

TITLE Polish Cinema in the 1930s as a Trace of Reality
AUTHOR Adam Uryniak
SUPERVISOR Prof. Tadeusz Lubelski

The aim of the dissertation is to take a close look at the functioning of those elements in feature films made in interwar Poland (1918–1939), also known as the Second Republic of Poland, that originate from non-film reality and to examine in what way the topics, events or historical processes present in the public debate were dealt with in the cinema. The introduction presents the underlying premises of the methods and theories applied, the historical and film context related to the organisation of the film industry in the Second Polish Republic and the place of cinema in Polish culture of the period.

The first chapter is devoted to films in which the protagonists are women or in which the main focus of the plot is on women. Equality of women and emancipation processes in Polish society were among the most controversial topics in the public discourse of interwar Poland. In addition to the issue of equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, the problems of much more intimate areas of life – sexuality and birth control – were also widely discussed. The new social roles of women were often presented as a threat to the traditional image of the female as guardian of the hearth and home. Cinema was keen on the characters of emancipated women, presented in the conventions of a comedy, melodrama or thriller. This group of films provides an insight into the contemporaneous picture of many aspects of society at that time, such as legislation, social relations, social mores and morality.

The second chapter contains an analysis of films that are part of the propaganda image of Poland as a ‘maritime nation’. This motif, strongly present in the official state propaganda, was based on presenting the Second Polish Republic as a country with a strong fleet, with economic and communications links with the whole world and capable of colonial expansion. In the interwar period, the themes of travel, colonial expeditions and maritime issues became one of the fundamental leitmotifs of both state propaganda and popular culture. The group of films discussed in this part of the thesis also presents a certain type of hero recurrent in these works: a strong and brave man, both cunning and endowed with a sense of humour, who prevails over his opponents in every situation. Such films provided an outlet for a society working through the trauma of the past and the partitions which resulted in the country disappearing from the map of Europe and enabled Poles to daydream about their country being on a par with the world’s great powers.

The third chapter is devoted to films the plot of which explores the Great Depression and the social problems that resulted from this catastrophe. In order to maintain the interest of the viewer, Polish filmmakers were obliged to spice up repetitive blueprints and clichéd formulas with elements that differentiated the plot and attracted attention. In the 1930s, such a winning format proved to

include the techniques of realism, which gained popularity in Polish prose after the shock brought on by the Great Crisis. The works of the Przedmieście literary group, the series of journalistic reportage published in the magazine *Wiadomości Literackie* and in popular novels of manners such as *Strachy* (The Ghosts) by Maria Ukniewska or *Zakłete rewiry* (Hotel Pacific) by Henryk Worcell, directed the attention of the general public to areas of society that until then had been kept below the radar. In order to meet the tastes of the audience, the filmmakers swiftly took up realistic treatment of the subject matter, without however completely abandoning sentimentality and melodramatic entanglement. A characteristic feature of these films is a degree of left-wing sensitivity, which places the viewer's sympathy on the side of simple, ordinary people, rather than the corrupt and scheming representatives of the idle upper classes.

18.06.2018

Adam Uryszek