

# “I AM CAIN AND ABEL”: THE CINEMA OF ANDRZEJ WAJDA AND THE PRACTICE OF PREFERENCE FALSIFICATION

T. Gerald Archer

---

All art is propaganda. It is universally and inescapably propaganda; sometimes unconsciously, but often deliberately, propaganda. – Upton Sinclair

For art to truly be art, an artist must have freedom of expression. Artists express their innermost thoughts and emotions through their creations, and these thoughts and emotions are conveyed to those who encounter his or her art. All art is in some way considered propaganda. It is, basically, information that is presented to influence an audience. Sometimes those in a position of power use art to advance their own agendas, attempting to control the art and therefore the artist. Vladimir Lenin stated, “Of all the arts, for us cinema is the most important.”<sup>1</sup> He understood that the combination of sound and visual images was the most effective, of all the arts, to the dissemination of propaganda.

68

For a totalitarian regime to maintain power it must control the thoughts of its subjects; when illegitimate rule is forced upon them, the people must be convinced that they had desired this imperative all along. The slightest flicker of rebellion must be snuffed out quickly. Propaganda serves as the chief tool used to influence people to have positive thoughts about their government. If an artist’s work is suppressed it becomes a lifeless shell and does not reflect the artist’s true thoughts and feelings. In a society where the power structure exercises strong censorship of the arts, artists are faced with a dilemma. They can either practice self-censorship in order to please those who control access to the arts, or they can stand by the principle of freedom of expression but have their work buried under a sea of bureaucracy. By submitting to control, the artist accepts living a double life. They produce art that may, in some way, influence the viewer to accept the ideology of the power structure, while also concealing their own internal desires. The inner conflict of the oppressed artist is captured best by a sign found hanging on the altar of an East German church after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The sign read, “I am Cain and Abel.” The sign encapsulates the idea that a person can be both the sinner and the saint; the one who pleases the power structure and the one, who by interpreting the rules differently, is rejected. It is a conflict now termed

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 15.

“preference falsification.”<sup>2</sup> This concept is exemplified in the life and work of Polish film director, Andrzej Wajda.

Andrzej Wajda, one of the founders of the Polish Film School, has had a career spanning some of the most turbulent periods in Polish history. At the end of World War II, Poland shook off its yoke of Nazi oppression only to become dominated by the Soviet Union. Like many artists under the oppressive Soviet regime, Wajda made choices in regard to the content of his films. Wajda’s work reflected key events in Polish history and the evolving political and social climate of the country. His films serve as an example of how one man’s preference falsification can fluctuate over time. His moments of boldness, along with those of other artists, helped the Polish people to voice their internal thoughts. Wajda’s film, *A Generation*, addresses the post-war period in Poland and the struggle of the Polish people to deal with exchanging one oppressor for another. Two films about the Polish labor movements of the 1970s and 1980s, *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron*, also typify Wajda’s unique perspective. Finally, *Danton*, a film concerning the French Revolution, exemplifies the political and social issues of contemporary Poland through the guises of French history.

First, it is important to understand the meaning of the term “preference falsification.” Alexander Solzhenitsyn asked rhetorically, “What does it mean *not to lie*?” His answer was, “not saying what you don’t think.”<sup>3</sup> Preference falsification occurs when one hides their internal beliefs, due to sociological pressures. An example would be an individual who attends the latest romantic comedy with a group of friends and afterward voices his approval of the film along with his group of friends. The individual may not have cared for the film, but if the majority of the group expresses how much they loved the film, the individual may agree that he loved it as well. The individual may have felt that the characters were under-developed, the plot had numerous holes, or he may dislike romantic comedies in general. By agreeing with the group, he is falsifying his preferences in fear of being ostracized. If he does not reveal his personal preferences, he is concealing that information from his friends and not only misleading the group as to his preferences, but also denying them information concerning aspects of the film. If he had spoken truthfully, he may have been able to persuade some members of the group to think differently about the film. He is therefore doing a disservice not only to his personal integrity, but also to the

---

2 Timur Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 123.

3 *Ibid.*, 119.

other members of the group by falsifying his preferences.<sup>4</sup>

The revolutions that swept Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s surprised many outside observers. Many expected change to come about more slowly. Timur Kuran, author of *Private Truths, Public Lies*, asserts that preference falsification is the reason that these revolutions astonished the world. He maintains that everyone has what is called a "revolutionary threshold," or the point at which an individual feels that the cost of remaining silent surpasses the cost of speaking their innermost thoughts. Depending on a variety of factors, revolutionary thresholds vary across a population and across time. Most individuals will not act until they feel there exists a sufficient number of others that have the same opinions. As more and more members of a population reach their threshold, a cascade effect occurs. As more individuals find the courage to express their innermost thoughts, more individuals feel safe to step forward. Denying information through preference falsification curtails the number of those reaching their revolutionary threshold and strangles the possibility of any mass social movement emerging.<sup>5</sup>

After World War II, the people of Poland fell under the control of the Soviet Union. This new era in Polish history ushered in Stalinism, an extremely oppressive system of government requiring the extensive use of propaganda and designed to gain hegemony over the countries of Eastern Europe. Joseph Stalin had risen to power in the early 1920s by eliminating rivals and taking drastic measures to secure his power. The leader implemented totalitarian rule over the Soviet people, and consolidated his power by attempting to exercise complete control over the thoughts and actions of all Soviet citizens. A "cult of personality" formed around him, and all media was persuaded to champion the idea of Stalin as a great, almost god-like and benevolent leader. Images of Stalin decorated most walls and criticism was not tolerated. Freedom of expression, or least the expression of views that did not reflect the policy of the state, was not allowed; to do so would result in severe social and physical consequences. The state quickly suppressed anyone expressing an individual thought.

Andrzej Wajda was born on March 6, 1926 in Suwalki, Poland. The son of a Polish cavalry officer, his family lived in various provincial posts throughout Poland. In 1939 Andrzej's father, Jakob Wajda, was captured by the Red Army and taken to the Soviet Union. There he became a victim of the brutal execution of Polish officers in 1940 known as the Katyn Massacre. During the war, the young Wajda joined the Home Army

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3-5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 247-62.

resistance group in the Nazi occupied city of Radom. For a time he functioned as a courier, as did many boys his age, until a mass arrest eliminated most of his superiors. He fled Radom to live with his uncles in Krakow, and hid there, working in a locksmith's workshop for the rest of the war. As a youth Wajda became interested in art and began to pursue his interest in painting. In 1946 he initiated his studies at the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts. Despite winning awards at the academy, Wajda felt that he did not have the talent to be an artist and left the school in 1949. However, a continuing interest in art and several helpful introductions to a few filmmakers while at the academy later led him to enroll in the new Łódź Film School in July 1949.<sup>6</sup>

The Łódź Film School was founded on March 8, 1948, and quickly became the most notable school for young filmmakers in Poland. The institution had been created to promote socialist ideals under the sponsorship of the nationalized Polish film company, Film Polski, funded by the Ministry of Culture and Art. Most of the students, including Wajda, found the school too rigid in its instruction and believed the structure of socialist realism to be too confining. Although the pupils learned a great deal about the technical aspects of film, many desired a more creative vision of filmmaking.<sup>7</sup>

The Soviet Union invented the artistic style of socialist realism in which all artistic expression strove to convey the ideals of socialism. Expressionism and abstract art were not allowed; only idealized interpretations of the socialist worker followed the basic tenants of socialist realism. All stories followed a master plot that took a humble "positive hero" and led him to accept the role of Marxism-Leninism in history.<sup>8</sup> The Soviets introduced this style in literature, cinema, music, and all other forms of art. As Poland came under Soviet rule, the new communist government imposed this style on its citizen artists. Prior to Stalin's death in 1953, the socialist worker had been represented as a cog in the machine, but after Khrushchev's "thaw," there was a shift to more individualized stories.<sup>9</sup>

The post-Stalinist "thaw" that began after 1953 saw the loosening of the socialist realism standard. The Łódź School was the most resistant of all the schools from the dictates of the communist government, but censorship still prevented complete freedom of expression. As a result of being forced to practice preference

---

6 Janina Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda: History, Politics, and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 11-13.

7 Ibid.

8 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 9-10.

9 Ibid., 215-16.

falsification outwardly in their day-to-day lives, the young filmmakers found that much could be hidden in metaphor, irony, and circumvention. A group of Łódź graduates, including Wajda, along with such notable directors as Andrzej Munk, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, and Stanislaw Różewicz, began making films that broke away from the previously limiting standards. Inspired by Italian neo-realism, these directors began to challenge the attempt of the new socialist state in Poland to follow the Soviet style of filmmaking. They worked to break free of the shackles that the authorities tried to place on them, and through this effort the group of young filmmakers collectively became known as “The Polish Film School.” The incorporation of “Polish Romanticism” into Wajda’s films and its associated themes of nationalism and the tragic hero earned him the title “Father of The Polish Film School.”<sup>10</sup>

### *A Generation*

72 Andrzej Wajda happened upon the opportunity to make his first film, *A Generation*, by chance after the Polish director Aleksander Ford turned the project down.<sup>11</sup> As a staunch Stalinist in the late 1940s, Ford gained control of the national film industry and transformed Polish cinema into a tool of socialist propaganda. He headed various state-run departments seeking greater control and censorship in films and eventually oversaw the nationalization of the entire industry. At a Congress of Filmmakers in Wisla in 1949, delegates adopted socialist realism as the official style of filmmaking in Poland. In the late 1940s a political “wind of change” challenged Ford, causing him to be forced from his directorship of Film Polski in 1947. He had been accused of failing to actively promote socialist ideals in Polish film. By 1955—the year *A Generation* was released—Ford worked his way back onto the committee responsible for the approval of all scripts. He proved his dedication to socialism by making a highly praised socialist realism film, *The Youth of Chopin* (1952). Ford also served as an instructor at the state-run National Film School in Łódź. Wajda had been Ford’s apprentice and directed the film, *A Generation*, to complete his degree requirements.<sup>12</sup> Ford’s supervision is apparent in Wajda’s work, which possesses some of the outdated aspects of socialist realism.

Wajda’s departure from the usual socialist realism format can be seen in the film’s plot which concerns the

---

10 Annette Insdorf, *Double Lives, Second Chances: The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski* (New York: Miramax Books, 1999), 8-10.

11 Falkowska, 36.

12 Anna Misiak, “Politically Involved Filmmaker: Aleksander Ford and Film Censorship in Poland After 1945,” *Kinema* (Fall 2003), <http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/article.php?id=114&feature> (accessed April 24, 2012).

political awakening of a young man, Stach Mazur, a youth living in the slums on the outskirts of Warsaw during the Nazi occupation. The young man is poor and directionless and resorts to petty thievery. A carpenter at a local shop, Sekula, takes young Stach under his wing and helps him to gain employment at the shop. Sekula stands out from the rest of the men by seeming to be wiser and more fatherly than the others. While in the pub, he drinks ale instead of hard liquor like the rest. With alcoholism being a major problem in Poland, Sekula discourages Stach from drinking to keep the boy off this dangerous path. Sekula appears well groomed, neat, and well-dressed while most of the men have uncombed hair and wear tattered and patched clothes. Sekula is surely fitting the socialist ideal. The carpenter begins to educate Stach in the principles of socialism. He explains to the young man the concept of “surplus value,” observed by Karl Marx, in which the owner of the shop earns a substantial amount of profit while paying the workers very little.<sup>13</sup> He refers to Marx as a “wise man with a beard,” conjuring up a similarity to the bearded savior Jesus Christ. While Christ would save men’s souls in the next life, Marx would save men’s lives in this one.

Like every good socialist archetype, Stach is handsome, bright, and hard working. His ideology quickly grows under Sekula’s tutelage and he becomes a leader among his peers. The transformation of Stach is not solely due to Sekula’s education. Attending a Nazi mandated Catholic school at night, Stach meets a woman named Dorota. As the young men are leaving class, Dorota begins an impromptu rally, asking for the young men to join the Communist People’s Army. Dorota is the ideal socialist woman—smart, brave, and beautiful.<sup>14</sup> Wajda leaves the question open as to whether Stach wants to join the Army because of his principles or because he is smitten with Dorota. Regardless of the reason, Stach makes the transition from naïve boy to the mature socialist man, fulfilling the transformative ritual of socialist realism. Through the master plot of class struggle, the “positive hero” grows as a man.<sup>15</sup>

There are several ways in which the film promotes the superiority of socialism over other systems. Only the common man can be the hero of a socialist realism film. All other organizations outside of the Communist Party are seen as opposed to the plight of the working class. Despite the importance of religious and nationalistic

---

13 “Andrej Wajda: Ideology in *The Generation*, video interview,” Web of Stories. <http://www.webofstories.com/play/13575?o=MS> (accessed November 20, 2011).

14 Falkowska, 43.

15 Clark, 15.

organizations in Poland, socialism is portrayed as the only system capable of bringing liberation to the working classes. With the majority of the Polish people identified as Roman Catholic, they were allowed to maintain religious institutions under Soviet rule. Despite the legality of religious institutions, Wajda still presents a negative view of the Church's role in society. The only time representatives of the Church are seen is in the school where the priest is harsh and condescending toward the students. He questions the religious knowledge of one of the boys as an indication that he might not be a true Catholic and must be an atheistic communist subversive instead. The Church is clearly portrayed as not friendly to socialism, and perhaps even as being directly in conflict with the socialist ideal.

The Nazis are naturally portrayed as cruel and harsh. At the start of the film a Nazi is seen shooting a young teenager with as little pause as he would give to shooting metal cans. A later scene shows Nazis casually walking around several hanging bodies of what are obviously Polish citizens. In contrast to the unfeeling Germans, groups of Poles stand looking at the scene in horror. This interpretation of a historical event might have originated from Wajda's incorrect belief that the Germans executed his father at Katyn. Likewise, many other Poles initially believed that the Nazis had been responsible for the massacre.<sup>16</sup> By 1955, it was clear to all that the Soviets ordered the murders of the Polish officers at Katyn. Although Wajda was devastated by his father's death, he still portrayed the communists in a positive light and chose not to show the Soviets as persons capable of as much cruelty as the Germans. Wajda's film seems to ignore the fact that the Red Army occupied parts of Poland with the Nazis.

Representatives of the Polish Home Army are not portrayed in a much more positive light than the Germans. The Home Army represented the Polish Government in exile, which operated from London. The shop owner, Berg, supports the Home Army in their fight against the Nazis, but he is not completely committed to the cause. He warns that he does not want to continue hiding weapons in his shop because it could cause problems for him with the Nazis. Berg plays both sides. He placates the Germans for the sake of his business, and this aspect of his character obviously serves as a criticism of capitalism. During an inspection by German officers, one of Berg's men behaves foolishly as he climbs on a bunk frame to show how sturdy it is made. He bounces around in

---

16 "Andrzej Wajda: What we knew about Soviets, video interview," Web of Stories. <http://www.webofstories.com/play/13550?o=MS> (accessed November 20, 2011).

a clown-like way and draws the laughter of the Germans. His lack of dignity, shown to amuse the Nazis, comes across as a humiliation to the Polish people in the face of the occupation. Later, when a missing pistol is traced back to Stach, a Home Army officer searches Stach's home for the firearm. The officer's behavior is cruel and harsh, not far removed from the behavior of the Nazis. The people of the area are stirred to come to the defense of Stach and his mother, threatening the Home Army men with violence. This negative portrayal of the Home Army, despite his own background, is a strong indicator that Wajda exercised preference falsification.

In the two other films of his war trilogy, *Kanal* (1956) and *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), Wajda glorifies the heroic members of the Home Army.<sup>17</sup> They are portrayed as brave, self-sacrificing, and willing to fight against impossible odds. He is clearly vilifying the Home Army in *A Generation* to please those above him who control the future of his career.

Although Wajda followed the basic guidelines of socialist realism, he did show signs of rebellion with *A Generation*. He went against the wishes of Bohdan Czeszko, the author of the screenplay (originally titled *Candidate Term*). Czeszko's vision included a coming-of-age story about a young man maturing with the ultimate goal of becoming a member of the Communist Party. Wajda instead made the story more personal. He directed a tale of a young man starting out as an innocent and naïve youth who, through hardship and heartbreak, grows into a seasoned and melancholy rebel fighter. Stach Mazur is a more three-dimensional character, rather than the typical one-dimensional characters of socialist realism.<sup>18</sup>

Wajda portrayed the feeling of oppression visually with the lighting and sets of the film. Most of the sets are small and have a sense of confinement. Even outdoor scenes are shot in tight streets or in between the walls that formed the boundaries of the Warsaw ghetto. Many of the scenes were filmed in underground sewers contributing even more to the sense of confinement. Shot in black and white, Wajda borrowed heavily from the *Film Noir* genre and most of the scenes are very dark, giving the film an almost nightmarish quality. Although these elements are used to convey the feeling of oppression under the Nazi occupation, the audience of 1955 Poland could easily apply the same sentiment toward the current communist regime.<sup>19</sup>

17 Falkowska, 44-64.

18 Ibid., 192-93.

19 Ewa Mazierska, "A Generation: Wajda on War," The Criterion Collection. Posted on April 25, 2005, <http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1053-a-generation-wajda-on-war> (accessed November 20, 2011).

76

One of Wajda's more complex characters is Jasio Krone, who questions whether he should be involved in the People's Army, vacillating back and forth with his level of commitment. Although he is one of Stach's friends in the shop, he is reluctant to join Stach's group. Jasio professes to be part of the resistance, but is conflicted. Representing the more cerebral side of Polish society, he wears a white coat similar to the coats popular among Western intellectuals in the 1950s.<sup>20</sup> The critic Boleslaw Michalek wrote: "It is a fair guess that the inner world to which Wajda personally felt most attuned was that of Jasio Krone—edgy, troubled, bewildered, switching from one extreme to the other."<sup>21</sup> He has a strong look of fear on his face as he passes the bodies of those hanged by the Nazis for their subversive actions. He seems paralyzed by this fear, and it is apparent that he does not wish to fight. When Stach later approaches him about joining the People's Army group, Jasio refuses. While he is telling Stach "No," Jasio is subconsciously wrapping a leather strap around his hand suggesting that he is imagining a noose being wrapped around his neck. However, Jasio is the first to act in irrational violence, shooting the German officer in the pub. He seems to gain a sense of bravado because he has a gun in his hand. Although he later repudiates violence and declares he is against killing, his change of heart only occurs just after a pistol is taken away from him. He is told that weapons belong to the whole group and he must share. Without the weapon the fear returns and he claims, "I am just a civilian. What can I do?" He is once again immobilized by fear.

Jasio's resolve is finally set by the pressure of Polish family honor. Strong themes of Polish nationalism run through the film. Jasio's now elderly father was a veteran of the Polish Army and talks frequently of his military exploits. When Jasio encounters a former Jewish neighbor trying to escape the Germans, he clearly agonizes over what to do, but tells the man that there is nothing he can do. The words of Jasio's father are what finally cause him to commit fully to the resistance. Just after the Jewish man leaves, his father says, "You're right. Stay out of it. You're a journeyman now, not a hero." As the father says this, he is sitting under a painting of himself as a young man in uniform. Wajda emphasizes this idea of family honor by using Jasio's face as the young face of his father in the painting. This clearly symbolizes that it is now Jasio's time to step into the uniform and fight for his family and for Poland. Contrary to most socialist realism films, Jasio joining the communist rebels is not a *fait de compli*. He takes part not out of some high socialist ideal, but out of a sense of personal honor,

---

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

nationalism, and compassion.

*A Generation* departs most notably from the standard socialist realism form through the various tragic endings. Sekula disappears to the Jewish ghettos, Dorota is eventually arrested and taken away to her certain death by the Nazis, and Jasio throws himself off of a winding staircase when he is cornered by the Germans. Death was not the normal ending for a socialist hero, but in a more authentic wartime environment, real socialist heroes encounter death. Stach has to watch as Dorota is taken away by the Nazis. He has fallen in love with her and wants to rescue her, but he resists knowing that it is useless and he must live to fight another day. At the end of the film, Stach sits, grieving the loss of Dorota with a tear running down his face. Wajda contrasts this sadness with the appearance of a group of youthful, bright-eyed recruits who meet Stach. They are full of energy and eager, very much like Stach was when he first began. It is a somber conclusion compared to typical socialist films that end with heroes walking off into the Marxist utopia.

Knowingly or not, Wajda illustrates the principles of preference falsification in *A Generation*, as all of the characters lead double lives.<sup>22</sup> They have a persona that they present for the Nazi occupiers, while having a private self with ulterior motives. The Germans view most of the men in the film as being simply normal factory workers, but they are secretly rebel fighters working in opposition to Nazi rule. Even the owner of the shop, while furnishing the Germans with bunk beds, is secretly storing weapons for the Home Army. This duplicity surely resonated with the Polish audience, who by the time of the film were accustomed to not revealing their inner thoughts.

### ***Man of Marble***

As Wajda's career progressed, his status as a top Polish director, along with changes in the country's political climate, allowed him to be increasingly critical of the communist government. By the 1970s, Poland saw an economic decline leading to social unrest and criticism of the failing socialist system. Because of this dissatisfaction with the government, Wajda, and fellow director Krzysztof Zanussi, started a movement known as the "cinema of moral concern," a style that addressed the hardships of the Polish people under the communist government. His fame allowed him to reveal inner preferences that he could not express before. Despite this new

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

freedom, Wajda limited his voice to veiled comments within his films. To protect his career, and his art, Wajda did not openly join any dissident movements.<sup>23</sup> Although he started revealing some of his innermost thoughts, Wajda had not reach his revolutionary threshold yet.

In 1977 Wajda released *Man of Marble*, a film that in many ways reflected his own experiences as a director. The main character wades through the same mire of bureaucracy that Wajda encountered. Producing the film was not without difficulty. In the works since 1964, the film had to be postponed due to censorship.<sup>24</sup> Finally winning approval for *Man of Marble* required considerable maneuvering on the part of Wajda, and the finished product reflected this challenging process.

With a contemporary setting, the film chronicles a young female film student, Agnieszka, while she makes her thesis film. Told through a series of flashbacks, Agnieszka attempts to uncover the fate of a socialist worker hero, Mateusz Birkut, after his fall from grace in the early 1960s. Agnieszka, like Wajda, is interested in uncovering the truth of the past. Throughout the film, Wajda is encouraging the Polish public to question the history that has been presented to them by the communist government. In this way, he is giving others information that preference falsification would normally deny.

Wajda is highly critical of the propaganda system that produced early socialist films. He illustrates how the institutions of power exploit the humble and naïve Polish worker, who is only to be discarded when no longer needed. Included in the film are two fictional socialist realism films, *The Beginning of the Town* and *Architects of Our Happiness*. Wajda's treatment of socialist realism serves as a function of catharsis for the director.<sup>25</sup> As an admission of guilt for his contribution to these types of films, Wajda symbolically lists himself as the assistant director of *Architects of Our Happiness*.

Of all of Wajda's films, *Man of Marble* appears to be his most autobiographical, and this can be seen on two different levels. One representative of Wajda is the fictional director, Jerzy Burski, who discovers Birkut, and wants to make a documentary of him as the ideal socialist worker. From the start it is clear that Burski and the party officials are manipulating the image of Birkut and making sure that every aspect of the documentary

23 Falkowska, 21-22.

24 Ibid., 166-67.

25 John Orr, *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda: The Art of Irony and Defiance* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 42-43.

they are producing is flattering to socialism. Through this aspect of the plotline, Wajda shows how images were cultivated in early socialist realism films.

When Agnieszka tracks down Burski, he is now a famous director, like Wajda. The tenacity of young Agnieszka impresses Burski, and he allows her to accompany him back to his villa. The contrast between the two filmmakers is symbolic of the difference between the younger and older versions of Wajda. Burski now lives at a level of comfort well above the average Polish citizen. He has compromised his principles to gain a high level of success in the communist system. The flashback is actually Burski's version of the story, and he readily admits to staging parts of the documentary. It is believed that Wajda saw himself as the aging Burski. He had compromised his values in the past to gain a venue for his art, paving the way for its subsequent success. Agnieszka stands in sharp contrast to Burski; instead of a large house and servants, her only possessions are the drab clothes she is wearing and a small duffle bag of belongings.<sup>26</sup>

Agnieszka represents a combination of who Wajda was in 1977, as well as the filmmaker he wishes he had been. She is bold, unafraid, and passionate. Despite discouragement from her producer and from government officials, she does not surrender her vision. She engages in several arguments with her producer as he attempts to steer her in a safer direction. He insists that she should create a film about the steel mills showing how industrialization has improved communist Poland. She argues that a film about Poland in the 1950s would be more interesting to youths.

The 1950s were a turbulent time for Poland and other countries in Eastern Europe as these nations struggled to obtain more independence from the Soviet Union following Stalin's death. The General Secretary of the Polish Communist Party, Wladyslaw Gomulka, averted a Soviet armed intervention, like the one Hungary experienced in November 1956, by practicing subservience. This decade and Poland's subjection to the Soviet Union was not something the Soviets wanted the Polish people to revisit and reflect on. Considering this, Agnieszka's proposal for a film concerning the 1950s is extremely controversial.

Agnieszka searches the back rooms of the national museum for socialist realism statues from the 1950s. When she comes across a statue of the socialist hero, Birkut, she is immediately drawn to it and decides to focus

---

<sup>26</sup> Falkowska, 161.

her film on him. She desires to discover the truth behind what happened to Birkut. While the director Burski appears relaxed and casual, Agnieszka pursues the truth with a chain-smoking manic energy. Agnieszka's prying into such a sensitive subject causes the school to suspend her project and confiscate her equipment. The film has an abrupt ending after Agnieszka locates Birkut's son, Maciej Tomczyk, and learns that Birkut is dead.

The film concludes with Agnieszka and Tomczyk walking down the hall of the school with looks that imply an impending confrontation with school officials over her suspension. The driving force of the film is the question of what became of Birkut, but that question is left unanswered. The viewer never learns the circumstances of his death. On occasion a filmmaker will leave an open ending to their film for artistic purposes; however, the ending does not seem to be Wajda's intention. In fact, the final scenes were determined through censorship. The Script Assessment Commission removed a scene that explains that the fictional Birkut had been killed in the clashes at the Gdansk shipyards in 1970, as well as a scene of Birkut's funeral. The government allowed the film to be released to quell tensions, but the connection to the real events at the shipyards and the portrayal of the emotional funeral was more than they could allow.<sup>27</sup> It would be another four years before Wajda could reveal the missing scenes and the fate of Birkut in the sequel *Man of Iron*.

The protest that led to Birkut's death in 1970 surfaced again in the 1980s. Rising food prices and stagnating wages led to general strikes at the Lenin shipyard in 1980. As other shipyards joined in the general strikes, the movement evolved into the independent labor union known as Solidarity. Solidarity succeeded in breaking the will of the Polish government and the Polish Communist Party First Secretary, Edward Gierek. On August 31, 1980, the union and the government settled on the Gdansk Agreement, which recognized the right of Polish citizens to establish trade unions independent of Communist Party rule.<sup>28</sup> For a time the government tolerated Solidarity and those associated with the union experienced unprecedented freedom, but this was not to last. With possible Soviet military intervention looming, Polish Prime Minister, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, imposed martial law on December 13, 1981. With swift action, Jaruzelski took the Solidarity leaders off guard, and the union leaders backed down, choosing non-violence.<sup>29</sup>

---

27 Orr, 4.

28 Michael Dobbs, K. S. Karol, and Dessa Trevisan, *Poland/Solidarity/Walesa* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981), 48-64.

29 John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 221-22.

***Man of Iron***

Between the time of the Gdansk Agreement in August of 1980 and the beginning of martial law in December of 1981, Wajda experienced a sense of freedom that allowed him to express his inner preferences completely. On December 16, 1980, he was chosen by organizers to preside over the unveiling of the *Monument to the Fallen Shipyard Workers of 1970* at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk. Wajda directed the entire ceremony and incorporated many symbols of national unity. One of Wajda's leading actors, Daniel Olbrychski, recited the names of the 42 fallen workers, and as he did so, the crowd responded, "He is with us."<sup>30</sup> It was during this time of unprecedented freedom that Wajda hastily produced *Man of Iron*, the follow up to *Man of Marble*. The film continues the story of Maciej Tomczyk, the son of *Man of Marble's* Mateusz Birkut, and is recognized more for its historical importance than its quality. Disjointed and roughly edited, *Man of Iron* includes a collection of events that document the rise of Solidarity. The fictional character, Tomczyk, plays the part of the real-life leader of the trade union movement, Lech Walesa.<sup>31</sup>

After Solidarity rose to a position of power, the Polish government still exercised influence over most media outlets. All news flowing out of these censored sources criticized the trade unions and distorted the facts in favor of the communist government. In a bold move, Wajda was the first to deal with the subject of Solidarity. It seems that he felt an imperative to inform the public of the events that were being hidden from them.

Being well acquainted with socialist realism, Wajda incorporated many of its stylistic elements, but instead of supporting the communist establishment, he promoted the cause of Solidarity. In *A Generation*, the Soviet-backed government promoted this style because the information benefitted the communist state. Communism had been seen as the better alternative to Nazi domination or the Polish government in exile. Wajda now turned socialist realism against its creator.<sup>32</sup> Once again the worker is the hero, but now the revolutionary government has turned on the worker and subjugated him again. Wajda's characters in *Man of Iron* are very one dimensional. Those who favor Solidarity are seen as pure while those of the communist government are seen as malicious and evil. This idea of good versus evil struck a chord with the predominantly Catholic audience. *Man of*

30 Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 102.

31 Janina Falkowska, *The Political Films of Andrzej Wajda: Dialogism in Man of Marble, Man of Iron, and Danton* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996), 155-66.

32 Ibid., 145.

*Iron* has far more religious imagery than *Man of Marble*.<sup>33</sup>

On October 16, 1978, Karol Wojtyła became Pope John Paul II, the first ever Polish pope and the first non-Italian pope since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. His election was widely celebrated in Catholic Poland. Because of the country's deep religious roots, the Catholic Church had become identified with patriotism.<sup>34</sup> The Pope was a strong supporter of human rights and would become a dominant participant and symbol in the Solidarity movement. Shortly after his election, John Paul II made his first official visit to his home country, in June of 1979. The occasion was the nine-hundredth anniversary of the martyrdom of Saint Stanislaw. Stanislaw had been Bishop of Krakow, as had John Paul II. According to legend, Stanislaw was martyred for chastising King Boleslaw the Bold.<sup>35</sup> It was fitting that the pope would visit Poland to celebrate a saint who defied the institution of power in the country. First Secretary Gierek and his advisors recognized the potential for civil unrest that the Pope's visit posed. In an effort to curb the impact of the visit, the Communist Party issued instructions for teachers that summarized the threat they perceived:

82

The pope is our enemy, because he celebrated the mass for Pyjas. [Murdered opposition group member that was probable victim of police brutality] Due to his uncommon skills and great sense of humor he is dangerous, because he charms everybody, especially journalists. Besides, he goes for cheap gestures in his relations with the crowd, for instance puts on a highlander's hat, shakes all hands, kisses children, etc. It is modeled on American presidential campaigns... He is dangerous, because he will make Saint Stanislaw the patron of the opposition to the authorities and a defender of human rights. Luckily we managed to maneuver him out of the date May 8... The visit will cause some complications in our relations with the Soviet Union, because the pope will demand the, so-called, equal rights for the believers in the countries... His visit will cause some problems, because we will have to pacify 156 oppositional activists for its duration... Because of the activation of the Church in Poland our activities designed to atheize [sic] the youth not only cannot diminish, but must intensely develop. We must strive at all cost to weaken the Church activities and undermine its authority in the society. In this respect all means are allowed and we cannot afford any sentiments.<sup>36</sup>

During World War II, Stalin had shown contempt for the Catholic Church by asking, "How many divisions does the Pope have?"<sup>37</sup> Little did he know that the Church would come to play a pivotal role in ending the Soviet

33 Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda: History, Politics, and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema*, 189.

34 Dobbs, 42.

35 Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 130-33.

36 Ibid., 134-35.

37 Denis MacShane, *Solidarity: Poland's Independent Trade Union* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1981), 99.

domination of Poland.

The pope's visit had the effect that the communists feared. Solidarity and the Church fused together in a common human rights goal. In *Man of Iron* this partnership is symbolized in the cross Tomczyk makes to mark the sight of his father's death. The iron cross, welded together by Tomczyk in the same manner he would weld something at the shipyard, has a pointed base which he thrusts into the Polish soil in a stabbing gesture, as if to say that the combination of the Church and the workers will strike at the heart of the country.

In the film, Tomczyk and Agnieszka take on messianic qualities. Party officials seek to find evidence to slander Tomczyk, but like in the case of Christ, nothing can be found. He is pure of heart and motives, serving as one of the saviors of the Polish working class. The wedding of Maciej and Agnieszka takes on an iconic quality. Attended by the saints of Solidarity, Walesa and Walentynowicz, they both stand by giving their blessing to the mother and father of the labor movement. After Agnieszka becomes pregnant she takes on a Madonna quality. While her husband is in prison, shipyard workers bring offerings of money to the "holy mother." When Agnieszka tries to refuse they say, "It is not charity, it is a symbol of our solidarity." Wajda also incorporates numerous scenes of documentary footage of a religious nature. For instance, the film includes footage of real masses that were held during the strikes, stressing the importance of religion to the movement.

83

### ***Danton***

It is possible that a person liberated from preference falsification can return to a level of falsification if his environment changes to the point that he no longer feels safe enough to reveal his beliefs. Wajda's next film, *Danton*, was released in 1983, less than two years after the imposition of martial law. Wajda's denial of a political message in *Danton* may have been a return to preference falsification on his part. He was due to return to Poland to direct a theater production and may have been concerned about his status and safety at home. Author David Sterritt states,

It's possible that *Danton* has more biting political meanings and intentions than Wajda cares to let on, fearing for his status in the Polish artistic community... or his personal well-being. 'There are moments in the history of our country when we can afford to make... a political film that one is not ashamed to put one's signature to,' [Wajda] told Marcel Ophuls, adding that, 'right now, this is not the case in Poland.'<sup>38</sup>

38 Falkowska, *The Political Films of Andrzej Wajda: Dialogism in Man of Marble, Man of Iron, and Danton*, 50.

Wajda retreated to the relative safety of using a historical event in France as a metaphor for modern Poland. Despite Wajda’s denial that *Danton* had anything to do with the current political climate in Poland, the public found the parallels too striking to be mere chance. The film was made in France as a joint venture between the French, West German, and Polish film industries. Its reception in France and Poland was very different. The French disliked the film because of its blatant disregard of historical fact, while Polish audiences praised it because they saw the contemporary parallels to their own lives.<sup>39</sup> Wajda departed greatly from Stanislaw Przybyszewska’s original play, *The Danton Affair*, in which Robespierre was depicted in a much more favorable light.<sup>40</sup> *Danton* is not about the conflict between the French revolutionaries, Georges Danton and Maximilien Robespierre, but rather the conflict between Solidarity leader, Lech Walesa, and Polish Prime Minister, General Wojciech Jaruzelski.<sup>41</sup> There are strong similarities between the character of Robespierre and the way the Polish people perceived Jaruzelski to be.

Robespierre is rigid, serious, and very private. He is devoted to the strict principles of the revolution.<sup>42</sup> Even when his close friend, Camille Desmoulins, is numbered among the traitors, Robespierre pleads for him to turn against Danton but will not stop the arrest in order to save Camille. Robespierre appears to be tortured mentally and physically by his revolutionary principles. Jaruzelski is likewise stiff and rigid. Like the film’s Robespierre, Jaruzelski wore a corset under his clothing.<sup>43</sup> Always dressed in his uniform, and wearing sunglasses, because of an eye ailment, Jaruzelski was seen as very reserved and serious. Although Wajda would not have known at the time, Jaruzelski was conflicted in his actions just as Robespierre had been. Jaruzelski explained in later years that the decision to impose martial law was made because a Soviet invasion was imminent. The invasion of the Red Army would have had a far greater risk of bloodshed than what occurred during martial law.<sup>44</sup>

As in *Man of Iron*, there are poignant commentaries in *Danton* of the pitfalls of revolution. Both Georges Danton and the Bolsheviks were revolutionaries who experienced the misfortune of seeing their own revolution become corrupted and turned against them. The character Danton is symbolic of the entire working class. The

---

39 Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda: History, Politics, and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema*, 202-204.

40 Paul Coates, *The Red and the White: The Cinema of People’s Poland* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 11.

41 Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda: History, Politics, and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema*, 200.

42 Ibid., 205.

43 Ibid., 200.

44 Jan Repa, “Profile: Poland’s last communist leader,” BBC News, Posted May 16, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1332541.stm> (accessed April 24, 2012).

Bolshevik revolution was supposed to be a triumph of the worker, and should have brought about the rise of the common man. However, the bourgeoisie was quickly replaced by revolutionaries who corrupted the system into a totalitarian bureaucracy. The common man was once again put back under oppression. Danton was also a revolutionary. He had been a founding member of the Committee of Public Safety, a committee that eventually turned against him. Just as Solidarity felt that the communist system had turned on the workers who helped create it, so too did the Committee of Public Safety betray Danton. In a review of *Danton*, Ireneusz Leczek commented:

Those who start the huge machinery of a social movement become its victims, thrust out by others. Private intentions mix with social ones. Naïve activists operate alongside experienced political players yearning for power and money. All this is very close to recent Polish affairs. Consequently, my opinion is that *Danton* is much more Polish than it may seem.<sup>45</sup>

The Bolshevik Revolution intended to offer freedom from oppression, but instead brought bondage to the very people that it claimed to liberate. The film is full of issues that paralleled Poland under communism. The film depicts French citizens standing in line for bread, just as the Polish people had to stand in line for food because of the increase of prices imposed by the government. As French soldiers escort an unidentified prisoner past the bread line, a young woman in line comments on how handsome he is. Just as in contemporary Poland, this expression of internal thought was subject to punishment, and secret informants were commonplace in Poland. The girl is overheard by a man on the street and he promptly reports her to a soldier and the woman is arrested and led away for her comments alone. She has not committed a crime, and as in Poland, she is arrested for mere suspicion of guilt.<sup>46</sup>

Wajda comments on the state of the Polish judicial system through his portrayal of the trial of Danton. There are so many similarities it is hard to believe that the parallels were not drawn intentionally. Similar to reports of trials in Poland under the communists, Danton was not given a fair trial. The charges were fabricated by the Committee of Public Safety, and Danton's group was forced to sign depositions incriminating them. The trial by the tribunal is clearly a formality. The rules seem flexible under the Committee's oversight. The jury is shortened from twelve members to nine because only nine men could be trusted to deliver a guilty verdict. Just as the Polish judicial system functioned as an arm of the communist apparatus, the military tribunal conducting the

<sup>45</sup> Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda: History, Politics, and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema*, 199.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

trial functioned as the arm of the Committee.<sup>47</sup> This is best exemplified through Robespierre's exclamation to the trial's presiding judge, "We send you the republic's enemies! Your duty is not to judge them but to destroy them!"

A key document of the French Revolution, *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, plays an important role in *Danton*. Copies of the rights are seen throughout the film, most notably displayed on both the door to Robespierre's bed chamber and early in the film as a boy is featured memorizing the rights. While stating the tenants dealing with a citizen's inherent freedom, the boy is punished for making a mistake. This is an obvious contradiction to a person's freedom to learn or not learn about freedom. At the end of the film, the boy is brought before Robespierre to recite these rights. Lying ill in bed, his face covered by a sheet, Robespierre listens uneasily to the boy. Symbolic of the illness of communism and in light of what has just taken place on the screen, it appears that Wajda is showing that everything that the revolution represented has been sacrificed in the name of protecting the revolution. It reflected the popular belief that communism had betrayed its basic mandate in order to protect the system. Wajda ends the film after the boy recites the first four rights:

86

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.
2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body, nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.
4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.

These four seem to be the most condemning of the communist system, especially as to its lack of a pluralistic political system and the implementation of laws that are not deemed to be harmful to the general public.

Wajda expressed in an interview that he felt *Danton* illustrated, "One of the tragedies of every revolution: the point when those who bring it about are no longer in a position to determine how it develops."<sup>48</sup> All revolutions, he said, are threatened by two possible scenarios: a premature end and a tendency to be taken over by

---

47 Rhett A. Butler, "Poland-Judicial System," Mongabay.com, [http://www.mongabay.com/history/poland/poland-judicial\\_system.html](http://www.mongabay.com/history/poland/poland-judicial_system.html) (accessed December 11, 2011).

48 Falkowska, *The Political Films of Andrzej Wajda: Dialogism in Man of Marble, Man of Iron, and Danton*, 50.

a new group. Just as Danton is doomed, he prophesizes that Robespierre will soon follow him to the guillotine. In the scenes involving the artist Jacques-Louis David, Wajda further reinforces the idea that the original leaders of the revolution eventually will lose power. As Robespierre enters David's studio to pose for a painting, the artist is seen instructing an apprentice in glazing David's painting *The Death of Marat*. Along with Danton and Robespierre, Jean-Paul Marat was considered one of the three main driving forces of the French Revolution and was the first of the three to lose his life. As Danton is being led to his execution, David is seen sketching him from a nearby window. This seems to complete the trinity of the martyrs of the revolution being committed to canvas.

In *Danton*, Wajda shows both sides of the revolutionary threshold as pertaining to preference falsification with the film's characters. One of Danton's supporters, Bourdon, is encouraged to speak up and defend Danton. Trembling, Bourdon gets up but instead of defending Danton, he condemns him. This is clearly an example of a man who is unwilling to risk the repercussions of speaking his beliefs. In contrast, when Robespierre offers Camille Desmoulins a chance to falsify his preferences and save his own life, the clearly fearful Desmoulins refuses the offer. Desmoulins reached his revolutionary threshold and would rather die than not speak his own truth.

## Conclusion

Socialism in Eastern Europe proved to be unsustainable. The bureaucracy needed to sustain the communist governments and the corruption that flourished in such complexity proved to be fatal to the Soviet Union's control. By June of 1989 Solidarity convinced the Polish government to allow pluralistic elections. Of the 261 seats being contested in the parliament, Solidarity won 260. The landslide victory took everyone by surprise, even Solidarity's leaders. They feared that such a strong showing would provoke a Soviet reaction, and this anxiety suggested that even they were not prepared for the results.<sup>49</sup> In December of 1989 a free-market economy and democratically elected government was formed. By January of 1990, the Communist Party that held sway over Poland for almost fifty years disbanded. The people of Poland were finally able to reveal their personal preferences and their preference was a rejection of communism.

---

<sup>49</sup> Kuran, 263-64.

Although Wajda tempered his personal thoughts at times, he could also make bold films that challenged convention. Over time, the Polish people gained access to information that aided in their realization that they were not alone in their negative opinions toward their government. Wajda had achieved the one thing that would help to protect him, fame. His success insulated him from some of the harsher repercussions that befell lesser-known dissidents. He could not just disappear, or at least not disappear without a violent outcry from the public. This fame helped to lower his revolutionary threshold and gave Wajda a great deal of power to reveal his true beliefs. He had taken the totalitarian tool of propaganda and turned it against the communist rulers. In 2007 Wajda made a film, *Katyn*, which was free of any need for preference falsification. *Katyn* told the story of the massacre that had taken his father. The film is a harsh criticism of the Soviet Union and the horrendous acts Soviets had perpetrated. Throughout his career, Wajda's art sometimes pleased the Polish people with its truthfulness, while at other times he tempered his films to protect himself. His art could be benevolent because of what it revealed, or it could be harmful because of what it did not say. He was the Polish son who pleased his parents and the one who displeased them at the same time. He was Cain and Abel. ◆◆◆