticism from his closest friend Jan Czeczot. Czeczot criticised him for enjoying his time with the Russians (!). Mickiewicz, defending himself, wrote in a letter: "Dinners, dances and singing are supposed to insult that godly lover [Poland] of ours? Aren't you behaving like those boys who beat every Jew in order to take revenge for Christ's crucifixion?"[60] Czeczot's criticism implies that Mickiewicz, a public figure, should have tailored even his private life to fit the agenda of Polish patriotic circles.

Certainly, Mickiewicz could not be too outspoken in his letters as he was under discrete supervision by the Russian authorities. Nevertheless, he could easily express his personal emotional state. Close investigation of Mickiewicz's correspondence indicates that, emotionally, Mickiewicz was in a much better state during his exile in Russia than when he had to work as a teacher in Kowno. He did not see the Russians as enemies; on the contrary, he used the example of the Russian press to indicate its superiority when compared with the Polish (Warsaw-based) unprofessional and disorganized press. What is more, when referring to Warsaw/Polish literary circles, he always distanced himself by writing "they."[61] It is perhaps unsurprising that in Mickiewicz's legend there is no space for remembering that, initially, he was seen as a provincial (Lithuanian) writer by Warsaw literary salons. As with all grand figures

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60. "Obiady, tańce śpiewana mająż obrażać ową boską kochankę? Nie jesteśże podobnym do chłopców stołowickich, którzy bijąc Żyda każdego chcieli mścić się za ukrzyżowanie Chrystusa?" Mickiewicz, *Dzieła. Listy*, p. 315.

61. Ibid., p. 312.

one must keep in mind that very often they were mostly concerned with rather pragmatic matters such as the popularization of their own works. One might wish a "real" artist to be similar to the French poet Rimbaud as envisioned in Agnieszka Holland's film *Total Eclipse*, who declares: "Couldn't care less about being published. The only thing that matters is the writing itself."[62] Artists had to, after all, make a living. The situation of creative individuals in 19th century Poland was even more demanding: a writer was seen as either "us," thus conforming to the needs of occupied Poland and the politics that served its goals, or "against us," thus with the occupiers. Mickiewicz ended up being "with us;" he eventually became a great advocate for the Polish cause, but only after he had gained international notoriety through his apolitical writings.

The poet's preoccupation with "things Polish" started around 1828, with the publication of *Konrad Wallenrod*, but quite logically climaxed after the failure of the November Uprising in 1830. The Uprising, an armed rebellion against tsarist Russia, resulted in great losses for the Polish nation in both a literal and a metaphoric sense. Not only did many people die, but also many were forced to flee the country. Among those who became part of the Great Emigration were Mickiewicz and a second *wieszcz*, Juliusz Słowacki. Mickiewicz wrote his most influential texts concerned with Polish martyrdom, *Forefathers' Eve III* (1832) and *Books of the Polish Nation and the Polish Pilgrimage* (1832), while he was already an exile in Paris. What is more, his definitive turn to the Polish political situation was partly motivated by his personal animosity toward the tsar's commissar, Nikolay Novosiltsev, who aimed for the total elimination of Mickiewicz's influence in public life. It was Novosiltsev, who, in order to gain the tsar's favor, arrested the supposedly rebellious members of the Philomath Society, including Mickiewicz. It was Novosiltsev who wrote to the tsar about the harmfulness of *Wallenrod*, although Moscow censors (after minor changes) accepted the text for publication.[63] The Russian commissar was the source of the poet's problems: due to Novosiltsev's anti-Polish program, Mickiewicz not only was imprisoned, but was also subsequently banished to Russia, where the authorities kept moving him between Odessa, Moscow, and Saint Petersburg. It is quite likely, therefore, that the uncertainty of his fate together with Mickiewicz's limited options for active participation in cultural life inspired him to write about the Polish political situation. Quite naturally, then, Novosiltsev became the name of the merciless character in *Forefathers' Eve III*. In other words, it is possible that not only the need to speak on behalf of an oppressed Polish nation – as is believed today – involved Mickiewicz politically, but also his experiences and frustration with the Russian authorities. Counterintuitively, the majority of his works prior to the November Uprising clearly indicate that Mickiewicz was fascinated with novel literary tropes more than national causes.

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[62] 62. Agnieszka Holland, *Total Eclipse* (United Kingdom, France, 1995).

If that is really the case, if it is true that, initially, Mickiewicz was interested in literary experimentation rather than describing the sentiments of an occupied nation, then why and how did he become the Polish national poet? Perhaps the answer is closely related to what Maria Janion argues, namely, that Mickiewicz's fame as a "Polish patriot" was engineered by his contemporaries, both politicians and writers. Janion rightly asserts: "They [Polish writers] canonised Mickiewicz's art in a very precise way; they selected some of his works – for the nation ... they imposed a certain well-defined ideological choice."[64] Mickiewicz's personal charisma together with his extraordinary talent made him a great candidate for the position of national poet. Influential politicians were even more straightforward in their criterion for evaluating Polish art. One of Mickiewicz's contemporaries, a politician Dembowski, mercilessly criticised the first two parts of *Forefathers' Eve* for its glorification of individualism. He writes: "Gustaw [the main protagonist] is not bothered by the national climate, *Forefathers' Eve* is not a political poem … what kind of social thought is there? What is there that could elevate one above simplistic individual love?"[65]

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[63] Świdziński, *Adam Mickiewicz w opiniach rosyjskich i radzieckich*, p. 23.

[64] "To oni głównie w określony sposób skanonizowali twórczość Mickiewicza, dokonali w niej wyboru – dla kraju. ... narzucić pewne określone wybory ideowe". Maria Janion, *Purpurowy płaszcz Mickiewicza. Studium z historii poezji i mentalności* (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2001), p. 119.

Maria Janion is not the only one who characterizes Mickiewicz's reputation as a national poet as somewhat "engineered." In 1830, the poet himself lamented to his friend Malewski that some writers in Paris were attempting to "dramatize" his biography. He admits: "I see that the French translator of my works wants to draw some attention to himself by transforming me into some kind of political Robinson Crusoe."[66] In that article, the author apparently claimed that Mickiewicz was a member of a *Patriotic* Society (not the Philomath Society which aimed at self-education) for which he was banished to "Tartary."[67] The poet did not stop at private complaints: he sent a letter to the editor of the Paris journal *Le Globe* (unsuccessfully); he also wrote to one of the authors of similarly false articles, Leonard Chodźko, asking him to stop printing false reports about his alleged political activities.
Mickiewicz writes:

> For some time now, some harmful articles filled with lies have been printed. The Radiant Society [Philomaths' subgroup] has been described in them as both political and important; and that is what our enemies have always wanted to prove and are now proving; that is also something that we objected to in order to convince the government about the truth.[68]

In other words, Mickiewicz's legend started growing during his lifetime and the key element of that legend was its political side. In the climate of overall Western aversion to Russia at the time (which was very prevalent in France as the memory of Napoleon's defeat was quite recent), "upgrading" the biographies of Polish émigrés

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65. "Bo Gustaw nie żyje narodowym żywiołem, bo *Dziady* nie są poematem politycznym. … jakaż tam myśl społeczna? Cóż tam, co by wynosiło nad prostą indywidualną miłość?" Ibid., p. 121.

66. "Widzę, że tłumacz francuski dzieł moich chce zwrócić uwagę na swoję pracę robiąc ze mnie jakiego Robinsona Kruzoe politycznego." Mickiewicz, *Dzieła. Listy*, p. 543.

67. Ibid., p. 544.

68. "Od niejakiego czasu pomieszczono okropne dla nas artykuły i pełne fałszów. Otrąbiono Towarzystwo Promienistych jako polityczne i ważne, co właśnie dowodzili i dowodzą nieprzyjaciele nasi, a czemu dotąd zaprzeczaliśmy, starając się rząd o prawdzie przekonać." Ibid., p. 548.

to activists persecuted by merciless Russians sold better. Therefore, painting Mickiewicz as more of a political figure was useful for both the Polish emigration and French society. The former could point to him and say: he is the voice of the persecuted Polish nation since he himself has felt the severity of tsarist despotism; the latter could simply heighten the anti-tsarist sentiment in France. In other words, despite Mickiewicz's real interests and preoccupations, giving him a more pronounced political role was simply useful to these groups.

Eventually, Mickiewicz turned his attention to Polish politics away from writing what only highlights how historical circumstances can cause changes in a person's life ambitions. Mickiewicz entered the phase that made up his legend and reputation, the "patriotic" phase: within three years he completed *Forefathers' Eve III*, *Books of the Polish Nation and the Polish Pilgrimage* and *Pan Tadeusz,* and became the Mickiewicz who is best known today. A few years after he had finished the above works and a few years after the failure of the November Uprising he almost completely gave up his literary career in favor of almost exclusively political writing: he wrote numerous political articles and pamphlets in French and Polish. Over one hundred years later, a Nobel Prize laureate in literature, Wisława Szymborksa, said in one of her interviews that Mickiewicz stopped writing when "he turned from a personality into a celebrity."[69]

Mickiewicz's life and art was definitely determined by the turbulent times in which he lived. On the one hand, by responding to collective needs of the stateless nation he secured his position as the great poet-prophet. On the other hand, however, his artistic creativity was constrained by the expectations of that very nation, or rather, by the intellectual and political elites who represented the nation.[70]

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69. "Mickiewicz odkąd przestał być osobą a zaczął być osobistością, przestał pisać," Antoni Krauze, *Radość pisania. Film dokumentalny o Wisławie Szymborskiej*, 2005, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LErgtF5W9nU, '13:29.

70. Perhaps the most influential circle actively shaping the politics of Poland in the 19th century was that based in Paris. Other circles located in Warsaw and Vilnius were also involved in attempts to regain Polish independence, but their activities had to be carried out with more precaution.

The political situation of Poland at the time, along with the expectations of his readership, discouraged politics-free art. If such apolitical works appeared, they were quickly passed over, as the early reception of Mickiewicz's works demonstrates. Just as today's media makes the choice of what to show and what not to show, those who were literate and had some power orchestrated what others should read and praise in the decades of the 1820s-1840s.

One more conclusion comes to mind: if we can call Mickiewicz "a Polish poet," then we should also be aware that he is "an international poet" and public intellectual. His later political activism went beyond fighting for the Polish cause. After immigrating to Paris, Mickiewicz was an advocate for other nations' freedom as well: during his visit to Pope Pius IX, the poet asked him to support the 1848 French Revolution; he organised a military Mickiewicz Legion to help liberate all enslaved Slavs; he founded a French newspaper *La Tribune des Peuples* promoting democracy and socialism; finally, he set off to Istanbul to fight against Russia in the Crimean War and began to organize a Jewish legion there. The great variety of different nations he supported speaks to his strong belief in international equality and freedom, rather than solely in Polish messianism.

The extent to which Mickiewicz was constructed as the model of the Polish Poet can be better understood when juxtaposed with the "rejected" Juliusz Słowacki, the second Polish *wieszcz*. Although Słowacki was a much more prolific writer (he dictated the lines of one of his finest works, *Genesis from the Spirit*, while on his deathbed), his reputation among Polish contemporaries was not one to be envied.

Juliusz Słowacki: Too Aesthetic

While the ongoing rivalry between Mickiewicz and Słowacki for the place of premier Polish Romantic poet is a fact often speculated on and analysed, the causes of Słowacki's "lost battle" are less clear. The consequences of Słowacki's rejection on the notion of an artist in Poland are even more vague. Aesthetic comparisons between the literary achievements of both artists do not bring anything valuable or new to the discussion, as they are often a matter of taste. There is no doubt that Słowacki (just like Mickiewicz but in his unique fashion) exhibited remarkable linguistic talent, as his texts, strewn with neologisms and intelligent wit, clearly demonstrate. Nevertheless, Słowacki, unlike Mickiewicz, after an initial and very brief positive reception in Paris and Geneva, was clearly disliked by Polish communities and had difficulty publishing and distributing his works. The situation among Polish émigrés in Paris was clear: there was only "Adam's circle," composed of his admirers, and they were openly hostile toward Słowacki. For example, a publisher and a great friend of Polish artists, Eustachy Januszkiewicz, went so far as to publish a false and unjust report of the improvisation duel between Mickiewicz and Słowacki, portraying the latter as an arrogant and inept artist.[71] This antagonism between two excellent poets, and the reasons behind Mickiewicz's superiority, when compared with Słowacki, serve as a vital case study. As demonstrated earlier, Mickiewicz became a celebrated artist with the publication of his most patriotic texts, but only after the November Uprising. Close investigation of Słowacki's correspondence and reviews of his works suggest that it was definitely not a lack of talent, but rather his lack of involvement in Polish matters that pushed him outside of Polish literary salons. While this fact may appear rather intuitive, it is remarkable that Słowacki's omission or breaking from Polish matters is inseparable from his deeply-rooted notion of unrestrained individualism. In other words, Słowacki was a self-conscious artist, who tailored himself according to his vision of how an artist should behave, look and even dress.

Since promoting individualism was the key principle of Romanticism, why would Słowacki be attacked on the basis of his strong sense of uniqueness? As mentioned earlier, while the epoch indeed embraced the notion of a person's

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71. Juliusz Słowacki, *Listy do krewnych, przyjaciół i znajomych (1820-1849)*, vol. 12 (Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1952), p. 425.

singularity, in Polish literature individualism mattered as long as it was an imitation of Mickiewicz's individualism; in other words, it mattered as long as it served higher goals.[72] Słowacki's strong belief in his unfettered poetic genius was off-putting. Yet he could not bring himself to compromise his art by submitting it to collective pressures from anyone, no matter the price.

Investigating Słowacki's perception of what it means to be an artist, and what consequences this bears, can be fully grasped only through a brief analysis of his relation to Mickiewicz. When Słowacki made his first recorded literary attempts, Mickiewicz was already an established herald of Romanticism in Polish literature. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the young poet sought Mickiewicz's appreciation of his works. Being an extremely talented man, if somewhat arrogant, Słowacki sensed that nobody other than Mickiewicz was the best jury for his art. In fact, Słowacki sent some samples of his writings to Mickiewicz in 1829, but got no reply whatsoever.[73]

In his insightful chapter titled "Słowacki's Duels with Mickiewicz," Marek Piechota investigates Mickiewicz's persistent silence with respect to the younger poet. While the personal correspondence of the latter is filled with inquires about and references to Mickiewicz, Mickiewicz himself mentions Słowacki only four times in his numerous letters; three times in a critical way. But what is perhaps most symptomatic of his attitude toward Słowacki is the fact that in the series of Paris lectures he delivered on Polish literature at the College de France, Słowacki was not mentioned at all (!).[74] Mickiewicz, as the very first chair of the Department of Slavic Literatures in Paris, was fully aware that he had the power to educate his audience (which consisted not only of students but of many intellectuals of the time as well) as he wished. In other words, he held the position and the authority of either prizing or downgrading the achievements of various fellow writers. But with Słowacki,

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[72] Read more in Marta Zielińska, *Mickiewicz i naśladowcy. Studium o zjawisku epigonizmu w systemie literatury romantycznej* (Warszawa, 1984).

[73] Marek Piechota, *"Chcesz ty, jak widzę, być dawnym Polakiem," Studia i szkice o twórczości Słowackiego* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2005), p. 22.

[74] Ibid., pp. 23-4.

Mickiewicz went even one step further, as his deliberate omission of Słowacki's works from academic lectures was worse than harsh criticism, since it could have resulted in Słowacki's erasure from the history of Polish literature. His depreciation of Słowacki's works was not only unfair but also seemingly very deliberate.

Although there are many hypotheses regarding Mickiewicz's real opinions about Słowacki's poetry, Marek Piechota rightly assumes that the only convincing proof exists in one of Słowacki's letters. The poet writes to his mother in 1832:

> One Pole told me Mickiewicz's opinion about my two volumes of poetry [published in Paris in 1832]... he said that my poetry was adorable and resembled an edifice made of beautiful architecture; that it was like a sublime church – but there was no God inside... Isn't it a lovely and poetic sentence? It reminds me of his sonnet 'Resignation.'[75]

Słowacki here does not seem to be upset that Mickiewicz considers his art an art of empty poetic forms; rather, he is glad that Mickiewicz appreciates his linguistic capability. Comparing Słowacki's art to a "beautiful church without God" reflects not only Mickiewicz's view on Słowacki's work but more importantly formulates the manifesto that would come to determine what Polish poetry in general should (and should not) entail. Mickiewicz postulates that verbal art is made for some goal, that art must incite certain ideas and is not only an exercise in poetic forms. In other words, after his initial (pre-November Uprising) fascination with poetic expression, he then opted for art that served the Polish cause rather than remained preoccupied with the realm of poetic experimentation alone. Although Polish Romanticism before the November Uprising was very diverse (as Mickiewicz's body of early works also clearly demonstrates), after the insurrection it became dominated by agitational works created in the spirit of Mickiewicz's writing.[76]

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75. "Jeden z Polaków mówił mi zdanie, jakie dał Mickiewicz o moich dwu tomikach... powiedział, że moja poezja jest śliczna, że jest to gmach piękną architekrurą stawiony, jak wzniosły kościół – ale w kościele Boga nie ma... Prawda, że śliczne i poetyczne zdanie? – podobne do jego sonetu pod tytułem 'Rezygnacja.'" Juliusz Słowacki, *Listy do matki*, vol. 13 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1952), p. 87.

76. Maria Janion, *Żyjąc tracimy życie. Niepokojące tematy egzystencji* (Warszawa: WAB, 2001), p. 98.

Mickiewicz's contemporaries further reinforced his judgment of Słowacki's poetry. After the famous "improvisation duel" none of the witnesses could really recall what the improvised lines of the two great poets were about. What they agreed upon, however, was the fact that Słowacki, finally humble, admitted Mickiewicz's superiority and his primary place on the poetic Parnassus. Mickiewicz, in turn, supposedly stated: "One cannot be a poet without love and faith."[77] Similarly, Słowacki's friend Ludwika, in her own words, expressed a corresponding opinion about his poems: "In those works one sees the poet only – the man is hiding."[78]
In 1841, when commenting on Słowacki's *Beniowski*, Zaleski wrote: "*Beniowski* ... is his best work thus far; he demonstrates great imagination but there is not a bit of heart in it. He believes in nothing, admires no one and expects nil."[79] Jan Koźmian wrote in his review of *Beniowski*: "By 'going into combat' with irony, you [Słowacki] went against God and against Poland."[80] While the criticism of the inner dryness of Słowacki's texts may be very well dictated by the fashion for Romantic emotionality, it seems quite likely that his poetry struck contemporary readers as some kind of aesthetic "showing-off." In other words, to Mickiewicz and his contemporaries, Słowacki's art passes as the art of form; his poetry seems to be a construct of beautiful linguistic arrangements, effective figures of speech but at the same time deprived of "authentic," important ideals. It is a poetry that manifests its creator and glorifies the artistic "I." This idea is similar to the French postwar notion of *auteur*, whose priority will be to manifest his or her artist "I" on screen.

Whether Słowacki's poetry really privileges poetic experimentation over emotional weight and thematic content is not important. What matters is the very fact that for Mickiewicz and his compatriots this was the criterion for evaluating poetry. That is the crucial point: Mickiewicz was the literary oracle of his time and his judgements carried great value; the idea of the poet who must advocate for the Polish cause came into being through him. Mickiewicz, fully appreciated only after the publication of his politically involved texts, became the herald of "engaged art." Słowacki, for his part, not only liked Mickiewicz's judgment of his poetry, but also had never hidden the fact that he truly aspired to become an artist. His sense of what it meant to be a creative individual was very strong, oftentimes bordering on conceit. In 1832, in one of his numerous letters to his mother, he confessed:

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[77] "Poetą być nie można bez wiary i miłości," Piechota, *"Chcesz ty, jak widzę, być dawnym Polakiem." Studia i szkice o twórczości Słowackiego*, p. 54.

[78] "W tych tworach poetę tylko widać – chował się człowiek," Słowacki, *Listy do matki*, p. 109.

[79] "*Beniowski* ... najlepszy ze wszystkiego, co dotąd napisał. Ogromna fantazja, a serca ani źdźbła. W nic nie wierzy, nikogo nie miłuje, niczego się nie spodziewa," Stefan Treugutt, *Beniowski. Kryzys romatyzmu indywidualnego*, 2nd ed. (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich, 1999), p. 237.

[80] "Wojując ironią ciężko wykroczyłeś przeciw Bogu, przeciw Polszcze," Bogdan Zakrzewski, ed., *Sądy współczesnych o twórczości Słowackiego (1826-1862)* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1963), p. 162.

> All in life bored me – I had to abandon everything – and now, like a madman, I am chasing after some kind of immortality … You know, my dear mother, I will confess to you what I haven't confessed to anyone yet. In childhood (when I was so pious) I often prayed to God feverishly to give me the most miserable life possible – to be despised by all my century; and I wanted him to reward me with immortality after death in return.[81]

A few months later, Słowacki admits to his mother (with some degree of shame) that once Goethe had died, it was as if God wanted to make space for another great poet: himself.[82] In yet another letter, he confessed to her: "Laugh at me – but I do feel that there is a soul of fame within myself; and that soul cannot die with me."[83] The problem was that his very strong sense of being a unique creative individual did not fit with the expectations of his time. Or rather, it did not perfectly fit with the expectations of his nation. Stefan Treugutt in his chapter "The Ideal Poet" writes that

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81. "Wszystko mnie znudziło – musiałem wszystko porzucić – i jak wariat gonię za [jakąś tam] urojoną nieśmiertelnością. … Wiesz, mamo kochana, powiem Ci to, czegom nikomu nie mówił – w dzieciństwie, kiedy byłem egzaltowanie nabożny, modliłem się do Boga często i gorąco, żeby mi dał życie najnędzniejsze – żebym był pogardzany przez cały wiek mój – i tylko, żeby mi za to dał nieśmiertelną sławę po śmierci," Słowacki, *Listy do matki*, p. 47.

82. Ibid., p. 60.

83. "Śmiej się ze mnie – ale ja czuję, że mam w sobie duszę sławy, która ze mną umrzeć nie może," Ibid., p. 127.

one of these expectations was to have a poet who manifests modesty and humility in the face of grand, national themes.[84]

Słowacki was not a modest type. Not only did he care enormously about his fame and readership, but he also tried to look and behave like a poet. In a letter to his mother in 1832, he described his outfit in the most detailed way ("white cashmere vest with huge colorful flowers") only to add that once he had become a poet, he must avoid Mickiewicz's reputation: apparently, servants took Mickiewicz for a lackey due to his unrefined attire.[85] On another occasion, when writing to his mother about meeting with Victor Hugo, Słowacki stated: "His [Hugo's] posture does not transmit the sense that he may be a genius … Privately, he is happy – he's got a wife, three kids, and that really isn't in line with Romantic poetry."[86] It seems that he had a clearly defined idea of how a poet should look and behave; a real artist certainly should not enjoy a happy family life.

Słowacki's attention to poetic appearances was not a pose, though. By not compromising his poetry to any external pressures, he not only risked being rejected from social and artistic spheres, but risked poverty as well. In 1831, while in Paris, he wrote to his mother: "We are offered various literary jobs here; I thought of writing a romance from our history in French – but I can't write for money at all. Each time I think of it, my imagination coagulates."[87] Ultimately, his financial situation got worse due to his ideological quarrels with Polish émigré circles. But what is remarkable is that, unlike Mickiewicz, who turned from a lyrical poet into a freedom fighter, Słowacki kept writing poetry and artistic prose to the very last days of his life. It was his unshaken conviction that he could not be anything but a poet, together with his strong sense of being an extraordinary individual, that pushed him to the margins of the Polish community and its readership.

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[84] Treugutt, *Beniowski. Kryzys romatyzmu indywidualnego*, pp. 233-56.

[85] "… kamizelkę białą kaszmirową, w ogromne różnokolorowe kwiaty," Słowacki, *Listy do matki*, p. 77.

[86] "Wcale z jego postawy geniuszu nie widać … w życiu prywatnym szczęśliwy – ma żonę, dzieci troje, a to wcale nie na rękę dla romantycznej poezji." Ibid., p. 39.

[87] "Proponują tu nam różne literackie zatrudnienia; myślałem nad tym, ażeby jaki romans po francusku napisać z naszej historii – ale za pieniądze pisać nie mogę – zupełnie; ile razy o tym myślę, imaginacją mam zupełnie skrzepłą," Ibid.

In the same chapter where Treugutt delineates the characteristics of the "ideal poet," he also briefly discusses how different political groups tried to "pull" Słowacki to their side in order to use him for their own agendas. Słowacki, however, resisted all pressures. Mickiewicz, on the other hand, found a great channel through which he won his compatriots' hearts, even though throughout his life he was also unwilling to align himself with any political group. The difference was that Mickiewicz created some of the most powerful and persistent national myths, thus he found the key to the hearts of his readers, while Słowacki remained too detached from the collective imagination, and perhaps too focused on issues of aesthetics. What is more, Słowacki was fully aware that he risked much by continuing to write critical or ironic texts describing Polish matters. Indeed, when *Balladina* (*Balladyna*, published in 1839) was completed, Słowacki sent the manuscript to the publisher asking him to print it only when times were more favorable, as his text was unpatriotic and could cause him a lot of trouble.[88]

What Treugutt does not mention in his chapter, however, is what kind of consequences promoting this ideal of a "modest poet" had for Polish culture. And this was a matter of great significance as it situated artists in a kind of cul-de-sac: they, in fact, found themselves oscillating between their intrinsic thirst for unrestrained artist expression and the burden of national responsibility that had to shape their works. They were in double captivity: one was imposed by official authorities (in this case tsarist Russia) and the other by many Poles themselves, because they wanted to adjust artistic creativity almost exclusively to higher national goals. What was worse, this model of a creative genius whose divine role is to pay homage to the Polish spirit and advocate for its cause abroad cast a shadow on artists to come. The reason why Słowacki lost the battle with Mickiewicz for the top place in the Polish Parnassus was

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88. Słowacki, *Listy do krewnych, przyjaciół i znajomych (1820-1849)*, p. 87.

not only the fact that he was bold enough to go against Polish matters. He was well aware that in order to gain notoriety one *must be* patriotic and respond to readers' expectations. His desire to immortalize himself went against the Polish agenda of promoting the immortality of the nation.

Słowacki became very popular with the publication of his two early poems "The Hymn" and "Ode to Freedom" written only a few days after the outbreak of the November Uprising. "Ode to Freedom" openly alludes to Mickiewicz's "Ode to Youth," the piece that brought Mickiewicz wide acclaim roughly ten years earlier. While Mickiewicz's ode, as noted above, can be read as a universal manifesto not necessarily connected with Polish history, Słowacki's ode makes the task harder, if not impossible, as the first stanza outlines the general message of the poem:

Welcome, the angel of freedom
Soaring above the dead world!
Here, in the Nation's dome
The altars are fringed with flowers
And the fragrant incense burns!
Look! There's a new earth here – a new life in people.
He looked – and in the azure of heavens
He spread his wings
Painted gold above Poland;
And he listens to the hymns of this land.[89]

Although later in the poem, Słowacki mentions different episodes from European history, the introductory stanza, together with the fact that the poem was written immediately after the November Uprising, made the ode inseparable from the Polish context. Similarly, Słowacki's "The Hymn" is very much rooted in Polish traditions unfamiliar to foreigners. The poem is an apostrophe to the Mother of God (in Polish:

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[89] "Witaj, wolności aniele, / Nad martwym wzniesiony światem! / Oto w ojczyzny kościele / Ołtarze wieńczone kwiatem / I wonne płoną kadzidła! / Patrz! tu świat nowy – nowe w ludziach życie. / Spójrzał – i w niebios błękicie / Malowne pióry złotemi / Roztacza nad Polską skrzydła; / I słucha hymnów tej ziemi." Juliusz Słowacki, "Oda do wolności," in *Liryki i inne wiersze*, vol. 1 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1952), pp. 35–9.

Bogurodzica), which is one of the oldest symbols in Polish culture. The power of it lies in the fact that *Bogurodzica* combines many elements important for a nation's existence: it is the title of one of the earliest recorded medieval literary pieces in Polish history and it was passed on to later generations as the hymn of the Polish cavalry that defeated the Teutonic Knights at the battle of Grunwald in 1410. What is more, it also stresses the religious character of the Polish nation.

Słowacki, a well-read young man, was fully aware of the power these symbols had on the Polish national imagination. Certainly, to say that he used the most attractive Polish codes for self-promotion may be a bit of a conjecture, but it is a possibility, especially in light of Słowacki's later "quarrels" with the Polish émigré community. In any case, Słowacki's two poems written in a truly Tyrtaeus-que fashion, made him popular, and were not enough to conceal the poet's striving for individual recognition. He did not want to be known for building another myth of the Polish nation, but for his literary talent alone, beyond any particular subject matter. Among the many writers imitating Mickiewicz, the "first Polish bard," Słowacki had the courage to think and write independently. His real drama was that he did what a creative individual should do, but was halted by the opposing expectations of the Polish readership. Maria Janion rightly defends Słowacki and his individualism when she states: "The condition of a poet means exactly the awareness of one's own singularity, uniqueness, originality and the ruthless struggle to always and everywhere have them accepted by society, literary criticism, critics, contemporaries, posterity, and by each and everyone."[90]

The difficulty of being a Polish writer in the 19th century was that literate Poles at the time were more interested in expressions of collective national experiences, than in artistry as such. Słowacki understood this dynamic well, when in 1832, not even two years after the failure of the November Uprising and the publication of his

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90. "Kondycja poety to właśnie świadomość własnej niepowtarzalności, jedyności, oryginalności i bezwzględna walka o ich uznanie przez społeczeństwo, przez opinię literacką, przez ktytyków, przez współczesnych, przez potomnych, przez wszystkich zawsze i wszędzie." Janion, *Żyjąc tracimy życie. Niepokojące tematy egzystencji*, p. 97.

first two volumes of poetry, he bitterly confessed: “My first volumes of poetry lack soul … I initially presented myself as an artist to people who did not think of artistry at all as they were concerned with important, terrible and real tragedy [November Uprising].”[91] Słowacki’s words summarize two key matters: first, an artist’s role is not supposed to be limited to his artistry if he does not inspire certain themes and ideas; two, Słowacki admits the superiority of national matters having an “authenticity,” when compared with artistic creation. This confession affirmed the model of artistic creation that Mickiewicz imposed, ultimately embracing the orientation of future artists in Poland, including filmmakers.

Polish Artists after Romanticism

Positivism and the Young Poland Movement

Claiming that Mickiewicz – whether intentionally or not – singlehandedly defined the role of an artist in Polish culture may sound like a bit of an exaggeration. While the impacts of his most passionate works on the national imagination are undisputed, the role he played in shaping “a model artist” remains undervalued. Maria Janion, an expert on Polish Romanticism, gives much credit to Romantic poets (and Mickiewicz especially) for orchestrating the “great transformation of society’s consciousness.”[92] She emphasizes the extent to which artists after the third partition of Poland (1795) merged with politicians, and how they became “a political power of unprecedented proportion.”[93] I argue that their political impact affected not only the realm of ordinary citizens but, more importantly, the entire sphere of creativity. This influence

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91. “Pierwsze tomy poezji moich są bez duszy. … Pokazałem się więc po raz pierwszy jako artysta ludziom, którzy bynajmniej o artystostwie nie myśleli… ważną i okropną tragedią rzeczywistą zajęci,” Juliusz Słowacki, *Pisma prozą*, vol. 11 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1952), pp. 113-14.

92. “Potężną przemianą świadomości społecznej kierował – poeta,” Janion, *Maria Janion. Prace wybrane*, p. 22.

93. “ … stawał się potęgą społeczną i siłą polityczną o niespotykanych rozmiarach.” Ibid.

did not end with Romanticism (or with Mickiewicz's death), but continued to shape generations of artists to come. The representatives of the literary period of Positivism (about 1864 – 1881), and later on of the Young Poland movement (about 1881 – 1918), continued Mickiewicz's legacy.

Although the Positivists' literary program was dramatically different from that of the Romantics, it does not at all mean that its representatives gave up the idea of preserving Polish culture. The difference was that instead of celebrating armed insurrections, the Positivists called for the systematic education of the masses and reasonable steps in their effort to resist the processes of Germanisation and Russification in the respective territories of partitioned Poland. The painful memories of two failed "Romantic" uprisings had resulted in a turn to realism and naturalism in literature: prose rather than poetry became the most potent medium for manifesting a new program. But while lyrical poetry lost its status in literary circles, the role literature was expected to play in Polish society remained the same. Bolesław Prus, perhaps the most outstanding writer of Polish Positivism, famously declared: "Here [in Poland] poets take the place of politicians, philosophers, teachers and even economists."[94] He added that the role of a prose writer is to be a sociologist. His words suggest that there is a clear division between a poet and a prose writer, i.e. the former has more influence as he/she penetrates many more spheres of public life than the latter, who only studies and observes the functioning of a given society. But being a writer-sociologist also meant fulfilling an utilitarian role. In other words, the position of artists did not diminish with the end of Romanticism, but rather gravitated toward defining the most adequate genre for a specific ideological program. Positivist literature, with more utilitarian force, carried on Mickiewicz's notion of art that promotes the national cause. Henryk Markiewicz, a literary scholar, in his book *Dialogues with Tradition* states: "Positivism found in Romanticism a predecessor of unique ideological and literary authority: the failure of the uprising [January Uprising

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[94] "U nas poeci poeci zastępują polityków, filozofów, nauczycieli, nawet ekonomistów," Ibid.

1863] did not diminish, but rather increased the cult of the three[95] *wieszcze* among vast layers of society."[96] In his other brilliant essay, "The Origin and Fate of the Myth of Three *Wieszcze*," Markiewicz explores the meaning of the term "wieszcz," demonstrating its prevailing position regardless of the time period. During Positivism, the term *wieszcz* lost its "sacred" and prophetic characteristics, but was nevertheless readily used in discussions.[97]

The fact that Positivist authors continued to submit to collective national aims is rather intuitive. After the painful failure of the January Uprising in 1863 (which marks the end of the Romantic era), the situation in Congress Poland got worse. Censorship became more severe and various laws aiming at eradicating Polishness were taken up in Prussian- and Russian-occupied Poland. Poles in the Austro-Hungarian Empire continued to enjoy the most liberty. Although the earlier generations of Romantic artists (Mickiewicz especially) did not bring freedom to their peoples, they succeeded in something else of vital importance: they created a set of national myths. These myths became instrumental in shaping Polish identity; the role they played in those turbulent times became the glue which bound together different layers of heterogeneous society. Later generations of artists would continue to build on these core myths, strengthening the foundations of a stateless nation. The greatest novelists of the Positivist period, including Bolesław Prus, Henryk Sienkiewicz, Maria Konopnicka and Eliza Orzeszkowa, came to serve analytical roles similar to sociologists, while embodying positions within the voice of the entire nation. All of them gained incredible popularity during their lifetimes.

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95. Traditionally, Zygmunt Krasiński figures as the third *wieszcz* along with Mickiewicz and Słowacki. For the purpose of my project here, I did not include Krasiński in my analysis of an artist's roles in Poland for two reasons. One, coming from a wealthy aristocratic family, he has been considered more of an "elite writer" rather than the voice of awakening Polish identity. Two, throughout his life he remained outside of the Mickiewicz-Słowacki competition of most revered Romantic poet.

96. "… pozytywizm miał w romantyzmie poprzednika o wyjątkowym autorytecie ideowym i literackim: klęska powstania nie umniejszyła, a bodaj przeciwnie – utrwaliła kult trzech wieszczów w szerokich kręgach społeczeństwa." Henryk Markiewicz, *Dialogi z tradycją* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), p. 68.

97. Henryk Markiewicz, "Rodowód i losy mitu trzech wieszczów," in *Z historii literatury polskiej*, vol. 2 (Kraków: Universitas, 1996), pp. 57-60.

Prus, in his novel *The Doll* (*Lalka*, 1890), explores different layers of Warsaw society and highlights the possible factors destroying society from within. In the character of Rzecki, an old "Romantic" remembering Napoleon's time and cherishing ideals crucial for Romanticism, Prus pays homage to that legacy. Similarly, Eliza Orzeszkowa, in her novel *On the Niemen* (*Nad Niemnem*, 1888), explores the still very painful memory of the January Uprising and elevates it to a sacred symbol. Konopnicka, who composed a variety of patriotic texts, passed on to posterity "The Oath," which starts with the words:

> We won't forsake the land we came from
> We won't let our speech be buried.
> We are the Polish nation, the Polish people,
> From the royal line of Piast.
> We won't let an enemy to oppress us.
> So help us God!
> So help us God![98]

Not only did "The Oath" become a kind of national anthem, it also reinforced the notion of a Pole as Catholic. Finally, Sienkiewicz, the first Polish Nobel Prize laureate in literature, created a very powerful series of historical novels entitled *Trilogy* that romanticizes the most dramatic moments in Polish history. Sienkiewicz's notoriety led Stefania Zahorska, an interwar critic, to declare: "Sienkiewicz won in fighting for the 'rule of souls.'"[99] Yet the winner of the "rule of souls" was Mickiewicz, as he was the author of that very phrase, in which the protagonist of his *Forefathers' Eve III* demands that God lead him in the "rule of souls," as he believed he could lead people better than God himself. Although Zahorska's statement by no means places Sienkiewicz among the Romantic writers, it does mean that his status as an artist fits into a Romantic paradigm where an artist's task is not only to create aesthetically valuable literary pieces or artifacts, but more importantly, to advocate for Polish independence.[100] Kazimierz Wyka makes a bold statement summarising the position of literature within Positivism:

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[98] "Nie rzucim ziemi, skąd nasz ród, / Nie damy pogrzęść mowy! / Polski my naród, polski lud, / Królewski szczep Piastowy, / Nie damy, by nas gnębił wróg... Tak nam dopomóż Bóg! / Tak nam dopomóż Bóg!" Maria Konopnicka, "Rota," in *Wybór poezji* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1952), pp. 135-6.

[99] Stefania Zahorska, *Wybór pism: reportaże, publicystyka, eseje* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2010), p. 352.

> Polish Positivism was a movement lacking any artistic doctrine. It imposed on literature a certain program and it had certain criteria for evaluating literary works; above all, however, it tried to force literature to social service dictated by everyday needs rather than to understand the artistic consequence of its invisible philosophical foundation.[101]

The movement following Positivism, Young Poland, continued Mickiewicz's legacy. The situation in partitioned Poland did not alter significantly and, thus, participating in the national recovery project went on until the end of World War I. Young Poland (often called neo-Romanticism), just like Positivism, cherished those artists who contributed to the national cause. Stefan Żeromski, the leading writer of the time, dedicated his writings to scrutinizing the situation of the Polish state. In 1910 he writes: "Throughout my whole life I believed that the independence of Poland is the life-giving air without which Polish lungs cannot breathe."[102] Stanisław Wyspiański, though critical of the way in which Polish history and politics had been interpreted to fit a messianic mission, puts in the mouth of his protagonist from *Liberation** :

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[100] Paulina Duda, "Shaping Polish National Imagination: How the Extratextual Status of Literary Works Affects Wajda's and Hoffman's Film Adaptations," June 8, 2015, https://books.google.pl/books?id=JN9FBQAAQBAJ&pg=PA301&dq=shaping+polish+national+magination&hl=en&sa=X&ei=EoV1VYGQE8aqsQHB54DoCA&ved=0CCAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=shaping%20polish%20national%20magination&f=false.

[101] "Pozytywizm polski był prądem nie posiadającym określonej doktryny artstycznej. Narzucał literaturze pewien program, posiadał pewne miary, według których sądził dzieła literackie, ale raczej pragnął zmusić literaturę do posług społecznych nakazanych potrzebami chwili, aniżeli wyciągał konsekwencje artystyczne ze swych utajonych podstaw filozoficznych." Kazimierz Wyka, *Młoda Polska. Modernizm polski*, vol. 1 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1987), p. 37.

[102] "… niepodległość Polski … jest powietrzem żywotwórczem, bez którego płuca polskie nie mogą oddychać," Stefan Żeromski, "O niepodległość Polski," in *Elegie i inne pisma literackie i społeczne* (Kraków: Universitas, 1994), p. 246.

I shall triumph on this land,
And I will resurrect the STATE from it.[103]

On the other hand, however, other representatives of Young Poland, like many of their European contemporaries, were part of the decadent movement and praised the ideal of *l'art pour l'art*. The Decadents' leading proponent in Poland, Stanisław Przybyszewski, published *Confiteor* in 1899, which became the modernist manifesto of Polish artists. Przybyszewski criticizes artists (including the most outstanding ones) for "a moral-national cover for their works."[104] He asserts that art should not have utilitarian missions, but should be an end in and of itself.

Przybyszewski was not the only artist deeply involved in theorizing what "art" and "artist" entail. In fact, comprehending and describing the essence of the "creative I" was one of the most beloved topics during the Young Poland movement. There was an open turn to the Romantic belief in the "godly fire" that burns within an artist. Zenon Przesmycki and Bolesław Leśmian theorized about what "an artist" meant at the time, and although their notions differ from one another, they do come to the same conclusion: they eliminate the gap between the artist's role, and the cosmic creative power that inspires art.[105] Perhaps not surprisingly, at that time, Juliusz Słowacki's poetry was rediscovered and enjoyed popularity. Neo-Romantic poets wanted to raise an artist above the "common folk" by supplying themselves with supernatural powers; according to Leśmian and Przesmycki, artists were supposed to filter and give meaning and form to their unconscious, spontaneous impulses. By doing so, as Wojciech Gutowski argues, the modernists secured the practical function of the "new art," not on the social level, but rather on the sacral or "the highest" level, i.e. beyond the societal level; “the poet was” Gutowski states, “the trustee of God, Ideal, nation, universal values etc”.[106]

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[103] "Zwyciężę na tej ziemi, / z tej ziemi PAŃSTWO wskrzeszę." Stanisław Wyspiański, *Wyzwolenie* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1970), p. 74.

[104] Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Confiteor*, http://literat.ug.edu.pl/stachp/001.htm. Translated by Benjamin Paloff.

[105] Wojciech Gutowski, *Konstelacja Przybyszewskiego* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2008), p. 181.

The division between Young Poland’s socio-national and aesthetic-metaphysic artistic circles was clear, but the latter group did not pass to posterity with the splendor of the “activist,” socio-national writers (Wyspiański, Kasprowicz, Reymont, Żeromski). In his insightful article “The Heritage of Young Poland in the Eyes of the Interwar Era,” Henryk Markiewicz demonstrates that Przybyszewski and the rest of the decadents were heavily criticized for their pessimism and superficiality. He uses a quote by Zygmunt Wasilewski, who in 1932 wrote that “a-social” decadents formed a “Jewish movement” that depreciated Polish literature by transforming it “from spirit to body, from the national to the individual, from idealism to materialism.”[107] Markiewicz also acknowledges that some critics and poets very often praised the neo-Romantic artists (led by Przybyszewski) for their linguistic experimentation and breaking from national themes.

Interwar Poland

The interwar period, with the establishment of an independent Polish state, was characterized by shifting attitudes towards art. The Skamander group, the most prominent poetic group of the time, readily celebrated the end of the Polish partitions in a series of optimistic poems. One of Skamander’s members (and a cinema expert), Antoni Słonimski, formulated a kind of manifesto for the Polish artist in the newly established Polish state. In his poem “Black Spring” (1919) he exclaims:

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106. “poeta był mandatariuszem Boga, Ideału, narodu, wartości powszechnych etc.” Ibid., p. 194.

107. “... od ducha do ciała, od narodu do jednostki, od idealizmu do materializmu,” Markiewicz, *Dialogi z tradycją*, p. 215.

My nation is free, is free
So I am removing Konrad’s coat from my shoulders.[108]

Słonimski refers here to the Romantic hero Konrad Wallenrod, created by none other than Mickiewicz. Wallenrod sacrifices his life in the fight against the enemies of Poland and becomes an archetype of a hero who is both brave and cunning. What Słonimski implies in “Black Spring” is that artists up to 1918 had to metaphorically put on Konrad’s coat, and by doing so, continue their mission of fighting for Polish sovereignty. This “mission” required, just as in the case of the fictional Wallenrod, slyness (how to write in a way that does not provoke the suspicion of the censor) and bravery (how to face the eventual consequences of subversive writing). Yet since after 1918 Poland was free, art was off duty as well. The period of political freedom brought to fame several experimental writers including Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (”Witkacy”), Witold Gombrowicz, and Bruno Schulz. While the first two openly criticized, and even ridiculed, the national and patriotic character of Polish society and art, Schulz avoided any direct references to the political or historical circumstances of his time. Each of the three artists gained global notoriety and added new freshness and quality to the profile of Polish literature.

The initial excitement and optimism prevalent in post-WWI literature did not last long, however; very soon the young Polish state had to face serious political and economic challenges including Józef Piłsudski’s coup of 1926 and widespread poverty. The instability of the newly established state prompted writers such as Maria Dąbrowska, Zofia Nałkowska, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, and Maria Kuncewiczowa to continue working in the realist vein, as writers exploring the most hidden layers of human psychology. They were central to emerging discourses on economic issues and everyday life (especially of women) in newly established Poland, as well as the notion of an individual in the twentieth century.

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108. “Ojczyzna moja wolna, wolna… / Więc zrzucam z ramion płaszcz Konrada,” Antoni Słonimski, “Czarna wiosna,” in *Pozje* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1954), pp. 108–21.

In the 1930s apocalyptic themes began to dominate Polish arts: the unstable economic situation caused by the Great Depression of 1929, as well as the rise to power of the Third Reich, and Stalinist rule in the Soviet Union caused Polish intellectuals to fear the worst. The catastrophic visions in Czesław Miłosz's and Władysław Sebyła's poetry, tragically, were realized with the German and Soviet invasions of 1939. It seemed that in the thirties, with the growing fear of neighboring powers, artists once again had to put on Konrad's coat. Some, such as Bruno Schulz, became tragic victims of historical forces and could not continue their artistic work: being a Jew, Schulz was shot by a German soldier on the streets of Drohobycz, the town he loved and wrote about his entire life; Witkacy committed suicide upon learning that the Soviets had invaded Poland in 1939.

In light of the above, it is intriguing to explore whether the new emergent "type" of artist-filmmakers were regarded as obligation-free in Poland. For decades, literature (and other traditional arts as well) were an incredibly useful tool for inciting certain ideas and preserving the national Polish "spirit." Did this mean that the new medium of film, which fully developed in free Poland, was granted a similar role? Did filmmakers become the only "obligation-free" artists, as their medium bore no historical baggage, as was characteristic of literature? The question of the role that early filmmakers played in Polish life is further complicated by the fact that film, unlike literature, required large financial investments and included the work of many skilled professionals. Since by definition film is a collective art, to what extent, if at all, was a filmmaker at the dawn of Polish cinematography thought of as an artist in the same way that a writer was?

The writings of the most prominent film critic of interwar period, Kazimierz Irzykowski in connection with French film theorists (Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein) provides a great starting point for our discussion. In his book on film theory, *The Tenth Muse: Aesthetical Questions of Cinema* (1924), Irzykowski not only theorizes the cinema of his time but also suggests what his ideal of a filmmaker would mean. Further analysis of the theories and practices of interwar filmmakers and film critics can provide a crucial link between the Romantic legacy, and the postwar Polish Film School.

Chapter Two
The Film Artist in Interwar Poland (1918–1939)

The shape of cinema in independent Poland after 1918 varied from place to place because the previously partitioned region had long been occupied by three states with significantly different infrastructures, economies, and cultures.[109] While the multicultural and multilingual character of early cinema in Poland is very important (especially in light of the ensuing nationalistic tendencies in the newly established Polish state), it is of secondary importance when one considers the theoretical conception of the filmmaker. The film artist was thought of in terms of the specificity/nature of the film medium, rather than his or her nationality and/or ethnicity. While my theoretical analysis can exclude the aspect of nationality, in the sections devoted to the film practices of particular filmmakers I will focus on each one's notion of "Polishness." Consequently, my examination of how the filmmaker was defined in Interwar Poland will help to establish how the Romantic ideal of the artist not only contributed to the national recovery project after World War I, but also, penetrated the sphere of film art. The postwar debates on *auteurism* – despite the huge destruction of WWII – contained certain ideas that have continued to circulate without interruption in Polish film culture. These unique origins of the Interwar film artist bridge the notion of *wieszcz* with that of the postwar *auteur*.

Although it was poorly financed and equipped, as well as poorly received, Polish cinema did exist prior to the establishment of free Poland in 1918. Among the very few pioneers of moving pictures, Bolesław Matuszewski is perhaps the most important as both his practice as a cameraman, and his theoretical writings on moving pictures attracted attention in Western Europe.[110] While Matuszewski (and later filmmakers working in partitioned Poland) certainly paved the way for further development of the film industry, their major preoccupation was exploring the film medium itself, rather than foregrounding the significance of the person in charge of the filming. In other words, the Polish film pioneers, much like those elsewhere, were fascinated by moving pictures' ability to objectively document reality; thus, the role of a filmmaker was secondary and involved very little theorization as his/her intervention in the recorded material supposedly was minimal.

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[109] Sheila Skaff, *The Law of the Looking Glass: Cinema in Poland, 1886-1939* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), pp. 1-12.

Karol Irzykowski: Between Delluc, Epstein and "Content"

Of all the early writings fascinated by the new medium of film, Karol Irzykowski's rich body of work is the most comprehensive. Irzykowski was the first Polish film theoretician – among the first few in the world – who aimed to create a complete analysis of the definition of cinema. His theory of film, especially as published in his book *The Tenth Muse* in 1924, extends far beyond the state of cinema at the time, and offers visionary and often fantastical notions on cinema's potential. Irzykowski's thinking was conditioned by the fact that he completed his book at a time when film was not yet considered art. The sentence that best describes most people's attitudes toward early cinema was pronounced by interwar writer Kornel Makuszyński: "Reasonable people behave toward cinematography just as a man married to theatre would behave towards his trendy lover: he adores her but he also hides his

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110. Ibid., p. 32.

adoration."[111] In fact, according to Polish film historian Tadeusz Lubelski, cinema in Poland did not gain the status of art until the early 1930s.[112] Therefore, in his attempts to theorize what a "film artist" is and does, Irzykowski was ahead of his time in predicting vast possibilities for the new medium.

Irzykowski not only envisioned cinema's grand artistic possibilities, but also was very open in his attempts to elevate contemporary film to the status of legitimate art. He countered the commercial tendencies of contemporary producers and the viewing public who understood film solely as a source of income or light entertainment. Essentially, his sense of film as an artistic entity was based on the principle of movement.[113] Nevertheless, one should not assume that *The Tenth Muse* offers a coherent, comprehensive theory of film. Rather, it is an incredibly perceptive prelude to later debates on the aesthetic principles of the film medium. Also worth highlighting is that at the time he wrote *The Tenth Muse*, he already had published *Deed and Word* (*Czyn i słowo,* 1913) in which he sought to come to terms with the national admiration of heroism in Polish literature (*bohaterszczyzna*), and its negative implications. A few years after the publication of *The Tenth Muse*, he published *The Battle for Content* (*Walka o treść*, 1929), where he criticizes the Polish writer Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's fascination with and promotion of the idea of "pure form" in art. All three books should be seen as related works in which the critic's ideas revolve around similar questions concerning art's position in society, what form it should take, and what should be its "content" and function. In his introduction to the 1957 edition of *The Tenth Muse*, however, Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz argues that the weakness of Irzykowski's argument was that he did not specify what "content" actually meant. In other words, in his books of literary and cinematic criticism,

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[111] "Ludzie cokolwiek rozsądniejsi zachowują się w stosunku do kinematografii jak żonaty z teatrem człowiek w stosunku do młodej kochanki, którą uwielbia, kryjąc się równocześnie ze swoim dla niej zachwytem." Tadeusz Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego* (Katowice: Videograf II, 2009), p. 41.

[112] Ibid.

[113] See Introduction to Karol Irzykowski, *Dziesiąta muza. Zagadnienia estetyczne kina* (Warszawa: Filmowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1957), p. 20.

Irzykowski opposed the idea of "pure form" (or "pure cinema") in favor of "content," yet the latter never simply signified social or historical truths.[114]

Indeed, Irzykowski's explanation of film "content" is somewhat vague, but he clearly sees two tendencies prevalent in the 1920s film industry: one is represented by entrepreneurs and the general public who long for easy sensations, and the other is represented by "blasé aestheticians and, alas, literary men" who care only about film's technical uniqueness and aesthetic form.[115] It is clear that Irzykowski does not want to simplify the issue to a "form versus content" argument; instead, he proposes that film should strive toward a third tendency, i.e. "cinematic content." His theoretical investigation of what art should contain, and what impact it should produce on people, will ultimately lead Irzykowski to establishing his definition of the role of an artist.

The starting point for his inquiry is Jean Epstein and Louis Deluc's notion of *photogénie*, a concept that the Polish critic heavily criticizes. His harsh treatment of the French idea not only manifests Irzykowski's oscillation between Western and Eastern thought on cinema but, more importantly, will be mirrored by postwar film critics, who were equally critical of another French concept: *auteur*. In other words, this tension between fascination with what is Western and what is "ours" will ultimately determine the life and works of postwar filmmakers such as Konwicki and Wajda. In his book, Irzykowski dedicates several chapters to an analysis of *photogénie* and supports his argument with quotes from Epstein's texts, first published in France in 1921.[116] Early on it is clear that Irzykowski has an anti-*photogénie* agenda. He starts:

> Jean Epstein, a poet-lyricist and a writer of great subtlety, in his little booklet published in a futurist fashion, dedicates the whole chapter to *photogénie*, and explains it not so much by using clear but rather grand and truly 'photogenic'

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[114] Ibid., p. 10.

[115] "... zblazowani esteci i niestety literaci," Ibid., p. 148.

[116] Irzykowski footnotes Epstein's *Cinema*, but perhaps he means *Bonjour Cinema.* All of the English translations from Epstein here are from Richard Abel, ed., *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939*, vol. 1 (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).

> aphorisms. He assures us that '*photogénie* is not only a trendy and hackneyed word.' The matter is about 'A new leavening; dividend, divisor, and quotient.' 'One distorts one's mug in his attempts to define it.' … Since we will not find out from Epstein what *photogénie* is, we must listen to what and how he talks about cinema, having close at hand his mysterious compass called *photogénie.*[117]

The quotes that Irzykowski chooses from Epstein's book, and the way in which he translates them into Polish, draw attention to the French writer's pompous language, rich with abstract and elusive terms.[118] What emerges from the section on Epstein is that Irzykowski, an intellectual educated according to a German analytical way of thinking, takes Epstein with a grain of salt. He argues that Epstein's way of reasoning is too vague, too elusive, "too French" to stand the scrutiny of logic; it focuses so much on the mysterious *photogénie* that it no longer assumes film has any valuable content.

Irzykowski criticizes Epstein's fascination with "photogenic" moments such as "the mouth which is about to speak and holds back," and "the moment before landing, the becoming, the hesitation," when they only seem to occur for their own sake. He does admit that certain phenomena (especially those involving movement) are more suitable for cinematic language than others, but asserts that showing these without the intention of expressing some meaning for the film is pointless. He ironically adds that the examples used by Epstein to illustrate the significance of *photogénie* are only *pars pro toto*: "'The mouth which is just about to speak and holds back' is the same kind of 'poetry' that characterized a Polish noblemen's custom: in the Church, they would

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117. "Jean Epstein, poeta-liryk, pisarz subtelny, w futurystycznie wydanym dziełku poświęca osobny rozdział fotogenii i wyjaśnia ją nie tyle jasnymi, ile raczej świetnymi, iście 'fotogenicznymi' aforyzmami. Zapewnia, że 'fotogenia nie jest tylko słowem modnym i wyświechtanym.' Idzie tu o 'nowy ferment, o dzielną, dzielnik i iloraz równocześnie.' … Ponieważ nie dowiemy się od Epsteina wprost, czym jest fotogenia, musimy posłuchać, co i jak mówi on o kinie mając w zanadrzu swoją tajemniczą busolę fotogenii." Irzykowski, *Dziesiąta muza. Zagadnienia estetyczne kina*, pp. 128-29.

118. Irzykowski does not credit anyone for the translation of French texts and his Polish translation is much more pompous than the English translation from Richard Abel's book. In one of his letters Irzykowski writes that he does not speak French, however, he wrote this letter in 1905, so there is a chance that by the 1920s' that he learned or read German translations of French film theory (Irzykowski studied German philology). See: Karol Irzykowski, *Listy: 1897-1944* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1998), p. 63.

only remove their sabre halfway from their scabbards in order to manifest that they are ready to die for faith."[119]

Although Irzykowski admits that Epstein's "delight" in *photogénie* is sincere, he adds that the French theorist loves the idea of the film medium itself, more than cinematic material or content. He goes on to include Louis Delluc's clarification of the term, but then adds that "one can learn from Delluc's book even less [than from Epstein's]. The author starts with the words: 'Only a few people know what *photogénie* is.'" Once again, in referring to Delluc, Irzykowski uses somewhat ironic language, as if to say that taking French theorists seriously leads nowhere. Delluc is quickly dismissed, and Irzykowski cannot help but sum him up in this malicious fashion: "'daguerreotype in the hands of a bungler isn't worth more than a heap of stones.' With all due respect, why could not a heap of stones be photogenic?"[120] Irzykowski's annoyance with imprecision in the just-emerging language of the new medium leads to something which he mentions only in passing, but which is instrumental in his discussion of film artists. For the Polish critic the fascination with *photogénie* and its celebration of cinematic moments or fragments diminishes the "human element" in moviemaking. "Epstein ignores the role of the artist," he writes, "and celebrates the camera (*aparat*) itself for being such a clever and diligent artist."[121] In short, the Polish theorist considers the filmmaker more important than the cinematic apparatus.

Although Irzykowski mostly criticizes the vagueness of Epstein's and Delluc's ideas on film, it seems he was unable to watch their films. In fact, he closely focuses on (and apologizes for this) the very few films available in Poland, mostly German and American productions. What is ironic is that having no opportunity (and little money

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119. "'Usta, które mają przemówić a jeszcze milczą,' 'twarz przygotowująca się do uśmiechu' – to jest taka sama poezja, jaka tkwiła na przykład w zwyczaju szlachty polskiej, gdy w kościele tylko do połowy dobywała szabel z pochwy, aby zamanifestować, że gotowa umrzeć za wiarę." Irzykowski, *Dziesiata muza. Zagadnienia estetyczne kina*, p. 132.

120. "'... konsola fotogeniczna w rękach partacza nie jest więcej warta niż kupa kamieni.' Za pozwoleniem, dlaczego kupa kamieni miałaby nie być fotogeniczna?" Ibid., p. 134.

121. "... lekceważy Epstein także role artysty, opiewa natomiast sam aparat, że jest taki mądry i że jest takim sumiennym artystą," Ibid., p. 130.

as he lived in relative poverty) to access French films, Irzykowski criticized both artists for having ideas that might be good in theory, but lacked practical examples. It is impossible to speculate what Irzykowski would have thought of Epstein and Delluc's filmic works, but since he was not an advocate of pure cinema, and favored continuity of meaning in cinematic work, he probably would have appreciated their art. In fact, according to Richard Abel, "the French tended to focus debate on how the shot and its constituent elements could produce patterns of continuity other than those of the classical Hollywood cinema, which almost exclusively served the purpose of storytelling."[122]

Although Irzykowski's text passes quickly over the French theories and focuses almost exclusively on the imprecision of their concepts without any knowledge of their films, he nevertheless shares some basic principles with them. His concept of the film artist, for instance, is very close to Delluc's. He engages in the debate concerning the difference between a director and a screenwriter, one of the trigger points for postwar disputes over the term *auteur*. After describing film as medium separate from literature or theatre, as well as opposing the idea of "pure film," Irzykowski concludes the section with this: "In my opinion scripts should be written exclusively for cinema according to different [from literature] kinds of ideas and inspirations; the best, however, would be if a writer were a director at the same time."[123] Two things are worth mentioning here: first, Irzykowski spells out what after WWII will become the simplified definition of an *auteur* (see Chapter Three); second, in his description, Irzykowski is very close to Delluc's notion of *cinéaste*, a creative filmmaker who writes his own scripts. Although Irzykowski does not reference him here, Delluc had developed the concept of *cinéaste* in a series of essays in 1922 (thus before Irzykowski completed his book), which suggests that he might have been familiar with those essays.[124] Yet whether or not he copied Delluc's concept is beside the point. The key fact is that Irzykowski understood the role of a filmmaker in the process of making art, despite the poor conditions of filmmaking in Poland. In other words, he sketched the basis of what a director, an "authentic artist" should do – and urged Polish filmmakers to go in this direction. In fact, Irzykowski envisioned animation as by far the most advantageous cinematic genre, as it allows the "author-painter to be independent of director, actor, and studio conditions, and it also offers the possible direct manifestation of one's individuality."[125]

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[122] Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939*, p. 208.

[123] "Moim zdaniem scenariusze powinny być pisane specjalnie tylko dla filmu, pod wpływem odrębnego natchnienia i odrębnych idei, najlepiej zaś, jeżeli autor jest zarazem reżyserem," Irzykowski, *Dziesiąta muza. Zagadnienia estetyczne kina*, p. 154.

Certainly, Irzykowski's notion of a film artist could be more precise. Unlike Delluc and Ricciotto Canudo, the author of *Reflections on the Seventh Art* (1923), he does not differentiate between a *metteur-en-scéne, cinéaste* or *écraniste*. He employs several terms for the film artist: director (*reżyser*), author (*autor*), director-artist (*reżyser-artysta*), auteur (*autor filmowy*), director-author (*reżyser-autor*), and author-painter (*autor-malarz*). He does precisely what he criticizes Epstein and Delluc for: he is neither precise nor consistent in his terminology. What is more, unlike Delluc, who tested his theories in practice as a filmmaker, and who opted for giving "as much importance to the *editor* as to the director" Irzykowski does not consider film specialists other than the director, screenwriter and actor.[126] At the same time, he notes: "The whole work [a film] seems to be the result of collective creation, of a team that works intuitively – just like ants or beavers – and that is subjected to constant surprises of blind chance."[127] This statement suggests that he may be willing to accept the collective character of filmmaking – depending on one's sense of "ants and beavers." However, later on he adds:

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[124] Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939*, p. 219.

[125] "Film rysunkowy nie tylko zapewnia autorowi-malarzowi niezależność od reżysera, od aktora, od warunków światła i daje mu możność bezpośredniego wyrażania swojej indywidualności..." Irzykowski, *Dziesiąta muza. Zagadnienia estetyczne kina*. 209.

[126] Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939*, p. 229.

[127] "... całe dzieło wydaje się raczej wynikiem twórczości zbiorowej ... pracującego może takim instynktem, jaki ożywia bobry czy mrówki, lecz narażonego na bezustanne niespodzianki przypadku," Irzykowski, *Dziesiąta muza. Zagadnienia estetyczne kina*, p. 40.

> Authentic art can be developed only where the creator – although listening to his unconscious impulses, is nevertheless able to control them... he doesn't leave much space for accident.... In film that kind of work would be actually possible but in practice film is an industrial product, and a one-time attempt only, as all changes and experiments would cost too much.[128]

There is a certain indecisiveness to Irzykowski's notion of a film artist. On the one hand, he considers film an art; on the other, he is not entirely sure how to define its creator. At this point one can ask: is Irzykowski's ideal of a filmmaker-artist somehow related to the Polish Romantic tradition? Although he does not believe that art should serve any "social mission," he also pokes fun at the French fascination with pure cinematic form. Intellectually, he subscribes to a "Western" school of thought, as manifested in one of his letters addressed to a friend: "For God's sake, sir, regain your European point of view or I will really get offended."[129] It seems as if he wants to negotiate a space between French "pure cinema" and the emerging Soviet position on the usefulness of the arts.

Soviet Constructivism, which rejected the notion of autonomous art in favor of its utilitarian function, became very popular in the early 1920s, when Irzykowski published his book. What is especially important here, however, is that the concept of *wieszcz* clearly resonates with Constructivist notions: with all its loftiness and "godly" characteristics, the case of Mickiewicz indicates that *wieszcz* carries very pragmatic functions involving specific nation-building tasks; in other words, *wieszcz* may be an extraordinary prophet, but he is also "a national property" or a "common good," and his uniqueness matters as long as he contributes to the national recovery project.

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[128] "Prawdziwa twórczość może się jednak rozwinąć tylko tam, gdzie twórca, wsłuchany wprawdzie w szept źródeł podświadomych, wykonywa nad nimi ciągłą kontrolę i każdej chwili może na powrót wchłonąć, wykreślić to, co jest niedojrzałe, a więc jak najmniej miejsc zostawia przypadkowi. W filmie ten sposób pracowania byłby w zasadzie możliwy, lecz w praktyce film jest wytworem przemysłowym, jednorazowym, bo próby i skreślenia za wiele by kosztowały," Ibid., p. 41.

[129] "Niech Pan, na miłość Boską, odzyska europejski punkt widzenia, bo się z Panem pogniewam," Karol Irzykowski, *Listy: 1897-1944* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1998), p. 195.

There is dissonance in the notion of *wieszcz* that is also characteristic of Irzykowski's thinking. His approach to film in some sense parallels the very geographic position of the Polish state, or, to use Mickiewicz's metaphor, it represents a Poland-Christ crucified between Russia and Prussia – i.e., between East and West. "East" is represented by the Soviet notion of art's political and social utility, as well as the long Polish legacy of creating art for certain national goals; "West" stands for the somewhat elusive and breathtaking yet "empty" art forms. Just as Mickiewicz and Słowacki faced the dilemma of contributing to the national recovery project, rather than submitting to unrestrained artistic impulses, Irzykowski, too, had to come to terms with a similar conflict in formulating his views on the arts. He oscillated between his personal fascination with the cinematic medium, something close to Epstein and Delluc, and the kind of films made for a reason, advancing concrete ideas and meanings. Irzykowski was not alone at this crossroads. Such tension was manifested in the practice of interwar filmmakers as well, and the results of this "battle" came to determine the later character of postwar Polish cinema.

The Themersons: From Avant-Garde to Agitprop?

When compared with other film industries of the interwar era, Polish cinema does not look very impressive. The newly recovered state had to get on its feet first, and financing cinema was considered a low priority. Curiously enough, although the film industry was underdeveloped, as early as 1921, cinemas in Poland offered quite a good selection of productions by the most well-known filmmakers of the time: Murnau, Griffith, Chaplin, Keaton and Dreyer. Pudovkin's *Mother* as well as Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* were not shown due to censorship.[130]

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[130] Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego*, p. 42.

Despite its poor national profile, in domestic production the film medium became a fascinating topic not only for literary men such as Irzykowski, but also for other creative individuals who saw it as an undiscovered platform. When talking about Polish cinema in the first decade of the interwar period, a Polish film historian, Tadeusz Lubelski, groups feature films into three categories: politicized, entertainment, and autotelic. In the last category he places notable filmmakers who showed some distinctive authorial qualities in their works. Wiktor Biegański occupies the top place, but all of his films, unfortunately, have been lost. Leon Trystan, the second most interesting filmmaker according to Lubelski, was an open admirer of the idea of *photogénie* and paid more attention to cinematic rhythm, than to plot.[131] But while those filmmakers showed some attempts to break the conventions of directing in Poland, Alina Madej asserts: "In Polish [prewar] cinematography it is difficult to trace distinctively directorial strategies characteristic of authorial poetics."[132] I agree with Madej's statement, but keeping in mind Lubelski's distinguishing of more unorthodox prewar filmmakers, I will seek the origins of the film artist not in conventional cinema and feature films, but rather within avant-garde movements.

The most unorthodox Polish filmmakers who experimented with the cinematic medium in its earliest stages were Stefan and Franciszka Themerson. Although my dissertation primarily investigates the creators of feature length films, one cannot discuss the origins of the concept of the film artist by limiting it to features only. In other words, in the 20s and 30s, film was still an ambiguous medium that could not be narrowed down to any specific genre. The Themersons not only wrote on films and produced them, but also founded the Co-operative of Film Authors (Spółdzielnia Autorów Filmowych, S.A.F., 1937), which aimed at supporting independent cinematography. Part of their efforts in promoting film art was the founding of the journal *Art Film* (*f.a.*, *Film Artystyczny*, 1937) with Stefan as editor and Franciszka as art director. There is one more rationale behind investigating the roots of the film artist in experimental filmmakers' work and writings: they (not so much the Themersons as those associated with them, the members of the START group, which I will investigate in the next section) would literally rebuild Polish cinematography from the ruins of the Second World War. In fact, the START filmmakers and critics like Aleksander Ford, Wanda Jakubowska, Eugeniusz Cękalski, Teodor Toeplitz and Stanislaw Wohl who came to prominence after the Second World War were all members of the S.A.F. and contributors to the journal *Art Film*.

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[131] Ibid., p. 69.

[132] "W polskiej twórczości filmowej trudno wyraźnie dostrzec indywidualne strategie reżyserskie i cechy poetyk autorskich," Alina Madej, *Mitologie i konwencje. O polskim kinie fabularnym Dwudziestolecia Międzywojennego* (Kraków: Universitas, 1994), p. 10.

The Themersons were versatile artists; in some sense, film lent them the possibility of merging their numerous talents into one medium. Stefan was a noted writer and philosopher, while Franciszka was a painter and art director. But their experiments with film were short-lived: while they continued their artistic activities uninterrupted until their deaths in 1988, they gave up filmmaking entirely as early as 1944. The body of their cinematic work includes seven shorts: five of them were directed in the 1930s in Warsaw (*The Pharmacy/Apteka*, 1930; *Europe/Europa*, 1931/2; *Musical Moment/Drobiazg melodyjny*, 1933; *Short Circuit/Zwarcie*, 1935, and *Przygoda człowieka poczciwego*, 1937) but only the last of them, the English *The Adventure of a Good Citizen*, survived; the remaining two shorts, *Calling Mr Smith* (1943) and *The Eye and the Ear* (1944/5) were completed in London.[133]

The Themersons' critical essays, their short films, and Stefan's fiction highlighted the individual character of their creators; yet, at the same time, the couple stressed their creative collaboration without which their films would not have come to life. In the secondary literature on their films they are typically referred to as "The Themersons" ("Themersonowie" in Polish), rather than "Stefan Themerson" and "Franciszka Themerson." To put it another way, they somehow managed to become an undivided duet of two sovereign artistic personalities. As Nick Wadley said: "In talking about their films, Stefan left no doubt about the nature of his collaboration with Franciszka; he said more than once that he truly could not remember who did what."[134] As I will argue in Chapter Three, postwar debates on auteurism will revolve around this notion of collectiveness in filmmaking so openly acknowledged by the Themersons. But while the postwar French filmmakers will postulate that an *auteur* should write his/her own script, the Themersons extended beyond that definition as they both were in charge of not only writing and directing, but also of making props, drawing and animating as well as editing their pieces.

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[133] 133. Nick Wadley, "Film as Open Medium: The Art of Franciszka & Stefan Themerson," in *PIX* (Hampshire: BAS Printers, 1993), p. 73.

The reason behind the Themersons' intimate collaboration is romantic in nature: the Themersons met in Warsaw, married in 1931, and spent their whole life together in a relationship that seemed to supply both with incredible creative incentive. The degree to which their love and affection was a driving force behind their art is demonstrated in the letters and diary entries written between 1940 and 1942, when the couple was separated by the events of the Second World War. Once the war had begun, they both volunteered for the Polish Army in France (at that point they lived in Paris): Stefan became a soldier and remained in France, while Franciszka ended up an illustrator for the Polish Government in Exile in London. Over two years of separation, and the difficulties preventing uncensored communication, resulted in numerous unposted letters which Franciszka stored in her drawer. In one of them she writes:

> My dearest sunshine, I so want to get on with my work, and to do that for you – really, only for you. Alone, I break down completely. Already a long time ago I bought a small drawing pad that would fit in the pocket, to bring it to you, wherever that may be, just as I carry with me your poems that you copied for me before leaving, before that unnecessary departure. And then nothing – I drew a few pages, worthless, I threw them out, or gave them to whoever was around.[135]

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[134] Ibid., p. 75.

[135] Stefan and Franciszka Themerson, *Unposted Letters 1940-1942* (London: Gaberbocchus+De Harmonie, 2013), p. 25.

Not only was Franciszka incapable of creating without Stefan's presence, but she also provided him with unconditional faith and encouragement when it came to his own work. Her constant reassurances about Stefan's art suggest that he too needed her support for artistic development. Franciszka writes: "I so believe in your work and I love it so much. How sad I am if I think that perhaps I could be helpful, but I am not there with you."[136]

The influence of the Themersons' love on their collaboration should not be ignored; the fact that Stefan does not remember what their individual input was in making films suggests that he was able to forget his individuality (or artistic ego) and have an equal share in the process of creating a film. In other words, he concentrated on the sole act of making film, and did not feel the urge to be its only author, as creating with Franciszka was like creating individually. In the case of the Themersons it was not about Stefan and his Muse Franciszka (and that usually is the case within artistic circles), but about equal roles of two imaginative personalities.

The Themersons not only created unique cinematic pieces together, but also had profound technical knowledge of how the camera worked and what it was capable of doing. In fact, they made some of their shorts using a specially designed device which Stefan Themerson called a trick-table (*stół trickowy*). He described it this way:

> What we did was as follows: Instead of putting various objects on photographic paper, they were placed on a sheet of translucent paper on a horizontal sheet of glass, and photographed (frame by frame) from below. Movement was achieved by changing the position of some sharp naked lights, from above. ... The camera was an old (1910) yellow wooden box. I loved it. You could force it to do what you wanted to achieve. A modern camera would force you to do what it is capable of doing.[137]

What is striking here is not only the precision with which Stefan designed the whole apparatus to create moving pictures, but also, the personification of the camera itself.

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[136] Ibid.

[137] Stefan Themerson, *The Urge to Create Visions* (London: Gaberbocchus+De Harmonie, 1983), p.60.

To put it differently, the old-style camera was, according to Themerson, a tool obedient to the artist, just like a brush is obedient to the intention of a painter. He continuously grieved the technical evolution of the camera, as this advancement seemed to distance the artist from the important experience of the camera processes; Themerson lamented that it was the camera-producers who dictated the rules: "they can do everything that you, as an attachment to the camera, can do. *They* are the authors."[138]

The Themersons' intrinsic need was to understand and explore the mechanisms of taking photographs and putting them into motion, as that was the inseparable part of creating films. It was thanks to their knowledge of the "laboratory" that they could make films without anybody else's help. To be sure, to work on experimental shorts does not require the involvement of many specialists (like work on features does), but is inseparable from thorough expertise with regard to cinematic production in all its stages. In other words, the Themersons were in charge of the whole filmmaking process (including construction of their own camera device!) which made them the conscious and – literally – the sole *auteurs* of their films. While the postwar debates on auteurism advocated primarily the idea that a director should write his/her own script, the Themersons embraced the ideal of a film artist who should be in control of the whole process, including an understanding of the technology of the medium itself. Certainly, to make big productions with such an ideal in mind was not possible, and maybe that is the reason why they never directed a feature, and even stopped making films entirely as soon as cameras developed more technically.

Although the Themersons' filmography was limited in volume, they very quickly became the heralds of "artistic film." The film press of the time is almost univocal: the couple was the hope for art film in Poland. In 1933, in his article "Evaluation of Polish Film," Lewicki points at the avant-garde film circle, and Stefan Themerson especially,

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138. Wadley, "Film as Open Medium: The Art of Franciszka & Stefan Themerson," p. 75.

as, “the only vivid and creative group” in Polish film culture.[139] Similarly, Toeplitz (who was a member of the START group and later a major Polish critic) in reviewing Themersons’ *Europe* states: “It is a good thing that the wall of apathy has been destroyed, and that finally there are people who take chances and swim against the current, despite the cliché that Poland cannot make artistic film.”[140] But the biggest enthusiast – and one of the most influential ones – was Stefania Zahorska, who calls Stefan “the authentic filmmaker, and a real film artist.”[141] What is interesting here, yet goes beyond the scope of this project, is the fact that the critical discourse of the 1930s focused more on Stefan than Franciszka, which perhaps can be attributed to the all-too-common silencing effect of gender on women’s contributions to art.

The above-cited positive statements about the Themersons’ work often point to a concrete category, as they were soon labeled “formalists.” Jerzy Toeplitz, for example, writes: “the Themersons pay homage to abstractionism.” He describes how, after the screening of their first film, *Pharmacy*, the audience criticized it, saying, “the collection of photographs actually meant nothing, and was unnecessary.” Mrs. Themerson supposedly said the authors were mostly interested in “formal expression of certain cinematic effects without digging into thematic analysis of the presented photographs.”[142] Seweryn Tross in 1936 writes: “the escape from content into pure formalism was an interesting and new experiment in *Pharmacy*.”[143]

The Themersons’ surviving shorts, along with reviews of their lost ones, seem to pay tribute to the couple’s fascination with cinematic forms. In his article

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[139] “Większe tymczasem nadzieje rokuje młoda awangarda polska, jedynie żywa dziś i jedynie twórcza,” B.W. Lewicki, “Sąd nad polskim filmem,” *Gazeta Lwowska*, June 26, 1933.

[140] “Dobrze się stało, że przełamano wreszcie mur bierności i znaleźli się ludzie, którzy, wbrew komunałom, że Polskę nie stać na film artystyczny, próbowali swych sił, idąc wbrew prądowi,” Jerzy Toeplitz, “..Europa,” Themerson Archive in London.

[141] “... autentyczny filmowiec. Artysta filmowy, któremu trzeba i należy ułatwić drogę.” Stefania Zahorska, “Polski film - dobry!,” *Wiadomości Literackie*, December 18, 1932, pp. 3-4.

[142] “Themersonowie hołdują abstrakcjonizmowi filmowemu,” “... ten zbiór fotografij właściwie nic nie znaczy, nic nie mówi, jest niepotrzebny,” “... dążenie autorów do formalnego wygrywania pewnych efektów kinowych, bez wdawania się w analizę tematową zdjęć,” “Toeplitz, “..Europa.”

[143] “Ucieczka od treści w rejony czystego formalizmu w ‘Aptece’ była u nas próbą nową i ciekawą,” Seweryn Tross, “Pionierzy polskiego filmu artystycznego,” September 6, 1936.

"The Themersons and the Polish Avant-Garde," A.L. Rees traces their artistic development and tries to situate it within Polish and European art movements. He states: "If the Themersons rediscovered how to fuse Constructivist form with Dadaist iconoclasm, the film [*Europe*, lost] also implies a link to Surrealism, whose ideas had been permeating the continent since the mid-1920s."[144] While this is no doubt the case with their other shorts as well, one is tempted to admit that the couple nevertheless did not escape or avoid social content. From the interwar reviews, one gets the impression that the Themersons' lost films indeed were an exercise in cinematic form – yet the description of *Europe* (Themersons' second short), which was the visual representation of Anatol Stern's poem criticizing unleashed European capitalism, hints at serious social issues. Toeplitz's review of the film points to some shifts in their work. The critic admits that the couple made a step forward in their filmmaking as the short had more content than their first one.

In other words, the Themersons' cinematic work is definitely marked by the shift in the purpose of Avant-Garde artists, who during the second Avant-Garde Film conference in Brussels (1930) declared that the movement was no longer concerned with purely aesthetic matters and should evolve toward social and political film.[145] The misery of the early 1930s caused by the Great Depression and the rise of fascism made avant-garde proponents less optimistic about the value of abstract and detached art. Scanty information about the Themersons' next two films (and especially *Short Circuit – Zwarcie*, 1935 – commissioned by the Institute for Social Matters), together with the reviews of their earlier films mentioned above, suggests that the couple became – if not immediately but with time – interested in social questions, rather than pure abstractionism. Their collaboration on *Europe* with a key proponent of Constructivism in Polish plastic arts, Mieczysław Szczuka, may have triggered their interest in the social role of the arts.

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144. A.L. Rees, "The Themersons and the Polish Avant-Garde," in *PIX* (Hampshire: BAS Printers, 1993), p. 86.

145. Ibid., p. 93.

In fact, one can clearly see a social critique of the rules imposed by the majority on a minority in the Themersons' *The Adventure of a Good Citizen*. The short depicts "a good citizen" who accidentally overhears some workmen's conversation about walking backwards. He then starts to awkwardly pace the streets in that fashion; he bumps into two men carrying a wardrobe, and in the end (together with one of the men) starts transporting the wardrobe backwards into the woods. Once in the forest, the men start playing joyfully with the wardrobe mirror. A somewhat frenzied crowd carrying placards reading: "Walk forward!" "We all walk forward!" "Down with walking backwards!", chases after them. But the two men walk "through" the wardrobe's door and appear above the crowd, with hands and legs in the sky.

In *The Adventure*, the Themersons employ a variety of visually striking images, which draw the viewers' attention to the aesthetic layers of the film. They not only use lyrical photograms with flying birds and falling leaves in the scene where the two men enjoy their time in the forest, but also make a clever use of things within the film's diegesis to produce intriguing visual effects. The wardrobe mirror (to which Roman Polański, also a Polish-Jewish filmmaker, will make a clear reference in his *Two Men with the Wardrobe* in 1958, [Fig. 2.2]) is an excuse to produce striking visual impressions: for example, one of the men is standing half hidden behind the open mirrored wardrobe door: he starts moving his right leg and arm up and down as if imitating a bird; the mirror reflects the movement, which makes an impression that the man really has two wings and flies [Fig. 2.1]. On another occasion, when the men carry the wardrobe around the streets, different people and places are reflected upside down.

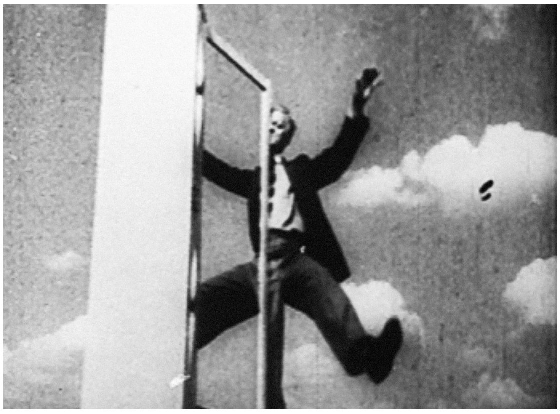

Fig. 2.1: Man playing with the wardrobe mirror;
The Adventure of a Good Citizen, The Themersons

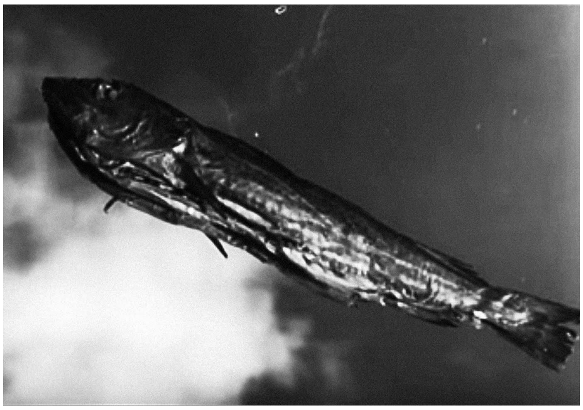

Fig. 2.2: Fish on a wardrobe mirror reflecting the sky;
Two Men and a Wardrobe, Roman Polański

However, the filmmakers' obvious attempt to visually impress the viewers goes hand-in-hand with the underlying message: they use an absurd gesture, i.e. walking backward, as a commentary on pressures coming from both a social majority and the state authorities. Any signs of being different or behaving in a way that goes beyond the social norms must be punished, and the offenders corrected through "proper" behavior. The crowd of protesters is comprised of many different people (men, women, aristocrats, Jews), but despite their diversity, they are equal in their intolerance of "abnormal" behavior as represented by the two men playing with the wardrobe.

While the film can be taken as a criticism of narrow-mindedness in all aspects of life, the Themersons make specific reference to creative individuals: the way in which the two men play with the wardrobe is inventive; what is more, neither man seems to feel awkward or ashamed of their childlike games – in fact, although strangers to one another, they enjoy each other's company. Once they open the wardrobe and "cross" through its door, they are seen smiling high up in the skies, against the backdrop of the firmament, which suggests that they, like artists and dreamers, have their heads in the clouds. This self-referential strategy, which draws attention to the filmmaker's work, will be reflected in the postwar notion of *auteur* who was supposed to "leave a signature" on a cinematic work.

While the Themersons' critique of certain social behavior is clear in *The Adventure of a Good Citizen*, it is absolutely blatant in their wartime production *Calling Mr. Smith* (1943). In fact, the short is an agitprop denouncing Nazi atrocities in Poland. The female voiceover tries to appeal directly to the viewers (in this case, British citizens) by accusing them of being indifferent to tragedies evolving in Poland. A series of images is shown: for example, German gothic cathedrals accompanied by Bach's musical compositions, and followed by a big gleaming swastika and human corpses; the voiceover talks about how present-day politics changed a country of Bach-lovers to Hitler-followers. The message is clear: if nobody stops the Nazis, they will erase Polish culture completely as they have already implemented laws prohibiting Poles from receiving higher education. The voiceover is somewhat irritating due to its forceful tone, but it succeeds in making the ideological point: indifference to the atrocities of tyrants will lead to complete cultural and humanistic annihilation. Urszula Czartoryska describes the short as "… a tragic film-dream which is at the same time a document, a settlement of accounts, a forecast, a cry and a continuous stream of poetry."[146] Indeed, the message is made more persuasive thanks to the skillful use of montage and juxtaposition of images such as marching soldiers and burning cities with famous works of art.

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[146] Ibid., p. 107.

Just as in *Adventure*, in *Calling Mr. Smith,* the Themersons highlight their own role as filmmakers, as if they wanted to subscribe to the speech delivered by the voiceover: when the female voice talks about the dramatic situation in Europe, suddenly an irritated male voice, Mr. Smith's, shouts: "Oh, stop it!" As soon as he utters these words, the film "stops," and what we see on the screen is the torn film negative. The scene calls attention to the film medium itself, and consequently, to its creators. The negative functions as a signature of the couple and alludes to the fact that the whole film screening was interrupted by the "real" viewer, Mr. Smith.

It almost seems that, quite literally, the Themersons acted here as if they carried a responsibility to be the voice of the Polish people. Like Mickiewicz in exile in Paris, the Themersons in London felt it was their duty to advocate for the Polish cause abroad, an idea rather distant from the postwar proponents of the *auteur*.

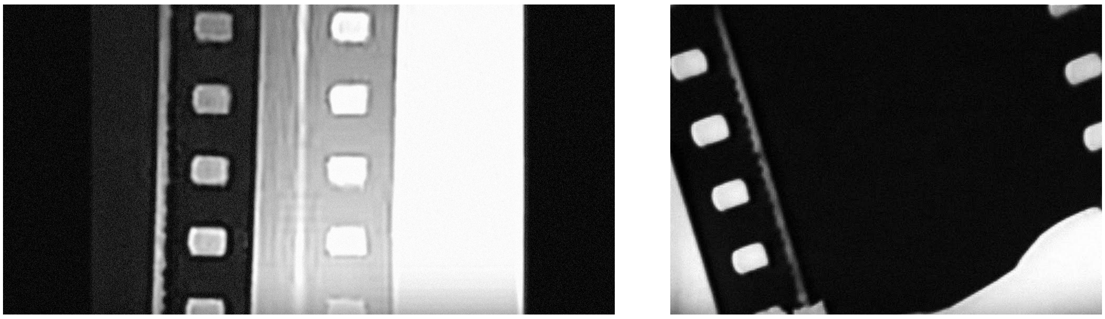

Fig. 2.3: Broken film negative calling attention to the authors of the film;
Calling Mr. Smith, S&F Themerson, 1943

The Themersons' last film completed in London, *The Eye and The Ear* (1944/5), which is a visual representation of Karol Szymanowski's music, at first might strike one as the couple's return to abstractionism. The short opens with lines reading: "This short film is an experiment designed to use the medium of the screen to create for the eye an impression comparable to that experienced by the ear." What follows is the abstract representation of different shapes matching selected songs by the Polish composer, Karol Szymanowski. The short does, nevertheless, make use of the potentially political song "Wanda," which describes a legendary Polish queen who decided to drown herself in the Vistula rather than marry a German prince. Committing suicide to avoid life with a German must have had a strong resonance during the war: the short itself was commissioned by the Polish Government in Exile's Ministry of Information and Documentation. One certainly would not call it an agitation-propaganda film on a par with *Calling Mr. Smith*, yet it was not wholly detached from politics either.

The fact that most of the Themersons' films are lost diminishes the chances of fully understanding their art. Nevertheless, the shorts, taken together with the couple's active engagement in other art fields, shed some light on the conflict, which they, like Irzykowski, faced. As in his case, the question cannot be simply narrowed down to the issue of form versus content: it is about oscillating and struggling to create between (if not beyond) these categories. In his book on film completed in 1983, *The Urge to Create Visions*, Stefan Themerson writes:

> I do feel that one cannot make a distinction between content and form when actually making a film. For example, I can well imagine making an abstract film out of realistic rushes, and making a narrative film out of abstract elements... the point is not whether we should stand here or there, the point is that we should move at least into an altogether different sphere. On to Parnassus? Why not?[147]

Stefan's take on the issue here is somewhat diplomatic: the Parnassus is the very symbol of ancient art and synonymous with the artists' "home." What Themerson seems to be pointing to here applies more to the experience of creating itself, to the process that should move an artistic individual to a new dimension. When we look at the content versus form problem from this perspective, art can take any path, as long as it supplies its creators with some unique journey to different spaces. Indeed,

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147. Themerson, *The Urge to Create Visions*, p. 68.

looking at the Themersons' cinematic work from that angle, one can believe that in creating their cinematic visions, they were in a totally different universe.

Although Stefan is rather diplomatic when he talks about form and content in his work, he is more straightforward when that very same question applies to Franciszka. In a diagram designed for the exhibition of his wife's work, he writes:

> Yet, neither pure form nor pure theme taken separately seem to satisfy her. As she herself says, when she looks at the Parthenon she can't forget the beggar who sits there, and vice versa, when she observes a beggar or a man in a bowler hat, she can't forget the form. She tries to put the two things together.[148]

By reflecting on these issues, Stefan Themerson demonstrates their struggle to come to terms with their open admiration for formalism and the idea that art should also serve some social role. It is as if Mickiewicz and Słowacki continued their battle within the body of the Themersons' works.

To be sure, the couple was shaped by the avant-garde movement and its fascination with pure cinematic forms. The reviews of their short films, together with the analysis of the films that survived, demonstrate the Themersons' clever use of striking and purely aesthetic phonograms, shots and stills. Nevertheless, they were also strongly influenced by Soviet Constructivism and began to use those aesthetic images not only to entertain viewers but also to make strong points about the worsening situation in Europe caused by intolerance and, specifically, by the Nazis' aggression. In sum, the Themersons advocated the idea of a film artist who knows his/her medium inside out; but their initial fascination with formalism grew weaker as the political situation in Europe grew darker.

Extratextual facts from the couple's life highlight even more strongly how they could not escape being involved in Polish matters. Certainly the personal side of their impulse toward political themes in their art was strong – being Polish Jews they were the most specific target of Hitler's racist violence. They nonetheless responded as

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[148] Wadley, "Film as Open Medium: The Art of Franciszka & Stefan Themerson," p. 84.

Polish citizens calling attention to the fate of their country; at the outbreak of the war they were relatively safe in Paris; nevertheless, once the war had started, they immediately volunteered for the Polish Army. Being raised in educated families in Poland, they – consciously or not – felt a sense of obligation to contribute to the efforts of fighting for Polish independence. This urge to act, to react, to fight back and to pay their debts as Polish citizens culminated with the making of *Calling Mr. Smith*, a film that to an objective viewer seems close to pieces of Soviet agitprop, albeit with a purely humanistic message. What is striking in their case is that being as open-minded as they were, they nevertheless could not escape "Konrad's coat" at the time when Poland was invaded by Germany. In some sense, the couple symbolizes the force with which the prevailing tradition of defending the nation impacted creative individuals almost a century after Mickiewicz's death. The Interwar period initially gave artists a chance to create, free from any patriotic obligation, and the new medium of film appeared to be the most obligation-free platform. The Themersons' case, however, demonstrates that the Romantic legacy was still alive, and once again prevailed over unrestrained artistic creation. What is more, the film medium turned out to be a more powerful tool in propagating certain political and social messages than literature. The leftist prewar artists concentrated around the START group understood this well, and because they were leftist artists, the task of rebuilding Polish cinematography after the war was entrusted to them by the communist government.

The START Group and Socially Constructive Cinema

It is no exaggeration to say that the Second World War, and especially the bombing of Warsaw, almost completely destroyed the infrastructure of the Polish film industry. But while there were no studios and equipment left to restart film production anew, many of the promising filmmakers and critics did survive the war. Among them were the START (The Society of Art Film Enthusiasts) group members: Aleksander Ford, Jerzy Toeplitz, Wanda Jakubowska, Eugeniusz Cękalski and Aleksander Wohl. All of them provided a direct link between pre- and postwar cinematography. Paradoxically, or perhaps logically, it is precisely due to the group's prewar leftist sympathies (readily associated with the Soviets) that they got the chance to organise and lead the film industry in PRL. My investigation of the group is crucial not because they, like the Themersons or Irzykowski, continued the debate on producing disengaged vs. socially useful art, but because they strongly opted for the latter. In other words, I use the START members to show how they shaped the profile of the Polish film industry in a way that ultimately shifted the debates on the film artist from aesthetic to ideological issues. The group, being close to Soviet ideology, could not really propagate the Romantic legacy of building an autonomous nation; they nevertheless reinforced the notion that a *wieszcz*, or any creative individual, becomes a common good and must serve collective goals. In this sense, then, the START members reinforced the Romantic notion with social usefulness. Wajda and Konwicki's postwar films embraced that role, supplying it with visual and thematic references to the Polish Romantic tradition. Not the START members, but the generation of the Polish School *auteurs*, became associated with the Romantic legacy – yet, the START group also shaped the way the term *auteur* differed from its French equivalent.

The role of the START members for the Polish film industry was significant: not only did they acquire all the necessary equipment for making films (allegedly, it was Ford himself who brought the most advanced film equipment from the German studio Babelsberg) but also set up the soon-to-be renowned Film School in Łódz.[149] What is more, they brought film scholarship to its heights by founding academic and popular film journals and organizing film archives.[150] The START members were closely associated with the Themersons, but their inclinations from the very beginning leaned toward Soviet socialist ideals rather than early Avant-Garde abstractionism. In other words, although they advocated artistic film and independent productions, they believed more explicitly that a real film artist should aim at creating socially constructive films. In short, they believed that film is art only when it embraces social utility.

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[149] Janusz Wróblewski, "Aleksander Ford. Pan Pułkownik," Polityka, January 2, 2009, http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/276731,1,ford-aleksander.read.

[150] Łukasz Biskupski, "Ukąszeni przez film," *Przekrój*, no. July (2012).

The START group was not so much important for its undertakings (the group existed for only a few years, from about 1929 to 1934) as it was for the fact that it brought together a group of cinephiles who would shape national cinematography in postwar Poland. It was thanks to the group's early acquaintance with Aleksander Ford, head of the wartime film crew marching and recording film at the side of the Soviet-organized Polish People's Army (*Czołówka Filmowa Ludowego Wojska Polskiego)* that Cękalski and Toeplitz were offered important roles in the postwar film industry.[151] In short, the START members' early collaborations initiated their thinking about film, and their need to reconcile artistic forms with social usefulness. What is more, the group advanced the cause of the Co-operative of Film Authors founded by the Themersons in 1937.

Although the young START filmmakers and critics sought the roots of film art in avant-garde movements and their formalistic approaches, it very quickly turned out that the group wanted political and social influence above all. Łukasz Biskupski writes simply: "Today we would call them a think tank."[152] There was no doubt that as much as they were interested in art, they were even more absorbed by its social influence. One of the most notable START members, Jerzy Toeplitz, who after the war would become the head of the International Federation of Film Archives (1948-1972) and head of the Łódź Film School, writes about the initial friction within the group in 1930:

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[151] Dorota Skotarczak, "Profesor Jerzy Toeplitz w świetle zródeł IPN" LXVI, no. 2 (2011), p. 151.

[152] "Dziś nazwalibyśmy ich think tankiem." Biskupski, "Ukąszeni przez film," p. 1.

> On one side there were supporters of ‘art for art’s sake’ ideas and all West European avant-garde ‘isms.’ On the other side were those who saw film art as a tool for creating social impact and educating people. It was clear that the latter side was much more numerous.[153]

Indeed, the socialist enthusiasts dominated the group, and very soon Eugeniusz Cękalski, a filmmaker, formulated START’s chief slogan: “We are fighting for socially constructive film.” In his opinion, creating films that fulfill certain social roles would eventually lead to educating viewers and creating anti-commercial film movements. Only then could art film be born.[154] Although START did not formulate the idea of an artist-filmmaker (Toeplitz only mentions that he/she must “search for new ways”), their message was clear: art film should contain certain messages impacting viewers; therefore, an artist-filmmaker’s task is to create such films.[155] Since the group was made up of socialists, it implied that those messages should be socialist in spirit. This, however, does not mean they blindly submitted to socialist-realist aesthetics after WWII. They would encounter many troubles with authorities as their vision of socially-constructive films did not go hand-in-hand with the visions of the communist government after 1945, which favored Soviet models of art.

Cękalski also openly delineated his “issues” with Western filmmakers. Although he admitted that Pabst and Clair did wonders to raise the level of world cinematography, their productions nevertheless were improving only film form, while “the content still remains shallow and trivial.”[156] Such an accusation brings to mind not only Irzykowski’s criticism of Epstein and Delluc, but also, the attack on the French New Wave and *auteur* productions almost thirty years later (Chapter Three). And in fact, Cękalski together with Toeplitz and other former START members would

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153. “Z jednej strony stanęli zwolennicy „sztuki dla sztuki”, zwolennicy zachodnio-europejskich – „izmów” awangardowych. Z drugiej strony ci, którzy widzieli w sztuce filmowej narzędzie Jerzy Toeplitz, “Nasze spotkania (1952),” in *Spotkania z X muza*, ed. Jerzy Toeplitz (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1960), p. 143.

154. “walczymy o film społecznie użyteczny,” Ibid., p. 143.

155. “Poszukiwanie nowych dróg”. Jerzy Toeplitz, “O polską sztukę,” in *Spotkania z X muza* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1960), p. 101.

156. Eugeniusz Cękalski, “Przyszłość filmu,” *Kurier Polski*, 1933.

often appear on the pages of the most popular Polish film weekly *Film,* publishing articles criticizing the French *nouvelle vague* in the 1950s.

Cękalski not only formulated START's manifesto but also wrote the opening article in the first issue of *Art Film*, the journal founded by the Themersons in 1937. The title of the piece already sounds like a program: "New Roads for the Development of Cinema," and is printed in two languages, Polish and English. Right in the first paragraph, Cękalski (using somewhat pompous language similar to that of communist officials), states: "Cinema has become the elementary spiritual nutriment to the young, the commoner, the laborer, the unemployed. The ethical and aesthetic comprehension of the masses is being formed by the cinema."[157] After highlighting the power of moving pictures, Cękalski then goes on to praise English avant-garde filmmakers because they represent a cinema which devotes its thoughts to "an artistic, educational and cultural cinema, a cinema for common rooms, clubs and associations." Once again, young Cękalski formulates the ideal of art film that has educational properties. To reach that level, the film industry must be state-controlled; Cękalski openly admires the fact that the "English avant-garde works creatively for state institutions," most likely referencing the GPO Film Unit which was a part of the UK General Post Office.[158] These statements – clearly socialist – not only highlighted the path which Polish film should take in order to raise the level of domestic productions, but also was the reason why former START members were appointed the heads of cinematography by the communist government in post-WWII Poland.

Jerzy Toeplitz subscribed to Cękalski's ideas as he too advocated socially-constructive productions. In his review of Themersons' *Europe,* he appreciated the formalistic beauty of the couple's film, but at the same time remarked: "Too much formalism – this is a serious and dangerous mistake."[159] And Toeplitz's opinion mattered. In fact, as early as 1933, in one of the articles published in *Polish Courier*

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157. Eugeniusz Cękalski, "New Roads to Development of Cinema," no. 1 (1937), p. 8.

158. Ibid., p. 11.

159. "Za dużo formalizmu – to poważny i niebezpieczny błąd," Jerzy Toeplitz, "..Europa."

(*Kurier Polski*), Toeplitz responded to the attacks of the film journalist who published a highly critical piece on Toeplitz's alleged professional arrogance and his critical attitude toward film producers. The journalist called Toeplitz "the self-appointed pope of the Avant-Garde" and a "vague doctrinaire."[160] Even these insults indicate that Toeplitz's position in film circles was important, and indeed he was very active and did not restrain himself from criticizing the profit-oriented film industry. Toeplitz's open criticism of the profit-driven market resonated quite strongly with Soviet notions of the time – and that was not seen favorably. For most Poles, after the declaration of independence in 1918 identification with anything related to Russia was seen as unpatriotic; the Russians were the "cruel invaders who occupied Poland for over a century." As with Mickiewicz, who was criticized decades earlier for spending time in Russian company, Toeplitz is accused of "raving about Soviet films – even about those promoting communism."[161] The anti-Russian sentiments were rooted deeply enough in Polish consciousness as to doom anyone praising Russian art as anti-patriotic. Not without reason, Wanda Jakubowska claims that the START group was dissolved because it promoted socialist ideology in the Soviet fashion; the START members, who happily organized the screenings of the films of Pudovkin, Eisenstein, and Vertov, as they admired them enormously, had to report themselves to the police after each screening.[162] The group was under the Polish authorities' discreet surveillance as Soviet sympathizers – and thanks to that, they later got the chance to lead postwar cinematography. After World War II, politics, rather than anything else, determined the path of film art in Poland.

The Polish interwar government was suspicious of the START group: its members, rather than joining in efforts to strengthen the position of the newly established state, instead bought into Soviet ideas of internationalism. While START members were interested in the social and political role of film, what they lacked in their dedication to Polish matters was Polishness itself. Just like Mickiewicz (before he was monopolized by patriotic circles) promoted the idea of equality among nations, so the START members advocated internationalism.

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[160] "Pragnąłbym tylko raz na zawsze zdemaskować samozwańczego papieża awangardy …"; „Mętny doktryner," Jerzy Toeplitz, "Tolerancja czy krytyka?," *Kurier Polski*, no. January (1933).

[161] "Toeplitz zachwycający się filmami sowieckimi, nawet temi komunizującemi," Ibid.

[162] Biskupski, "Ukąszeni przez film," pp. 2–3.

Not without importance is the fact that both Toeplitz and Ford were Jewish. Ford in his prewar cinematic career directed two films devoted to Jews: *Sabra* (also known as *Halutism*, 1933) depicting the Jewish-Arab conflict and *Children Must Laugh* (*Mir kumen on*, 1936), a production in Yiddish, which was banned altogether. Ford's life and artistic achievements are a testimony to his belief in the social potential of film. While Toeplitz and Cękalski were not major figures in both the START group and postwar cinematography, the person with the most power – and the most tragic victim of political shifts in twentieth century Poland – was Ford. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Ford fled from Nazi occupation to the Eastern part of Poland; he served in the Soviet-organized Polish People's Army, and was promoted to the rank of colonel. Stalin liked him – immediately after the war Ford became the head of the Polish Film Institution, and later, a professor at the Łódz Film School; he was almost "untouchable" until the 1968 anti-Semitic purges within the Communist Party, which resulted in his forced emigration, as he could no longer work in film and his name was banned from any publicity. Unable to cope with his émigré fate, and unable to work creatively, he eventually committed suicide in Florida. From the position of "tsar of Polish cinema" and the "authorities' pet," he was remembered with no more than two brief sentences printed in the Polish press after his death in 1980.[163]

Before the war, Ford directed a few shorts within the START group, and one of them, which showed the life of boys living by selling newspapers on the street, *The Street Legion* (*Legion ulicy*, 1932), won the *Kino* readers' award. Most of his prewar productions, unfortunately, have been lost, but critics praised their "authentic feel" and interesting landscapes. Ford was not afraid of exploring difficult issues, and this

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163. Janusz Wróblewski, "Aleksander Ford. Pan Pułkownik," January 2, 2009, http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/276731,1,ford-aleksander.read.

very often had serious consequences for his productions: his feature *Awakening* (*Przebudzenie*, 1934), depicting the story of three girls asserting their own independence, was heavily censored, while his Yiddish staged documentary *Children Must Laugh* (*Mir kumen on*, 1936), about children from the Medem Sanatorium, was banned altogether. In short, the authorities in Interwar free Poland considered Ford to be a very suspicious person, as his films did not show Poland in a favorable light. To contribute to Polish nation-building meant not only to talk about relevant matters for Polish society, but to only talk about some of them, i.e. the matters which were deemed patriotic. Ford's strong leaning toward Soviet socialism, together with his internationalism, were his "suspicious" characteristics before the war; this meant that although Poland finally was independent from external forces, it did not become free from nationalist agendas. In other words, art, and especially film, which required considerable financial resources, was still subject to national pressures and the "nation" was by no means open to harsh criticism of its everyday reality. Thus, postwar reviews of *auteur* films and the whole debate on the filmmaker's social role, was conditioned by the politics of the interwar period.

As far as Ford's war productions are concerned, they were openly propagandistic. He directed them marching along side of the Polish People's Army organized by the Soviets, which justifies their "message." In a letter to Stefan Themerson, Cękalski writes maliciously:

> You know, the second wave of destruction is passing through Poland, and it will be followed by liberation [from the Soviets]. Ford, Stasiu Wohl, Lutek Perski are marching alongside Berling's Army and Wandzia [Jakubowska]. They are making super-ultra-patriotic films – I saw the sample, very poor indeed – the best part of it was the opening credits as it included the START and SAF members only.[164]

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[164] "... w Polsce się druga fala zniszczenia przesuwa a po niej wyzwolenie. Ford, Stasio Wohl, Lutek Perski idą z Berlingiem i Wandzią – filmy robią super-ultra-patriotyczne, widziałem próbkę, bardzo słaba, najlepsze były napisy – sami członkowie Startu i SAF'u." Letter from Eugeniusz Cękalski to Stefan Themerson, July 20th, 1944. I accessed the original letter at the Themerson Archive in London.

Apart from recording speeches of communist doctrinaires, however, Ford also caught glimpses of the merciless reality of war. He completed a documentary, *Majdanek – The Cemetery of Europe* (*Majdanek – cmentarzysko Europy*, 1945), a graphic account of Nazi atrocities in the Majdanek concentration camp. Nevertheless, Ford's amicable relationships with the political elites after the war were always marked by struggles over censorship. It turned out that Ford was too controversial for both the pro-Soviet government, and the Polish underground interested in liberation. Despite his power and connections, the communist party did not like his films: he had to cut out many scenes in *Border Street* (*Ulica graniczna*, 1947) because they were judged to be too anti-Polish in spirit, while *The Eighth Day of the Week* (*Ósmy dzień tygodnia*, 1958) was shelved and was eventually premiered over twenty years later. Ford's films were too critical of contemporary realities and did not depict happy *tovariches* in a merry socialist country. His postwar films (perhaps with the exception of *Chopin's Youth – Młodość Chopina*, 1952 – which was directed in a socialist realist fashion, and *Knights of the Teutonic Order – Krzyżacy*, 1960 – a historic superproduction), just like his interwar films, depicted social issues prevalent in Poland. But during this period his films were too daring for both the Soviet-run communist government and pro-Polish nationalists. Ford's cinematic career was marked by his long-lasting dedication to exploring social issues, rather than developing a sophisticated cinematic style. Whereas Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Irzykowski and the Themersons swung back and forth between the Western model of unrestrained creation, and the responsibility to spresent the Polish positions, Ford left aside aesthetic concerns in favor of film's utilitarian functions, not necessarily advocating for any Polish agenda to recover true autonomy.

While Ford and Toeplitz bore the consequences of political shifts in communist PRL (they both had to leave the country after 1968), there was one more notable START member who did not stop believing in communist doctrines but was almost completely erased by history: Wanda Jakubowska. Recent efforts to "de-Stalinize" one of the first female directors in the film history can finally shed some light on

Jakubowska's impact on shaping national Polish cinematography. In her book Monika Talarczyk-Gubała describes the filmmaker as a prewar supporter of socialism, a doctrine that had very little in common with Stalinist ideology.[165] The fact that allegedly Stalin himself wept over the script of her film *The Last Stage* (*Ostatni etap*, 1947), depicting women's fate in the Auschwitz concentration camp (where Jakubowska was also imprisoned), does not mean that she uncritically followed the Soviet leader. Talarczyk-Gubała sees Jakubowska as more of a woman who had to overcome incredible challenges in order to direct films in a male-dominated industry. Unlike the self-centered Ford, she had never used her connections to authority for her own benefit, but to support younger filmmakers.[166] What is more important here, however, is that Jakubowska's life and art were an attempt to reconcile criticism with affirmation of reality in the current system, rather than oscillation between art free from any obligation and socially constructive productions. For Jakubowska, like Ford, had always believed that art, and especially cinema, should have its political influence. While it is impossible to judge whether she acquired this attitude before the war (she had completed one film before 1939, *On the Niemen*, but it has been lost), her long postwar cinematic career left no doubt about her sympathies. With the exception of the 1947 film *Last Stage*, all her later productions bore very typical traits of socialist realist aesthetics and ideology. *The Soldier of Victory* (*Żołnierz zwycięstwa*, 1953), *Contemporary Story* (*Historia współczesna*, 1960) and *The White Mazurka* (*Biały mazur*, 1979) prove that Jakubowska remained faithful to her socialist values. As Tadeusz Sobolewski remarks, Jakubowska's life may be a tribute to female independence and strength, but her films do not go beyond typical ideological productions.[167] There is a

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165. Małgorzata Sadowska, "Babcia polskiego kina - artystka czy komunistyczny politruk?," *Newsweek*, February 4, 2015, http://kultura.newsweek.pl/wanda-jakubowska-babcia-polskiego-kina-artystka-czy-politruk-,artykuly,356442,1.html.

166. Barbara Hollender, "Wanda Jakubowska, 'Niepoprawny Komuch,'" February 25, 2013, http://www.rp.pl/artykul/940422.html?p=1.

167. Tadeusz Sobolewski, "Wanda Jakubowska: socrealistka, komunistka, feministka. Biografia 'babci polskiego kina,'" *wyborcza.pl*, accessed October 11, 2016, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75410,17712562,Wanda_Jakubowska__socrealistka__komunistka__feministka_.html.

line published by *Political Critique* on Jakubowska's legacy that best describes the filmmaker's "in-betweeness," or rather her belonging to two different worlds: "Her professional career embraces two epochs in cinema: prewar and postwar. They include both the avant-garde and socialist realism: the avant-garde in its critical approach toward the social system and socialist realism which – on the contrary – celebrates the system's new order."[168]

It is clear that Jakubowska – just like other START members – had no doubt that a filmmaker's task was to fulfill some kind of social role. What is important here is the fact that the leftist ideology that shaped them laid the foundation for the structures of the postwar national film industry. It was no longer a matter of aesthetic dispute, but about a political platform where different ideologies tried to surpass one another. In the state-run cinematography, organized around Film Units, which "forced" film specialists to collaborate on certain productions, Western debates on auteurism resonated rather strangely. What is more, the enthusiasts of socialism, such as the START members, were considered by many after the war to be the "enemies" of Poland since they supposedly sided with the Soviets. But if this were true, how could they have educated the next generation of filmmakers such as Wajda, Munk and Kawalerowicz, who did not readily subscribe to communist ideology, but tried to subvert it? Perhaps what Dorota Skotarczak writes about Toeplitz is true of other START members, as well as of the Polish Film School directors: that his career is an example of pragmatic attitudes toward socialist reality.[169] To put it differently, unlike writing novels, making films was a huge enterprise requiring considerable financial resources – and if one wanted to make them, he/she had to cleverly play with the authorities.

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168. "Jej zawodowa biografia obejmuje dwie epoki kina: przedwojenne i powojenne, w tym awangardę i socrealizm, czyli dwa kierunki XX wieku budujące programową relację między sztuką i polityką: awangarda w jej wymiarze krytycznym wobec społecznego ładu, socrealizm – przeciwnie, afirmującym nowy porządek," Monika Talarczyk-Gubała, "Wanda Jakubowska: Paskudna? Niewygodna?," *Krytyka Polityczna*, November 10, 2014, http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/film/20141110/wanda-jakubowska-od-nowa.

169. Dorota Skotarczak, "Profesor Jerzy Toeplitz w świetle zródeł IPN," Annales. Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska Lublin, LXVI, no. 2 (2011), pp. 147–57.

There is one more important thing when it comes to the START members: they disrupted the never-ending oscillation between “art for art’s sake,” and the social utility of art. In the film medium, they left no doubt that cinematic form matters insofar as it conveys important social and political issues. Making their films in socialist realist fashion does not necessarily mean that they blindly followed Stalinist leadership; rather, it gave them the chance to finally make socially constructive films, which would move Polish cinematography away from cheap and silly dramas, which defined prewar Polish cinematography. They truly believed that the beauty of art lies in enlightening people; that “art for art’s sake” is not interested in “unveiling the truth.” As I demonstrated earlier, this notion of art existing for something greater, something closer to the core of things, had dominated Polish arts since the period of Romanticism. Why, then, did the START filmmakers not end up in the league of auteurs in the 1950s? The answer is simple: while they were busy praising the constructive faculties of film, they neglected film form, which resulted in mediocre productions. Certainly, one should not think of them as only “devoted communists.” Nevertheless, it was the next young generation of Polish filmmakers that was able to create aesthetically unorthodox films that fulfilled an important mission: to demythologize the Soviet view of Polish history and politics. And that is the point where Mickiewicz and Słowacki, the two Polish *wieszcze,* shake hands with the *wieszcze* of Polish filmography – Wajda and Konwicki.