|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **About you** | **[Salutation]** | Maria | [Middle name] | Ionita |
| [Enter your biography] | | | |
| Ryerson University | | | |

|  |
| --- |
| **Your article** |
| Wajda, Andrzej (1926--) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Andrezj Wajda is a Polish film and theatre director, best known for his politically engaged films exploring Polish history, and his collaboration with the actor Zbigniew Cybulski.  In 1940 Wajda’s father was killed by the Soviets in the Katyn Forest massacre. In 1942, he joined the Polish Resistance, fighting in the Army of the Interior, which had ties to the Polish government in exile in London, rather than to the Soviet Union. He would later translate some of his wartime experiences in his highly acclaimed film trilogy, *A Generation* (1955), *Kanał* (1957) and *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958).  The heroes of these movies are young and desperate: in *A Generation* they are Communist partisans. In *Kanał* they are Jewish fighters during the bloody Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The intensity and passion of their struggle stands in stark contrast to the historical hell they are traversing (*Kanał*’s descent into the Warsaw sewers is shot to resemble a Dantean Inferno). Nowhere is this more evident than in the masterful *Ashes and Diamonds*, which takes place in the immediate aftermath of the war and details a minor episode in the murky struggle for power between the Communist partisans and the Army of the Interior. |
| Andrezj Wajda is a Polish film and theatre director, best known for his politically engaged films exploring Polish history, and his collaboration with the actor Zbigniew Cybulski.  In 1940 Wajda’s father was killed by the Soviets in the Katyn Forest massacre. In 1942, he joined the Polish Resistance, fighting in the Army of the Interior, which had ties to the Polish government in exile in London, rather than to the Soviet Union. He would later translate some of his wartime experiences in his highly acclaimed film trilogy, *A Generation* (1955), *Kanał* (1957) and *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958).  The heroes of these movies are young and desperate: in *A Generation* they are Communist partisans. In *Kanał* they are Jewish fighters during the bloody Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The intensity and passion of their struggle stands in stark contrast to the historical hell they are traversing (*Kanał*’s descent into the Warsaw sewers is shot to resemble a Dantean Inferno). Nowhere is this more evident than in the masterful *Ashes and Diamonds*, which takes place in the immediate aftermath of the war and details a minor episode in the murky struggle for power between the Communist partisans and the Army of the Interior. The protagonist, Maciek (played by the magnetic Zbigniew Cybulski, who, until his tragic death in 1967, was one of Wajda’s favourite collaborators) is ordered to murder a Communist official, accidentally kills two innocents, and then succeeds in his mission, but only to be senselessly gunned down while around him everyone celebrates the end of the war. As with the rest of the trilogy, Wajda shoots everything with a detached realism that observes, seemingly without judging, the absurd cruelty of history.  Nonetheless, there is an unmistakable element of political subversion embedded in this realism. Both *Kanał* and *Ashes and Diamonds* were made shortly after the death of Stalin, during a tentative thawing of the political and cultural climate behind the Iron Curtain. *Kanał*’s implicit suggestion is that the protagonists’ tragic deaths are the result of the Red Army’s refusal to help their struggle. *Ashes and Diamonds*’ official critique pointed out its refusal to lionize its Communist protagonists or paint Maciek and his friends as reactionaries: everybody is, instead, a victim of the turbulent, oppressive forces that would rip Poland apart so frequently during the 20th century.  Wajda’s filmography is vast and eclectic, comprising over 40 feature films, as well as shorts, documentaries and television works, but always marked by a deft mix of realism (even neo-realism, especially in his early works) and symbolism. The latter is most evident in his lush, painterly adaptations of Polish literary works, like *The Birch Wood* (1970), *The Maids of Wilko* (1979) and the deeply strange, experimental *The Wedding* (1972) - all of which double as oblique reflections on contemporary Poland and its intellectual and political climate. At least in part, this drive towards obliqueness is typical of Eastern European cinema during the Communist period and is due to the vagaries of a perpetually suspicious censorship that frequently drove a symbol-laden cinematic language to express what could not be articulated directly.  Wajda’s other major work is the diptych *Man of Marble* (1977)/ *Man of Iron* (1981)*.* The first film follows Agnieszka, a young documentarian researching in the mid-70s the life of Mateusz Birkut, a Stakhanovist worker who, in the 1950s had a brief moment of fame (the title of the film alludes to his now forgotten marble statue). *Man of Iron*, shot during the Gdansk shipyard strike of 1980 and the emergence of Solidarność labor union (Lech Wałęsa has a cameo) expands Birkut’s story (he is revealed to have died during the riots of 1970) and continues it through the life of his son, Tomczyk who, having married Agnieszka, becomes a participant in the Gdansk revolt. *Man of Iron* received the Palme D’Or in 1981 and both films were immensely popular, dangerously so, even, from the point of view of the Communist establishment. They represent the culmination of Wajda’s long-standing interest in the struggle of individuals against brutal historical forces. The sprawling, stately *Man of Marble* explores the lingering traumas of Stalinism, but its historical proximity to the 1970 protests and their brutal aftermath, suggests the oppression has been merely occulted, not eliminated. *Man of Iron*, while less artistically polished, is nonetheless a film of remarkable historical immediacy, recasting Birkut’s struggle into his son’s (both characters are played by the same actor, Jerzy Radziwiłowicz), and culminating in an optimistic, quasi romantic vision of individual triumph over historical repression. |
| Further reading:  (Ford and Hammond)  (Michałek)  (Michałek and Turaj, The Modern Cinema of Poland) |