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“A GENERATION” AND “KATYŃ” BY ANDRZEJ WAJDA AS TWO VARIANTS OF AN AFFIRMATIVE VISION OF HISTORY

Abstract

Andrzej Wajda's films are interesting and serious historical narratives, which enter in dialog both with academic historiography and with other forms of familiarization with the past. Some of Wajda's historical films are part of the paradigm of the affirmative vision of history. It is a vision that focuses on creating the positive picture of the bygone world, on showing those elements of the past that a given community recognizes as glorious and heroic, worth imitating, commemorating, and honoring, which can be the object of pride or even worship. The affirmative vision of history belittles, leaves in the background or omits all those themes from the past that fall outside positive evaluation for various reasons and could distort a consistent favorable picture of the past of a community. In the present article I would like to examine from the comparative perspective of two films, “A Generation [*Pokolenie*]” (1954) and “Katyń” (2007). The comparison between Andrzej Wajda's two films made in the space of fifty years shows that despite the fact that the two pictures were produced in entirely different historico-cultural contexts, using different film styles, the two screen stories present the affirmation of diametrically disparate versions of history, it is the dramatic strategies for and techniques of affirmation of history that remain the same in either case.

Key words: Andrzej Wajda, Generation, Katyń, Historical film, Visual History, affirmative vision of history

Andrzej Wajda's films are interesting and serious historical narratives, which enter in dialog both with academic historiography and with other forms of familiarization with the past. The director's historical pictures are characterized by versatility and diversity in respect of the presented historical issues and the stylistic forms of visualization of the past on screen.¹

¹ On the subject, see: Piotr Witek, *Andrzej Wajda jako historyk. Metodologiczne studium z historii wizualnej* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2016); On Andrzej Wajda's cinema, see:

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In the present article I would like to examine from the comparative perspective of two films, "A Generation [*Pokolenie*]" (1954) and "Katyń" (2007), created in different historico-cultural contexts and to analyze the strategies through which they become part of the pattern of the affirmative vision of history.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Films made in the framework of the affirmative model show the past mainly from the angle of so-called great historical events and figures (wars, battles, uprisings, politicians, generals, legendary commanders, etc.); they less often try to present the daily life of the heroes of great history and so-called ordinary people.

In Andrzej Wajda's debut film "A Generation" (1954) there are no great historical figures known in historiography. On the contrary, the director focuses on showing on screen the fates of ordinary anonymous people, workers from lower classes. The action of the film is set during the World War Two in the working class milieu in Warsaw's slums in the Budy suburb and in Warsaw itself. The vicissitudes of the main characters were placed by the director in the context and logic of the large-scale historical event, which was the global, six-year-long armed conflict and the German occupation of a part of Europe, including Poland. The film presents the history of a group of young people, members of the communist underground. The storyline of the film is the political and war initiation of the main hero, Stach, who, thanks to an experienced carpenter Sekuła and a young Union of Fighting Youth activist, Dorota, joins the People's Guard. The picture shows the formation of a new People's Guard group, commanded by Stach, nom de guerre "Bartek". The group members take part in armed actions to help Jewish insurgents escape from the burning Warsaw Ghetto.

In Wajda's film, the war, a large-scale event, redefines the attitudes and behavior of the heroes, and influences their decisions. It transforms ordinary workers into partisans, fighters for a just cause. It makes the daily life of the

main characters filled not only with play and hooliganism but first and foremost with underground activity and with thinking about the fate of the workers. Even Stach's love of Dorota is subordinated to the logic of war and struggle for the just cause defined by communist ideology. Their intimate meetings are filled with talks about politics and fight. Thus the war and war-related experiences make Stach an ideologically shaped and class conscious communist. In the film, the war as a great historical event is the circumstance conducive to the relatively fast ideological and political formatting of personality, to creating "a new communist man".²

Andrzej Wajda's "Katyń" (2007) presents the story taking place during the World War Two, and shortly afterwards. In the case of this film we also have to do with a historical event of great significance shown on screen. Like the film "A Generation", "Katyń" does not show the history of great historical figures. We see on screen the fates of anonymous persons, in whom the experiences of many Polish women and men are concentrated. Unlike "Pokolenie", the film focuses on the intelligentsia circles. In the film Wajda centers on how the main female characters: general's wife Róża, Agnieszka – Lieutenant Piotr Błaszowski's sister, Anna – the wife of Cavalry Captain Andrzej, who are waiting with hope for the return of their brothers and husband from the war, and learn from the Germans about the massacre of Polish officers perpetrated by the NKVD in Katyń. Almost naturalistically and shockingly, the director shows the horror of the murder of defenseless people, who had to be shot and killed in the back of the head only because they were the intellectual elite of the Polish pre-war society. With the end of the war and the advent of the communist system, the heroines witness the change of the version of the Katyń events. According to the new, government-decreed version, it was not the Russians but the Germans who committed the crime, killing the Polish officers by shooting them in the back of the head. The Katyń affair becomes a taboo subject. The binding official version of the events accuses the Germans of the crime. The women fight with great determination to expose the actual perpetrators of the Katyń massacre.

"Katyń", a reckoning with the concealed past falsified for decades, at the same time shows how tragically the war determines the fortunes and redefines the lives of people who have experienced it. The war with its consequences

² For interesting studies on the film "A Generation" see: Janina Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda. History, Politics...*, 36–44; Bronisława Stolarska, „Pokoleniowe doświadczenie sacrum. O debiucie Andrzeja Wajdy”, in *Filmowy Świat Andrzeja Wajdy...*, 233–251; Piotr Witek, „«Pokolenie» Andrzeja Wajdy jako narracja historyczna”, in *Historiografia w kontekstach nieoczekiwanych? Wobec zmiany i ciągłości: pejzaże współczesnego dyskursu historycznego*, eds. Ewa Solska, Piotr Witek, Marek Woźniak (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2017).

causes the daily life of Wajda's heroines to be filled first with waiting and hope, next with pain and frustration, and then with the struggle for truth. The WW2 as a great event is shown in the film not only as a circumstance conducive to mass crimes but also as a circumstance conducive to creating a big lie in accordance with the principle that it is victors who write history. The war in Wajda's film is also the time during which the moral attitudes of the main characters are verified.

Films in the affirmative trend focus on emphasizing and glorifying the fight for the freedom of the country and community, the suffering, martyrdom and heroism of representatives of a given community; they highlight and exaggerate their knightly and military virtues, underline their faithfulness to principles, indomitability and perseverance, cunning and abilities to adapt to the existing socio-political conditions (e.g. the organization of the underground army and state), glorify patriotic attitudes in accordance to the idea of patriotism respected in a given group, as well as positively assess specific national, religious, political and ideological values.

In Wajda's "A Generation", what is important is first – the fight, second – who wages the fight, and third – what cause the fight is waged for. The film presents a group of communists. The highest in hierarchy in terms of experience, knowledge and competence is the old carpenter Sekuła. He is the one who knows Marx's writings, thereby becoming Stach's mentor in the latter's political initiation. The next one in hierarchy in terms of mastering communist ideas is Dorota, a Union of Fighting Youth activist. Stach and his friends from the workshop are candidates who have to be taught everything and to whom the communist understanding of the world has to be explained. Sekuła is Stach's ideological teacher. Dorota functions as a political tutor and confirms him in the rightness of the views taught to him by the old worker. Additionally, she introduces "Bartek (Stach)" to the arcana of the left-wing underground. Quick to learn, Stach makes his fellows from Berg's workshop follow him. This is how a unit of People's Guard fighters is set up.

In Wajda's film, there is strong emphasis on communist partisans as an organization actively fighting against the enemy. Glorification of their fight is presented in the picture both in declarations delivered from the screen by the heroes and in the actions they undertake as well as in the attitudes of individual characters, who have no doubts about its necessity and rightness (Stach, Dorota, Mundek, Jacek, Sekuła), and even if they do, they overcome them (Janek Krone).

In the scene presenting the secret meeting of a People's guard group, at which new members of the organization were sworn in, we can hear the speech by Dorota. The young activist speaks with conviction to the assembled boys and girls:

"The fight against the enemy's personnel and their transport is our most important task. (...) We are soldiers of the great army of the people fighting against the Nazi invasion for the sacred cause of freedom (...) The stone walls of the city are our partisan forest. We cruise

about this forest with a pistol in the hand. And if they tell you it is madness, answer that even if it is, it has to be so. There is no other way."³

Glorification of the fight and the goal is carried out here at least on two levels. First, the language Dorota uses in the speech refers to religious rhetoric. The aim of the fight of the film heroes is the sanctified cause of freedom understood first of all as the elimination of enslavement by the fascist Nazis, capitalism, former masters, etc.⁴ If the goal of the struggle is sacred, it thereby, as it were by feedback, sanctifies the fight as an action serving to achieve it. In the same way, the goal sanctifies those who strive to achieve it, i.e. the soldiers starting armed combat. What is more, the warriors starting the fight for this goal are representatives of the "great people's army", therefore they act in the interest of the people, they are the chosen ones ready to sacrifice their lives on the altar of freedom, which has the status of a sacred goal. Taking account of the fact that within the communist-defined vision of the world freedom can be realized only in communism, appropriate conditions should be created for it. Thus one can guess, because such a declaration is not explicitly made in the film, that the fight for freedom means at the same time the fight for the establishment of a communist Poland as a necessary *sine qua non* for the final and complete achievement of the goal. Second, we have here a reference to the "romantic" idea of fight at all costs.⁵ To abandon this road would mean giving up the realization of dreams about freedom.

The People's Guard boys are brave and heroic. This can be seen in their attitudes, declarations and actions. In one of the scenes Wajda shows Stach urging Janek Krone to join the People's Guard. When the latter excuses himself, explaining that he has to work and take care of his old ailing father, "Bartek" (i.e. Stach) responds to his attitude with aggression and anger, shouting that the communists fight. There is emphasis here once again that to communists it is the fight that is/should be most important. In addition to verbal declarations, the screen also shows armed actions in different scenes. Some activities by the newly recruited partisans tend to be risky, ill-considered and irresponsible. In one of the scenes we can see Stach taking an almost spontaneous decision with his friends to carry out an action against a German soldier, who had beaten him up in the timber mill. The next scenes show "Bartek" with Janek Krone going to the sleazy bar of Aunt Walerka in Budy, often frequented by a Volksdeutscher, who had beaten the boy – they take his gun from him and kill him. They are praised by Dorota for having captured the gun, whereas they are not severely reproached for the armed action in their own suburb, which meant breaking the rules of the Underground. After all, the action was successful. The young

³ An excerpt from the soundtrack.

⁴ On the understanding of freedom by the German philosopher and theorist of communism, Karl Marx, see Karol Marks, *Kapitał*, t. 3, part. 2 (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1959), 400–401.

⁵ On the romantic concept of fight, see Maria Janion and Maria Żmigrodzka, *Romantyzm i historia* (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2001), 74–75.

fighters succeeded, proved themselves in combat, showed their courage and boldness. Stach and his friends also take part in more serious armed action. One example is the help to Jewish insurgents fighting against the Germans in the Warsaw Ghetto. In the scene taking place in a Warsaw street, Stach's squad consisting of Kaczor, Mundek, Jacek and Janek Krone successfully evacuates insurgents escaping through the sewers. During this mission the group engages in a skirmish with German soldiers. As a result, Janek Krone is killed after drawing the attention and attack by the Germans, thus enabling his friends and Jewish insurgents to safely escape. In this case, we also witness an example of courage, heroism and sacrifice of the young partisans. Especially spectacular is the attitude of Janek Krone, who, having doubts about joining the struggle, finally takes part in it and, like a trapped romantic hero, he sacrifices his life.

The characters in Wajda's film cannot be denied cunning and go-aheadness. Good examples are two situations. One, when Stach discovers that in Berg's carpentry shop there is a secret weapons storeroom of a Home Army cell. Thanks to this knowledge, he steals a pistol from the storeroom, which he then uses in armed actions. In this way, thanks to Stach's cunning and perceptiveness, the weapons storeroom of the competing underground organization becomes a store from which People's Guard partisans can obtain additional weapons. The other situation is the scene, in which "Bartek's" group seizes a German entrepreneur's truck standing in the street without a single shot being fired. The car is indispensable for evacuating Jewish insurgents fleeing from the burning Ghetto through the sewers. In this case, the young People's Guard partisans are presented as cunning, go-ahead and first of all effective fighters.

Positive values are also assigned in the film to communist ideology. A good example of the effort to glorify the communist understanding of the world is the scene, in which carpenter Sekuła, referring to Marx, explains to Stach what the exploitation of workers by capitalists consist in. Listening to the dialog of the two heroes, we learn that the capitalist Berg pays Stach for one working hour whereas the latter works eight hours. This is a rather childish and populist interpretation of the economic calculus, nevertheless influencing the imagination of the audience not familiar with the principles of economy, especially in the 1950s, when the film was made. Communism is presented here as a formation in the framework of which the social injustice done by capitalism is accurately diagnosed and exposed, and as the only system capable of fighting for social justice and freedom for the people.

In the film "Katyń" the director, by showing the history of the crime committed on the Polish officers in Katyń by NKVD and the process of falsifying it, demonstrates in his picture the suffering and martyrdom of the Poles, and emphasizes their knightly virtues, indomitability, perseverance, honor, faithfulness to principles, and heroism. In Andrzej Wajda's "Katyń" almost all main

characters – the military, civilians, women, men, the young and the old – have the set of the above-described characteristics.

Andrzej Wajda strongly stresses the knightly attributes of the Polish officers – prisoners of war imprisoned by the Russians after the attack on Poland on 17 September 1939. In the first scenes the director shows that the officers, before they were transported to the sites of execution, were not strictly guarded, which created favorable conditions for escape. In one of the scenes, we see Anna, Cavalry Captain Andrzej's wife, come to the Polish soldiers kept war prisoners, meet her husband and ask him to escape, but he refuses, arguing that he is bound by the oath, which compels him to stay as a POW with his comrades in arms. When Anna comments that he had also vowed to her before God, he answers that their conversation makes no sense. Wajda thereby showed that one of the most important things to a Polish army officer was honor and being faithful to the oath towards the state and nation. In Wajda's film the conversation of the military officers in the camp of Kozielsk are imbued with heroic and patriotic rhetoric about fight and honor. The director appears to show that the vast majority of Polish officers retained in captivity the patriotic spirit and maintained high morale in accordance with the romantic cultural pattern⁶.

Wajda also make references in the film to the romantic mythology of Polish martyrdom in Siberia. In one scene he shows the Christmas Eve of Polish soldiers in Russian captivity. The director's picture evokes the presentations of insurgents deported to Siberia, for example the painting by Jacek Malczewski "Christmas in Siberia", whose tragic fate is also the experience of the Polish officers imprisoned in Kozielsk. In "Katyń", very interesting is the composition of the scene showing the Christmas Eve of the soldiers in Soviet captivity. Placed on a crane jib, the camera filming the bird's-eye view in different configurations, shows the officers assembled around the general making a speech in such a way that the group of the uniformed people forms a cross, which, in this context, seems to symbolize and indicate their soon-to-happen death.⁷

In Wajda's film there are also references to the idea of romantic messianism.⁸ In the initial sequence Anna is looking for her husband Andrzej among the wounded soldiers gathered in a church. Weronika, the daughter of Anna and Andrzej, recognizes her father's uniform on seeing a military coat covering a figure lying on the floor, over which a priest is praying. The picture of a man lying with his face covered on the ground usually means that we are dealing with someone already dead. Horrified, Ann runs to the lying person,

⁶ See Maria Janion, Maria Żmigrodzka, *Romantyzm i historia...*; Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska, *Historia i romantyzm. Szkic o twórczości Andrzeja Wajdy*, in *Kino polskie w trzynastu sekwencjach*, ed. Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska, Kraków: Rabid, 2005, 9–20.

⁷ On the symbolism of the cross, see: Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1990), 174–176.

⁸ On the idea of messianism, see: Maria Janion, *Czas formy otwartej* (Warszawa: PIW, 1984), 90; Andrzej Walicki, *Filozofia a mesjanizm. Studia z dziejów filozofii i myśli społeczno-religijnej romantyzmu polskiego* (Warszawa: PIW, 1970).

picks up the uniform, from under which the figure of crucified Christ emerges. In the scene in question, Wajda apparently equates Poland's fate with the fate of Christ and tries to communicate that Poland like Christ suffered and died but will rise from the dead. Poland's fall is part of the plan to save/liberate other nations, which, in a way, happened in 1989, when the Poles rose up and began the dismantling of the communist bloc in Central-Eastern Europe, whereby Poland was reborn as a free country.

In the film, the director also shows the struggle waged by women against lies about the Katyń cases. The women are thereby presented as indomitable fighters for truth, dignity and honor.

The films made in the affirmative tone avoid, pass over or belittle, marginalize, and distort the themes in the history of a specific community that are morally ambiguous or embarrassing because they are in opposition to the affirmed interpretation of that history. If they present them, it is only to criticize them or assign them the role of a dramatic and historical alibi to lend credence to the promoted vision of history.

In "A Generation" we have to do with a presentation of the history of the communist underground members. There is also another clandestine organization in it, competing with the communist organization and using the name of the Polish Underground Army. In Wajda's film the formation that begins to fight against the German occupier is the People's Guard. Its members carry out retaliatory actions, obtain weapons, help Jewish insurgents from the Warsaw Ghetto, launch propaganda actions, build up the communist underground, attract new members to the resistance movement, and acquire political awareness. The Polish Underground Army is an indeterminate, suspicious group of people, conducting some business and actions somewhere on the periphery of the main theater of war, and which, although they gather weapons, does not undertake any armed actions. It follows thereby from the film that the People's Guard is the only and main force bearing the burden of fighting against Germans on its shoulders.

At this point it is worth dwelling for a while on the Polish Underground Army as presented in the film. In view of the historical context in which the action of the film takes place, and referring to the non-film historical knowledge, one can guess that what is meant is the Home Army subordinated to the Polish government in London. The academic historiography creates the picture of the Home Army as the largest combat formation in the occupied Poland: three hundred and several dozen thousand soldiers. It was an integral part of the Republic of Poland's Armed Forces and was originally meant to be a nationwide, non-party formation. Its task was to carry out the fight against the Germans to regain independence, to organize self-defense and to be prepared to rise up against the occupiers at the moment of their military collapse. The picture of the People's Guard/Army is somewhat different. It shows that it was a far less numerous armed formation with about a dozen or so thousand partisans, independent of the Home Army and the government in London, and subordinated to the Polish Workers' Party, aimed at cooperation with the Soviet Union. It set

itself the task of fighting against the occupier and of retaliatory measures. It also conducted activities hostile towards the Home Army.⁹

Thus, if in Wajda's film the appearance of the Polish Underground Army is a reference to the Home Army, we have here the reverse proportion in showing and assessing the participation of individual resistance movement formations in the fight against Germans. In "A Generation", the People's Guard is overvalued at the expense of the Home army. The way the Home Army is presented can be regarded as a model example of belittling and marginalizing its size, strength, actions and range of impact. It is also important in this context that the communist partisans appear in the film under the official aegis of the People's Guard, known from historiography, while the competing resistance movement is not presented under its official name of the Home Army but as an enigmatic Polish Underground Army. The avoidance of the name of Home Army and the use of the term: the Polish Underground Army to refer to the competing, generally known underground organization can be recognized as an example of the device of anonymization, and thereby of passing over its existence in silence.

The communist propaganda in the early People's Poland presented the Home Army as a reactionary and hostile formation, which collaborated with the Germans and avoided fighting.¹⁰ The symbol of that propaganda is one of the best-known anti-Home-Army posters "Giant and the Bespittled Dwarf of Reaction".¹¹ To the communists, the Home Army was a difficult and troublesome subject that could not fit in their promoted version of history. Hence the need to appropriately scale down this issue and adjust to the approved interpretation of history. Made in 1954, "A Generation" executed this task in an exemplary way.

In Andrzej Wajda's "Katyń" we have to do with a different situation. Here, such values as honor, martyrdom, suffering, courage and faithfulness to principles rooted in the Polish romantic myth are affirmed.¹² The director presents the

⁹ On the Home Army see: Tomasz Strzembosz, *Refleksje o Polsce i podziemiu 1939–1945* (Warszawa: Agencja Omnipres, 1990); Tomasz Strzembosz, *Rzeczpospolita Podziemna. Społeczeństwo polskie a państwo podziemne 1939–1945* (Warszawa: Krupski i S-ka, 2005); *Armia Krajowa. Szkice z dziejów Sił Zbrojnych Polskiego Państwa Podziemnego*, ed. by Krzysztof Komorowski (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 1999); Rafał Wnuk, *Polskie Państwo Podziemne, podziemie nacjonalistyczne, podziemie komunistyczne – próba sił*, [www.ohistorie.eu](http://ohistorie.eu) (<http://ohistorie.eu/2018/09/27/polskie-panstwo-podziemne-podziemie-nacjonalistyczne-podziemie-komunistyczne-proba-sil/>) (accessed: 20.12.2020).

¹⁰ On propaganda see: Michał Szulczewski, *Propaganda polityczna. Zarys problematyki teoretycznej* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1972).

¹¹ See Mariusz Mazur, *O człowieku tendencyjnym. Obraz nowego człowieka w propagandzie komunistycznej w okresie Polski Ludowej i PRL. 1944–1956* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2009), 302–317.

¹² See Maria Janion, Maria Żmigrodzka, *Romantyzm i historia...*

themes that are in conflict with the romantic vision, but he appears to do so in order to criticize them. Look at some examples.

A good exemplification can be the scene showing the conversations of the Polish officers in the Kozielsk camp. Their discussions are filled with heroic and patriotic rhetoric about fighting, honor, and sacrifice. A critical attitude to the existing situation is expressed by one person only – a young air force lieutenant – Piotr Baszkowski, who accuses the government and the high command of betrayal. In the coherent picture of Polish officers as principled patriots there appears a flaw – this young officer. At this point, one might think that the director introduces a theme of criticism and reckoning. Similar exchanges of critical opinions were present in his “The Sewer” and “Ashes and Diamonds”. The heroes of both films frequently express polemical comments addressed to their superiors. However, this belief does not hold up with the development of the action. In the further part of the film we see that other officers immediately reprimand the lieutenant and call him to order. They appear to treat his behavior as a sign of moral weakness, point out his defeatism and yielding to the influence of Soviet propaganda. The critical voice of the young officer vanishes in the shower of patriotic platitudes. In the theme in question the director thus seems to show that critical opinions about the then situation, even if they did appear, were in a definite minority, whereas a vast majority of the Polish officers, in keeping with the brave heroic standard, stayed in captivity in the patriotic spirits and retained high morale. The fact that the young officer’s critical opinion was shouted down by the followers of principled patriotism and it fell silent can be interpreted as the criticism of this kind of attitude under the then circumstances.

As the film offers an example of a barely signaled critical attitude towards principled patriotism, and because it appears vestigially, it apparently does not break the coherence of the martyrological-heroic vision of history affirmed on screen.

The scene during which the young officer accuses the government of betrayal can also be seen in a different way, as a dramatic device aimed at persuading the audience that the film presents not only a martyrological-heroic interpretation of history, but it is also an attempt to show diverse contradictory arguments within it. This device, it seems, is meant to simulate that the film is not one-dimensional. Consequently, the introduction into the film of a critical theme, which was thinned down in the flood of patriotic rhetoric, can be interpreted as a kind of alibi that is to lend credence to the affirmed martyrological-heroic vision of history presented in Wajda’s “Katyń”.

In the foregoing context one more example is worth observing. In the Polish romantic myth there is no room for collaboration with the occupier. Cooperation with the enemy is out of line with the romantic system of values, and as such it is an embarrassing issue, which, if it appears, is criticized. This is the situation we have to do with in “Katyń”.

In the film there is a character – Irena, the sister of Piotr Baszkowski and of Agnieszka – a Warsaw Uprising soldier, a principled patriot. She is also a young

woman who, unlike her siblings, finds her place in the new Poland. She works as a state high school principal, being thereby an official strengthening the new regime. Her attitude towards the new order can be called pragmatic. She does not believe in the emergence of free Poland, being convinced that Poland will remain a Soviet province for a long time. Therefore, she sees no point in fighting a hopeless fight against the Soviets and the Poles who are in their service. She is strongly against young people giving up their lives for the country that cannot be saved. She accuses her sister of choosing the dead rather than the living and assesses her attitude as sick. She tries in vain to explain to her that since one cannot count on full independence, then it is necessary to build as much Polishness and freedom as one can within the existing conditions.

Irena's attitude in the film is criticized. In one of the scenes of a dialog between the sisters, the matters are brought to a head from the black and white perspective. In the scene of Irena's conversation with Agnieszka on the way to the cemetery, Wajda shows us that the only right attitude towards communism is the attitude of the latter. Anyone whose choice is like Irena's agrees to collaborate with murderers, and if so, s/he is jointly responsible for the committed and concealed crimes. In essence, the director leaves no choice to the audience watching the film. If the viewer identifies with the pragmatic attitude of the high school principal, this will mean s/he sides with the murderers. And if s/he identifies with Agnieszka's "romantic" attitude, this will mean that s/he is on the side of the victims. Essentially, it can be said that through the conflict between the two sisters Wajda subjects the viewer to a kind of moral blackmail.

The appearance of a hero like Irena, Agnieszka's sister, in the world full of characters-followers of principled patriotism may also function as a specific dramatic alibi in the screen narrative. Possibly, the character of the high school principal, like the scene of the dispute between the officers in Soviet captivity, was meant to somewhat soften the patriotic-martyrological tone of the presented history and make it a little more diversified, a history in which different arguments appear that can be justified in some way. Thus, the task of this alibi is to lend credence to the affirmed martyrological-heroic interpretation of history presented in the film.

Films of the affirmative trend show the past seriously – as drama. They avoid presenting the past events and communities in an ironic, grotesque, mocking and comic convention. Ironic, grotesque, or comic elements can appear in drama but they have to have a dramatic justification in a specific situation and cannot undermine the dramatic character of the historical narrative on screen.

"A Generation" presents history in a serious way. In the film we can see the highly difficult living conditions of the proletariat. Already in the first opening panoramic scene, the director shows the distant suburb of Budy near Warsaw, where workers live. The buildings look like makeshift mud huts, with poverty everywhere. The war is shown on screen as a difficult time of toughening up a new generation of Poles-communists, who wanted a different, more just Poland.

The Wajda-made film narrative presents a series of tragic events – the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, mass executions of the civil population by

Germans (in one of the scenes we can see Janek Krone walking along the street, in which the dead bodies of murdered civilians are hanging from roadside posts), death of friends. Individual scenes present the main characters experiencing dramatic situations. Already at the beginning of the film, during one of thieving escapades by Stach and his friends to rob German trains carrying coal to the east, one of his friends Zyzik is shot to death by a German watchman. Janek Krone, who decided to take part in the action of evacuating Jewish insurgents from the burning Ghetto, commits suicide after being surrounded by Germans. Soon after Janek's death, Gestapo officers come to Dorota's flat and arrest the girl. The drama of the presented situations is additionally emphasized by the symbolic compositions of individual scenes. Especially spectacular in this context is the scene of Janek Krone's death. The cornered man, in a dead end, climbs a handrail of the steps and jumps down from the last floor of the staircase. The spiral shape of the stairs highlights the dramatic situation of the cornered hero.

In "A Generation" there is one scene showing Stach's working day in Berg's carpentry shop. It is based on a formal device called a montage ellipsis. In several dynamic takes we can see scared and lost Stach running about the workshop, falling over, doing several things at a time, rushed by the shouting master craftsmen shown in close-up with twisted faces in cut-in shots, telling the boy to bring the accessories they need for their work. These takes are accompanied by dynamic, cheerful off-screen music to stress the pace of the events taking place on the screen. The whole scene, a metaphorical editing shortcut, symbolically, i.e. in a very compressed form, presents the standard working day and thereby a difficult time of a young worker learning his trade, exploited by the master carpenters. Owing to its composition, pace, music and Stach's grotesquely awkward behavior, the scene is of slapstick character, thus being funny to some extent. It introduces a little bit of humor to the dramatized narrative but it does not deconstruct the dramatic character of the story presented on screen.

While Wajda shows history in a serious way in "A Generation", he presents it in "Katyń" in an almost pathetic tone. Already at the beginning of the film, we can see the tragic experience of September 1939. Crowds of people are laboriously making their way over the bridge on the Bug. Some are running in panic from the Germans to the east, others to the west from the Soviets.

The subsequent sequences are even more dramatic. The film shows Polish officers in Soviet captivity. They have an opportunity to escape but they do not because they believe that this should not be done on account of the respected system of values, and that they may still be useful in this war.¹³ They do not

¹³ For a thorough analysis of the attitudes of Polish officers in Andrzej Wajda's film see: Piotr Witek, *Andrzej Wajda jako historyk...*

know what fate awaits them. The viewer, who has the historical knowledge, knows what the end of this decision will be, that it means death. Thus the situation presented on screen appears even more dramatic to the viewer. In the ending of the film the director shows in an almost naturalistic way the brutal murder of the Polish officers by the NKVD. Bent over a pit, with their hands tied to the back, the Polish soldiers are shot in the back of the head. The bodies are thrown into a mass grave and covered with soil by a bulldozer. Others, including the general, are dragged from the prison van, hauled into a cellar in the NKVD building and also shot in the back of the head from a pistol. Without leniency, the camera shows the blood of the killed soldiers splashing over the walls of the dungeon. Death is omnipresent in the film. In Krakow's streets, a young Home Army soldier Tadeusz is killed chased by Polish soldiers from Berling's Army after he tore off a communist propaganda poster from a poster pillar in front of their eyes. Lieutenant Jerzy, who survived the Katyń massacre by a coincidence, joined Berling's Army, where he was promoted to captain's rank, took part in the practice of lending credence to the Katyń lie, and ultimately, unable to bear the burden of war experiences, commits suicide.

Likewise dramatic is the fate of the women, who first wait with hope for their husbands, sons, and brothers. During the occupation, they do not, like the general's wife Róża, yield to German pressure and refuse to participate in the Germans' propagandistic use of the Katyń massacre. Shortly after the war, like Agnieszka, Lieutenant Błaszowski's sister, general's wife Róża, they fight against the Katyń lie fabricated by the communist authorities. For this fight, Agnieszka is arrested by the UB (Security Office). Very telling in this context is the example of Anna, who did not find her husband's name on the Katyń victims list as a result of a mistake, and believed the longest that Andrzej was alive and would return. She learned about his death in rather dramatic circumstances from Major Jerzy, now in the Kosciuszko (i.e. Berling's Army). His name was not on the list of victims, which is why she was happy to see him. She believed that since Jerzy was alive, so was probably Andrzej. Unfortunately, Major Jerzy told her that the cavalry captain was killed in Katyń, and the mistake stemmed from the fact that he was dressed in a sweater with the major's name.

In "Katyń" Andrzej Wajda presents a dramatic story, in which all the main heroes experience a tragic fate: they are killed, arrested and persecuted by the authorities, have to cope with the lie about the death of their next of kin, agree to collaborate with the new system, or are left lonely. In the film there is no room even for a bit of humor, nor is there distance from the past. Everything we watch on screen is presented in a naturalist way, almost with deadly seriousness. While watching the film, one has the impression of taking part in the events, of witnessing them. Wajda achieves the serious, dramatic, almost pathetic tone of the story not only by shocking the audience through tragic situations in which the heroes are entangled but also by saturating the film narrative with symbols from the national-martyrological imaginarius, which strongly impact the viewer's emotions and imagination. In the film there are symbolic references to the romantic messianic idea, according to which Poland is the crucified Christ of

nations, an innocent victim, which will liberate other nations by her own death and suffering. In “Katyń” the symbolism of the cross is ubiquitous. The cross is present in many scenes in various configurations. For example, in one of the scenes a short view appears showing a cross without Christ’s figure on the front wall of a church. The empty cross can be interpreted as the symbol of the world gripped by moral decline¹⁴, but it can be also recognized as the symbol of abandoned, left and lonely Poland torn apart by two bloodthirsty totalitarianisms.

Films of the affirmative trend are characterized by a distinct division into positive and negative heroes.¹⁵ Positive characters are those on the just side of the dispute and ready to sacrifice their lives for the espoused values, community, organization, nation, and the state. Negative characters in the films of the trend are individuals on the wrong side of the dispute, only looking after their own or narrowly understood (tribal) group interest, reluctant to sacrifice themselves for the whole community and persons outside it, responsible for the defeat of a given community (nation, organization, the state) and for persecution of society.

In “A Generation” the division into positive and negative heroes is very distinct. The first group encompasses people coming from the lowest classes: workers-communists. The positive traits of the true patriot communist are focused in the characters of Sekuła, Dorota and Stach, Janek Krone, Mundek and Jacek. Dorota is a young, beautiful, politically conscious woman involved in the underground and committed to the fight for the just cause, who is the leader of the group of young People’s Guard members. She is their political tutor and their authority. She also has plenty of courage. One of the scenes shows her carrying out agitation in the German-established school for workers, where Stach attends, so that young workers would join the communist resistance movement. In the same scene, the film director highlights the cunning and underground experience of the heroine. Right after the agitation action ends, Dorota vanishes in the crowd. Stach, who ran out after her with Jacek to talk to, could not find her. Dorota is not only someone like a “political officer”, whose task is to mold the ideological world view of the People’s Guard soldiers. She knows guns and can use them. This is perfectly seen in the scene taking place in the ruins of a brickyard, where Stach presented his combat group to her. When the girl asked him to show her the pistol taken from the Germans, Janek told her to be careful because “this shoots”. Undeterred by the condescending treatment, she took the German parabellum and looking straight in Janek’s eye, she took

¹⁴ „(...) the empty cross becomes the symbol of the world gripped by moral decline (...)”. See: Monika Nahlik, „Katyń w czasach popkultury”, in *Kino polskie jako kino narodowe*, eds. Tadeusz Lubelski, Maciej Stroiński (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2009), 331.

¹⁵ On different ways of constructing a hero see e.g. Agnieszka Tambor, “Przemiany bohatera w powojennym kinie polskim – od Supermana do Wonder Woman”, *Postscriptum Polonistyczne* 2, 20 (2017), 193–205; *Człowiek z ekranu. Z antropologii postaci filmowej*, eds. Mariola Jankun-Dopartowa (Kraków: Arcana, 1996); Grażyna Stachówna, „Równanie szeregow. Bohaterowie filmów socrealistycznych 1949–1955,” in *Człowiek z ekranu...*, 7–28.

the gun to pieces and reassembled it instantly and so skillfully as if she used it every day. Dorota has one more positive trait, which distinguishes her from the other underground members. She is an educated girl, who speaks foreign languages. We find this out for the first time in the scene showing the swearing-in of new People's Guard soldiers in her flat, during which, when making a speech, she uses a quotation in German. In another, during a conversation with Stach also in her flat, they both hear a German-sung song coming from outside the window. The girl translates for Stach what the text of the song is about. Dorota is not devoid of human feelings. On the contrary, as a young girl she falls in love with Stach, who is charmed with her. In Wajda's film Dorota is a woman devoid of negative characteristics.

Stach as a character is also created in a similar way. He is also a young, good-looking, nice boy with a charming smile. At the beginning of the film he is shown as a lazybones spending time playing a knife game with his buddies and as a hoodlum stealing coal from trains. Since, however, they were German trains, he justified his stealing escapades before himself as a patriotic activity directed against the occupier. In such a context it is difficult to treat Stach as an ordinary thief or hoodlum. It can be even concluded that this does not influence the assessment of him as a positive character. On the contrary, if we accept Stach's self-justification, the action of this young boy should deserve praise. Stach is a sensitive, somewhat hot-headed, courageous, intelligent and valiant young man. Despite his lack of education, he quickly learns the communist vision of the world expounded on by Sekuła. He understands what the exploitation of workers by capitalists consists in. He identifies with the acquired ideas and considers himself a communist. Influenced by Sekuła and Dorota, he enthusiastically commits himself to the communist resistance underground. He organizes a combat team and takes part in armed actions. He falls in love with Dorota. Stach is a character that undergoes transformation with the development of the plot: he changes from a lazybones and hoodlum into a different, mature, responsible and better man – a communist. One cannot treat him as other than a positive character.

Sekuła is an older, life-experienced man, a communist activist. He is a simple worker but he understands the world around him. In the film he is shown as a person well-read in Marx's writings, who understands them, which seems to indicate a high level of intelligence of the hero. He can present in a simple way the Marx-inspired communist vision of the world, thanks to which he can attract young uneducated workers to the communist movement. Sekuła is also shown as an honest and protective person. He gives Stach a helping hand when he meets him with a local thief in a sleazy joint in Budy after the tragic raid on a German train. He fixes him up with a job in Berg's carpentry shop, teaches him the carpenter's trade and to perform work decently and carefully, raises Stach's political awareness, encourages him to go to school and learn wherever possible. Sekuła is active in the communist resistance, takes part in the armed actions to help Jewish insurgents in the Warsaw Ghetto. He appears to be a good-natured old man.

Janek Krone is an ambiguous figure. On the one hand, the boy declares that he is a communist, which should mean that he will act like his friends, i.e. he will show attachment to the idea, manifest his willingness to fight, be involved in the underground activities; on the other hand, when Stach suggests that he should join the People's Guard, he firmly refuses, he is afraid to lose his job and income, for which he supports his sick father, he has doubts whether he should fight, he maintains that he hates war, he is emotionally unstable, his highly expressive behavior sometimes appears as hysterical. He does not seem to entirely belong to the group of young People's Guard soldiers, who are unconditionally devoted to the communist underground and fight. In addition, Janek refuses to help his Jewish friend Abram, an escapee from the Ghetto, with whom he had lived in the same tenement house before the war. At the same time, Janek, despite his doubts, decides to join Stach to carry out a retaliatory action and it is he who kills a German in cold blood. Right after he refuses to help Abram, and earlier, to join the People's Guard, he takes part in an armed action to evacuate Jewish insurgent from the Ghetto. He draws the attention of the Germans to himself, thus diverting the pursuit from the escapees. Finally, to avoid being caught, he commits suicide. Despite being a complex character, Janek, because he eventually overcomes his doubts and fears, becomes involved in the fight for the just cause and sacrifices his life for it, appears as a positive hero.

In "A Generation" the negative characters are both Germans and Poles. In the former case, we have to do with a collective personage consisting of the anonymous soldiers of the German occupation army. We see them in several scenes: Dorota's arrest by Gestapo officers, a skirmish with Stach's group during the evacuation of Jewish insurgents from the Ghetto, pacification of the Ghetto Uprising, in Berg's carpentry shop, when Germans come to check how their order is being carried out. The film distinguishes only one German – a Volksdeutscher. In one of the scenes taking place in the timber mill we can see Stach being called Polish swine and severely beaten up by a Werkschutz guard and other German functionaries. Thus, the Germans, as members of the enemy army, personify evil manifested in the actions against the Poles and Jews (and, which is not without significance, against communists): killings, arrests, beatings, persecution.

In the latter case, we have to do with the Poles who are members of an underground organization, called the Polish Underground Army in the film, competing with the People's Guard. Wajda shows them as brusque, primitive schemers and anti-Semites. All the negative traits of a PUA member are personified by one of the heroes – Mr. Ziarno, an avowed anti-Semite. In one of the scenes he can be seen in the carpentry workshop, where, on hearing the news about the outbreak of the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, he responds with contempt and mockery, saying "The kikes have started fighting, usia susia". The negative characters also include the carpentry shop owner Berg because he cooperates with the negatively assessed Polish Underground Army, which has a weapons storeroom in his workshop. An additional shadow cast on Berg is

also that he is a capitalist who exploits workers. In the scene showing Stach's conversation with Sekuła, we learn from their dialog that Berg does not pay the workers decently for the work performed. And if that weren't enough, Berg is on good terms with the Germans and carries out their commissions in his workshop. When watching "A Generation", one has an impression that negative characteristics are focused mainly in the persons who are not communists.

Positive heroes in Andrzej Wajda's "Katyń" are the Polish officers, who, though POWs, remain faithful to the motherland, to the military oath and to the national and Catholic values. The officers in his film are, as it were, an embodiment of unwavering, principled patriotism, a personification of nobleness. When in captivity, they do not lose heart, on the contrary, their morale, apart from some exceptions, is high. The director endows them with traits that have positive connotations.

According to Wajda, the better men were killed during the war, and the worse survived. It can thus be recognized in the film that the death of individual characters in the context of the fight for motherland, defense of patriotic ideals, dignity, etc. is what elevates and automatically, as it were, defines them as positive heroes. That is why one can recognize as a positive character the young Home Army member Tadeusz, who remains faithful to patriotic ideals like the murdered officers. Unable to ignore a propaganda poster tarnishing the Home Army, he tears it off a poster pillar in broad daylight, paying for this with his life. He is killed defending the dignity of the Home Army soldiers. In turn, Lieutenant Jerzy, who, after he survived the Katyń massacre, joined Berling's Army and came to Krakow with a major's rank, as well as lent credence to the Burdenko Commission in the meantime, spoke of forgiving the Soviets during the meeting with the general's wife, could have been an ambivalent figure. However, the moment he commits suicide because he probably cannot cope with his own traumatic experience and with the fact that he took part in lending credence to the Katyń lie and serves in the army, which is fighting together with the murders of thousands of Polish officers, goes over to the side of the better, the victims of terror. His suicide marks him as a positive character.

Positive characters in Wajda's film are women: mothers, sisters and wives of the murdered officers, and their widows, who oppose the Katyń lie. During the screening of a Soviet propaganda film at Krakow's market square, Róża, the general's wife, shouts that this is a lie. She reminds Major Jerzy that his duty is to bear testimony to the truth about the Soviet crime. At the cemetery, Agnieszka places a plaque with information about the death of her brother murdered in Katyń by the Soviets, for which she is arrested by the secret police. She also has a dispute with her sister who tries to make a new life for herself in new Poland. According to Małgorzata Sadowska, Wajda did not show the women waiting for their nearest and dearest and then fighting against the Katyń lie as flesh and

blood heroines. To the reviewer they appear as “figures rooted in romanticism, as suffering Grottgierian widows, guardians of memory and Polish tradition [...]”¹⁶ Following this interpretation, one might say that the director made them mythological symbols of the romantic patriotic attitude, a positive example to imitate.

In Wajda’s film there is also a positively depicted person of a Soviet officer, who offers to help Anna, the wife of Andrzej imprisoned in Kozielsk. He suggest they enter into a fictitious marriage in order to protect her and her daughter from NKVD’s repressions against the wives of the officers murdered in Katyń. One might think that this theme helps the director to hide the one-dimensional nature of the film and the presented story. Owing to the device of introducing the character of a Soviet officer with a human face, the martyrdom of the Poles shown on screen becomes more credible and moving. The negative characters in “Katyń” are the soldiers and officers of the foreign army and the Polish soldiers serving in the Kosciuszko Division, as well as informers, agents and officers of the secret police

The personification of evil is the NKVD officers, who brutally murder the Polish officers in the final scene of the film. Interestingly enough, Wajda showed only the executors of the crime whereas the film does not present the persons who took the decisions to murder and supervised the whole operation. Therefore in “Katyń” in the case of the executioners we are dealing with a collective, basically faceless hero, hence anonymous and impersonal to some extent. The identity and responsibility of those who had planned the massacre is concealed behind the mass of nameless executors.

The negative characters in the film are also represented by German soldiers. In the scene showing the arrest of professors at the Jagiellonian University, we can watch the person of the SS officer, Dr Müller, who, showing contempt to the assembled scholars, informs them that by trying to open the University, they committed a hostile act towards Germany, for which they will be arrested and transported to forced labor camps. In the scene, German soldiers run into the auditorium and brutally escort the professors to the already prepared trucks.

Wajda intentionally, it seems, included the theme of the “Sonderaktion Krakau” in the history of the Katyń crime. Thanks to this dramatic device, he equated the two totalitarian systems with each other: Nazism and communism. He showed and thereby emphasized that both of them mass murdered the elite of the Polish society to the same extent. Wajda’s film presents the two systems as “Siamese twins” – seemingly different but essentially the same, equally blood-thirsty and destructive, united by the lust for crime and hate towards others.

In another scene we can watch German soldiers attempting to compel collaboration from the widow of the general murdered by the Soviets in Katyń. They are persuading her to record the statement they had written, which they would be able to use for propaganda purposes against the Soviet Union. When Róża refuses, they apply a method of emotional abuse. They show the grief-

¹⁶ See. Małgorzata Sadowska, „W niewoli romantycznych mitów”, *Przekrój* 38 (2007): 61.

-stricken and mourning woman a propaganda film presenting the exhumation of the dead bodies. Taking account of the situation and the mental condition of the general's wife after she learned about the crime and her husband's death, the conduct of the German soldiers was cruel torture.

Negative characters also include the Poles. They are the Berling Army soldiers and security police officers. Those responsible for Tadeusz's death are the soldiers who, having noticed his act of tearing off an anti-Home Army poster, set off in pursuit of him, as a result of which they boy was killed, having been hit by their car. The killing of the character who is constructed in such a way that the viewers associate him with positive traits, almost automatically defines the soldiers as negative heroes. We have to do with a similar situation in the case of the officer interrogating Agnieszka. He is an officer in the Polish uniform in the service of a foreign power. He urges the girl to sign a statement that the Katyń massacre was perpetrated by the Germans. He consolidates the Soviet version of the events. This fact alone places him among negative characters. Coupled with the imprisonment of Agnieszka, who is a positive hero in Wajda's narrative, we have a clear picture of the Polish security police major as a negative hero.

In the films of the affirmative trend we usually have to do with the polarization of characters, with a clear and explicit division into "one of us" and "stranger".¹⁷

In "A Generation" the division into "one of us" and "strangers" is noticeable and essentially leaving no doubts as to where the boundary runs between the heroes of the story on screen. Look at some examples of relationships between the film characters.

The main heroes of the film – Stach, Dorota, Sekuła, Jacek, Mundek, Janek Krone – belong to the "one-of-ours" group – they experience one another as "one of us". This is so because they are avowed communists. In the film dialogs between the characters there are directly expressed declarations of communist affiliation. This is the case with Stach, Janek Krone, and Dorota. Without exception they share the same or similar system of values defined in the communist ideology, philosophically justified in Marx's writings, to which one of the characters, carpenter Sekuła, makes references. The same shared convictions result in all of them becoming involved in the communist resistance movement, and they fight in the People's Guard structures. Their joint actions stemming from respect of the same system of values are aimed at fighting against the occupier and at improving the lot of workers. The whole group also has a posi-

¹⁷ Film characters appear as "strangers" in relation to one another when there is social interaction between them at the level of disproportionate and separate systems of values they respect. Heroes, in turn, appear as "ours/oen of us" when the social interaction between them takes place based on shared values. When in the course of social interaction one subject perceives another as indifferent, it can be recognized that s/he experiences him as "a stranger". The category "one of us" like the category "strangers" is relative and situational. This means that in certain circumstances "one of us" can sometimes be perceived as "stranger" and (the same) stranger" may be regarded as "one of us". See Witek, *Andrzej Wajda jako historyk...*, Florian Znaniecki, *Współczesne narody*, transl. Zygmunt Dulczewski (Warszawa: PIW, 1990), 292–293, 319–320.

tive attitude towards the Red Army and the Soviet Union. Such declarations are expressed by Dorota during her speech to the assembled group in the scene presenting the swearing-in of partisans in the girl's flat. The heroes also have a positive attitude towards Jews. They are critical about the manifestations of anti-Semitism present among members of the competing resistance movement. The members of the communist partisan army, shown on screen, share the negative attitude towards capitalism, the German occupiers, and the Polish Underground Army.

While the whole group appears consistent with regard to the professed and respected values, whereby they experience one another as "one of us", there is one ambivalent character in it, whose status is fluid and changes depending on the situation. This character is Janek Krone, who is the first of a whole series of Wajda's doubting heroes, internally torn, having problems with choosing between their obligations towards a just cause and the wish to live a peaceful life. On the one hand, Janek Krone declares that he is a communist, which should mean that he will behave like his friends, i.e. show his attachment to the idea, manifest eagerness to fight, be involved in underground actions, show solidarity with the Jews; on the other hand, when Stach suggests that he join the People's Guard, he firmly refuses: he is afraid to lose his job and income, for which he supports his ailing father, he has doubts about fighting; he argues that he hates war, is emotionally unstable, his highly expressive behavior sometimes appears as hysterical. He does not seem to entirely belong to the group of young People's Guard soldiers, who are unconditionally devoted to the communist underground and fight. Furthermore, Janek refuses to help his Jewish friend Abram, an escapee from the Ghetto, with whom he had lived in the same tenement house before the war. Therefore, when Janek declares his affiliation with communists, he is experienced by his friend as one of theirs ("ours"). Stach treats Janek as "one of us" when he comes to him to suggest that Janek join the People's Guard. Janek's response to Stach's proposal instantly produces a distance between them. To Stach, Janek becomes "a stranger", who pretends to be "one of us". The situation again changes, when, despite his earlier declarations, Janek comes to help evacuate insurgents from the burning Ghetto. Then he is treated again as "one of us". Stach reacts to Janek's arrival with the words: "I'm damned glad, I really am". Janek's status also changes in the scene presenting the visit to his flat by his Jewish friend Abram. When Abram came to Janek to ask for help, he treated him like "one of ours", someone he could trust, someone he could get support from. Janek's reaction to Abram's arrival and request shows that he experienced the Ghetto escapee as "a stranger". Refusing to help Abram, Janek used the argument of Abram's appearance, which reveals his Jewish descent. Even by his appearance, Abram appeared as "a stranger" to Janek. Consequently, Janek also became "a stranger" to Abram.

In "A Generation", "strangers" to one another are also the partisans of the People's Guard and the Polish Underground Army. Both of them profess different systems of values. While the former are communists, the latter do not accept communism, they treat it with suspicion and hostility. Thus the two

formations are shown as hostile to one another. Mutual suspicion and hostility is clearly manifested in personal relations between individual characters. In one of the quoted scenes, when Mr. Ziarno is mocking the Ghetto uprising, his words are responded to with indignation by Stach and the other workers, including Janek Krone. "Strangers" in the film are also German soldiers, whom the People's Guard openly fight. The Jews and Polish communists are shown as "one of ours" in relation to one another; the latter being committed to helping the insurgents fighting in the Ghetto.

Look closer at one of the themes in "Katyń". The director shows the fate of Agnieszka and her sister Irena. In this case we have to do with the family relationship linking the two women. However, these are the only relationships that somehow connect the two characters because it turns out that more divides than unites them. Agnieszka served in the Home Army, fought in the Warsaw Uprising, professes principled patriotism, does not approve of the new system established by communists in Poland, fights against the Katyń lie, and, in defiance of her sister, she identifies with her brother murdered in Katyń. Irena in turn adopts a pragmatic attitude: if she does not accept, she least respects the new system, helps establish it, negatively assesses principled patriotism, and takes part in propagating the Katyń lie. Although they are sisters, the two women belong to the opposing camps. In the scene of their conversation on the way to the cemetery, they perceive each other as "strangers". Their interaction takes place at the level of entirely different and mutually contradictory systems of values.

In Wajda's film, Agnieszka and Piotr do not meet. However, the girl's attitude to her brother and her unwavering need to commemorate his death are a signal that she experiences Piotr as "one of ours" because he died in the name of the same shared values. To Irena, Lieutenant Baszkiewicz, despite being her brother, is "a stranger" to her, since he died for the world that no longer exists, at the hands of those who organize a new communist order with her according to entirely different principles. Thus, the attitude to their brother also divides the two sisters, whereby they experience each other as "strangers".

Interesting in the context in question is the character of Jerzy. In the prison camp, as Andrzej's subordinate and friend, he appears as "one of ours". He seems to share the system of values of his superior and the other fellow officers. The fact that the social interaction between Jerzy and Andrzej takes place based on the jointly respected system of values can be substantiated by the dialogs between the heroes or by the fact that like Andrzej, Lieutenant Jerzy did not escape from captivity. Jerzy's situation diametrically changes after he survived the Katyń massacre and began serving in General Berling's Army. After he came to Krakow in the Kosciuszko Division uniform, he became "a stranger" to his former acquaintances. This is perfectly illustrated by the scene of Major

Jerzy's visit to the Jagiellonian University to the professor under whom he studied. On seeing his former student in the uniform of the Polish Army, which came with the Red Army, the professor talks to him like to a stranger, initially pretending ostentatiously that he does not recognize him. The professor and the officer enter in interaction at the level of different value systems. The major represents the new communist system and it does not matter whether he accepts or not. What is essential is that he serves in the army that introduces it. To the professor, who risks his life keeping and concealing the Katyń documents, the coming system is hostile; therefore, all those who are associated with it in any way are "strangers". Jerzy's meeting with the general's wife also goes according to a similar pattern. The interaction between the two characters takes place at the level of divergent systems of values. Róża, the widow of the general murdered in Katyń by the Soviets, a person opposing the Katyń lie, perceives as "a stranger" the major of the Polish Army formed in the Soviet Union and fighting at the side of the Red Army, whose soldiers had murdered the Polish officers.

Jerzy's situation changes diametrically the moment he commits suicide. The professor and his associates recognize him as "one of ours". In the scene showing Ms. Greta bringing Andrzej's things to Anna's home, we hear the professor's assistant telling the cavalry captain's wife that she gives her back the mementos of her late husband, because Major Jerzy committed suicide. His death by suicide changed Jerzy's status: he turned from "being a stranger" into "one of us" for it was recognized that since he had shot himself, he became faithful to the values and ethos of the officer of the Second Republic.

"Strangers" in Wajda's film are obviously the Soviets and Germans. They are both shown as criminals. The former murdered the Polish officers and the latter arrested and caused the death of Jagiellonian University professors. An exception to the rule is the Soviet captain. As he is a Red Army soldier, he is, as it were by definition, a stranger. However, when by risking his life he saves Anna from arrest by the NKVD, he turns out to be a sensitive and decent man, having brutally suffered from the Soviet system. The officer ceases to be "a stranger". Anna experiences him as "one of us". On account of the fact that the captain saves Andrzej's wife from the NKVD, one can assume that he also perceives her as "one of ours". Their social interaction takes place at the level of mutually shared values; they are both decent people who might have been friends, had it not been for the war. In addition, the captain appears to see in Anna his wife, who was probably killed at the hands of the NKVD. By helping Anna, he helps himself to overcome the inner sense of guilt that he failed to save his own wife.

In Wajda's film the boundary between the characters defined as "strangers" and "one of ours" runs almost parallel to the line dividing the positive heroes from the negative ones. Those "one of us" are positive characters. This group comprises the officers from Katyń, their wives, mothers, sisters, priests, people who oppose the Katyń lie and have a hostile attitude towards the Soviets and the Soviet-imposed communist system. "Strangers" are negatively evaluated. This group consists of the Germans, Soviets, Polish communists, secret police officers, and the Berling Army soldiers.

The films of the affirmative trend present the history with an *a priori* identity-oriented attitude towards the past. The identity-based attitude towards the past consists in adopting (by historians, readers, film directors, viewers) the more or less real or imagined viewpoint of the protagonists of the past, in recognizing as our own their more or less actual or imagined values, judgments, beliefs, fears, prejudices, and expectations.¹⁸

As has been said above, in "A Generation" there is a distinct division into positive and negative characters and values. This kind of division is one of the most important mechanisms of constructing identity-oriented history. The distinctive molding of attitudes and values accepted and respected by individual characters serve to create identity signals responded to by the viewer watching history on screen. As a result, this reaction activates the projection-identification mechanism.

In "A Generation" we have to do with a bipolar construction of the heroes. The positive characters professing positively-marked values are Polish communists. The negative characters respecting negatively evaluated values are the German soldiers and members of the Polish Underground Army. This kind of construction of characters is a clear identity signal to the audience. While watching the vicissitudes of the heroes of "A Generation", it is far easier to identify with the positive attractive-looking characters: nice, advocating catchy slogans of fight for freedom and social justice, intelligent, clever, ingenious and well-read. The more so when they are compared with the negative characters representing values that are shown in the film as unacceptable, and whose behavior is also presented as reprehensible. On the one hand these are the German invaders, occupiers, murderers, Nazis. On the other hand, they are the Poles from the Polish Underground Army – dodgers, schemers, collaborators, nationalists, reactionaries and anti-Semites.

The construction of the characters in "A Generation" was carried out in such a way that the viewer who identifies with communist ideas will have no doubts which of the film heroes s/he would like to identify with, which group to support, the values of which group s/he would like to share, which attitudes to adopt, and which vision of the world and the human, and thereby of history, is the right one. The viewers who identify not so much with communism as with Polishness can choose between two groups of Poles and their visions of the world. It could be assumed that the viewer attached to Polishness will identify

¹⁸ On the identity-oriented attitude, see Krzysztof Pomian, *Historia – nauka wobec pamięci* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2006), 193–194. The effect of identity-oriented history can be achieved thanks to the projection-identification mechanism known in cinema. In a very brief outline, it consists in the viewer projecting him/herself, a part of his psyche onto the screen and identifies with the heroes. Identification consists in that the attitudes and experiences of the characters become the experiences and attitudes of the viewer. The viewer identifies with the heroes of the conflict, s/he wants to be like them, feel the same emotions, and share the same values. The projection-identification phenomenon is based on a wide phenomenon called empathy. On the projection-identification mechanism see Mirosław Przyłipiak, *Kino stylu zerowego. Z zagadnień estetyki filmu fabularnego* (Gdańsk: GWP, 1994), 111–113.

more eagerly with the positive image of the Poles, Polish communists in this case, than with the negative picture of the unpleasant, haughty and brusque Poles from the Polish Underground Army. By recognizing that the Poles are or should be sensitive, honest, brave, courageous, free, etc., the viewer will identify with a group of heroes, who precisely fulfill such notions and expectations. The values, attitudes and experiences of Polish communists will thereby become the values, attitudes and experiences shared by the viewer.

An additional element that can be regarded as an identity signal is that all the main heroes of the story on screen are positive characters. There is no one among them who could be negatively assessed. Although an ambivalent person appears in the film, Janek Krone, about whom various suspicions can be raised, he turns out nevertheless to be a positive hero in the course of the developing action. However, the persons of secondary and tertiary importance are negative characters. By using this device, the authors distinctly, as it were, indicated which heroes of the history on screen should be identified with.

The explicit polarization and assessment of the characters in the film appears as a clear identity signal. It functions in the narrative as a premise, from which it can be concluded that the authors of the film more or less intentionally, more or less frankly support one group of heroes (Polish communists in this case) and the vision of the world they subscribe to than the other group (in this case: the Polish partisans in the Polish Underground Army).

In Wajda's "Katyń", history is presented in such a way that the viewer should have no doubt with which characters s/he should identify, and which ones s/he should reject and condemn. The film shows a distinctive polarization of characters in terms of their attitudes, activity, and beliefs. On one side there are the Polish soldiers murdered by the NKVD, their families, and those opposing the new authorities. On the other, there are murders – the Soviets, communists who collaborate with them, and the Germans.

In the film, the director makes things clear. He seems to explicitly support the former against the latter. The clearest element that can be interpreted as a signal that the director identifies with Polish patriots, the underground soldiers, the officers and the values they represent is the character of Tadeusz. Tadeusz is a hero who draws on Andrzej Wajda's biographical experiences. We have here an autobiographical signal consisting in some resemblance between the diegetic character and the character of the film author created by himself in autobiographical descriptions. Therefore, if we recognize that Tadeusz is the director's alter ego to some extent, then a conclusion arises that Wajda identifies with this hero and through him with other characters who subscribe to similar values as the young Home Army soldier.

Here is another example. There is also a pronounced identity signal in another scene, discussed above, which shows the dialog of the sisters on the way to

the cemetery, during which, in response to her sister's words that she chooses the dead, which is sick, Agnieszka answers that she chooses the murdered rather than the murderers. As has been signaled above, Wajda, by having the heroine express this statement, narrowed the range of choice to a minimum. The audience has to support one group or the other as the director did not offer a third option. Consequently, any viewer who does not even share the viewpoint of Agnieszka, Tadeusz, the general's wife, Jerzy, the officers, etc., but respects the elementary rules of decency, actually faces a moral blackmail, confronting the choice offered by the director. There is nothing else s/he can do but side with the foregoing characters defined as noble. Even the character of the high school principal, who could appear as an ambivalent heroine, thought-provoking and encouraging the viewer to critically reflect on the above attitudes I have called national principled patriotism, was discredited in the dialog with her sister. Wajda placed her not only on the side of liars but also murderers. In the director's proposed zero-sum choosing option of "either/or, if the viewer is not for the victims, s/he, automatically as it were, sides with those who support the criminals.

CONCLUSION

Some conclusions are in order at the end of the discussion in the article.

"Wajda's "A Generation" was created in People's Poland in the 1950s in the sociocultural context defined by the communist system. People's Poland began its existence in the first decade after the war by breaking the continuity with prewar Poland. This consisted in creating – inter alia by means of historiography – the black legend of the Second Republic of Poland.

Reliable and solid knowledge about that period was replaced by a new vision of the world and history, in which the dominant feature was the class struggle and dynamic communist movement. The significant but inconvenient content, i.e. inconsistent with the promoted vision of the world, pertaining to that period in any way, was expunged, distorted, and if not, it was brutally criticized. The black legend of the Second Republic of Poland was to be the antithesis of the desirable image of People's Poland as a country building a new, just, socialist order.¹⁹ A similar role to that of historiography was assigned in earlier People's Poland to socialist-realist cinema.²⁰

Andrzej Wajda's "A Generation", produced in 1954, is a typical picture of that period. We have here the affirmation of the official vision of history, adopted in Poland in the nineteen-fifties.²¹ The director shows the picture of

¹⁹ See Rafał Stobiecki, *Historiografia PRL* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2020), 61–62.

²⁰ See Marek Haltof, *Kino polskie* (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2004), 77–88.

²¹ On the vision of history propagated in the 1950s see e.g. Rafał Stobiecki, *Historia pod nadzorem* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1993).

the occupation and fight against the German invader from the communist perspective, drawing on the socialist-realist style.²² Consequently, we are presented with a quite stereotyped and one-dimensional picture of the past, filled with socialist-realist newspeak. It follows from it that the true patriots and fighters for the freedom of the country and the just postwar world are members of the communist People's Guard. At the same time, the socialist-realist pattern of the plot is somewhat diluted thanks to Wajda's introduction of the character of Janek Krone, who, unlike Stach and Dorota, is an ambivalent hero; one could even say he is the opposite of a socialist-realist hero. Owing to the introduction of the character of Janek Krone, "A Generation" changes to some extent from a totally one-dimensional, tendentious picture of the past into a picture with some shades of grey, thereby increasing its reliability as a historical narrative, which transforms itself from a socialist-realist propaganda fairy-tale into a human drama. This device also enhances the effect of the affirmation of the historical vision promoted in the film.

In "A Generation" the director told the history of the communist resistance movement using the then innovative formal solutions. In its style, the film draws upon the esthetic characteristics of Italian Neorealism.²³ Here are, in a very brief outline, the characteristic features of the neorealist trend in cinema, which emerged in Italy. First and foremost, neorealist films were oriented towards the so-called "objective" observation of everyday life. Very simple formal means were used in their production. They consisted of long takes, steady "transparent" montage, static cameras, and technically imperfect, underlit, dark shots. Neorealist films focused mainly on presenting the environment of the poor Italian proletariat. They were made in natural sceneries, locations, and interiors. To put it simply, their form resembled documentary films. In "A Generation" there are very many elements typical of neorealist cinema. Wajda shows the poor milieu of workers living in poverty. The story takes place in muddy streets, sordid bars and workshops. The style of "A Generation" comprises somber, low-key-lit shots, expressive viewpoints of the camera, and long, static takes. The film thus resembles to some extent a documentary in its style. This style enhances the effect of screen credibility of the narrative, thereby supporting the device of affirmation of the promoted vision of history.

Produced a dozen odd years after the collapse of communism in Poland, "Katyń" was made as a film settling accounts with the vision of history preferred in the People's Republic of Poland, in which there was no room for decent reflection on the Katyń crime, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the Soviet Union's invasion of Poland in alliance with Germany on 17 September 1939. The film therefore became part of the tendency to fill in missing pieces of history, adopted in the then democratic state. However, it was at least a decade late in this respect. Wada carried out the squaring-up with the distortion of the

²² On socialist-realist in cinema, see: Marek Hendrykowski, *Socrealizm po polsku. Studia i szkice* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2015).

²³ On the cinema of "Italian Neorealism" see Tadeusz Miczka, *Kino włoskie* (Gdańsk: Słowo/ Obraz Terytoria, 2009).

past in People's Poland by using the device of affirmation and, in a way, of elevation of the distorted history.

Made somewhat over fifty years after "A Generation", Wajda's "Katyń" becomes part of the paradigm of the romantic vision of history. In his film the director promotes a rather unambiguous model of martyrological-heroic patriotism manifested in the individual's sacrifice for his homeland, including sacrificing his life on its altar. It is principled patriotism. This means that any other attitude appears as unpatriotic from such a perspective. The film heroes are characters who have no doubts, no hesitations, do not consider different solutions and ways to get out of the existing situation. They are absolutely faithful and obedient to the espoused values: they are the incarnation of patriotic and national virtues, carriers of the professed and respected reasons, over which they have ideological disputes with those who do not share them.

The director tells history by means of the former realist poetics of zero-style cinema, which is characterized by the transparency of form. Wajda does not use any avant-garde esthetic solutions. The formal level of narrative is subordinated to the function of emphasizing national suffering, the sacrifice made by the Poles on the altar of the homeland and the martyrological version of patriotism. Wajda tells about the past using the language of the past. He tells about the world and values that disappeared with the end of the war and with the advent of communism by means a classical film form, which appears somewhat anachronistic. Owing to this, the history on screen has, as Tadeusz Lubecki wrote in his review, the noble tone of a classical work. The form of the film does not clash with the affirmed vision of history – on the contrary, it supports it.

The comparison between Andrzej Wajda's two films made in the space of fifty years shows that despite the fact that the two pictures were produced in entirely different historico-cultural contexts, using different film styles, the two screen stories present the affirmation of diametrically disparate versions of history, it is the dramatic strategies for and techniques of affirmation of history that remain the same in either case.

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