
Goodbye Wajda, fighter for freedom and truth

On October 9th Andrzej Wajda, the famous Polish film and theater director, died. He was known for his use of the cinema as an instrument for teaching ordinary people the truth about recent Polish history.

In Communist era, in fact, ruling class, distorted facts and historical events for pleasing Soviets, masking their real occupation of Poland, pursued in a long term strategy. So many Polish intellectuals, coming from the opposition, starting the so called “flying schools”, teaching house by house, village by village the truth. But cinema had a strongest and mass impact.

Massacre of 22.000 Polish Army Officers in Katiń forest in April and May 1940 was the clearest example of historical distortion made by the Regime: Soviets and “official Polish propaganda” accused Nazis for this crime, but, as was demonstrated, it was carried out by the NKVD ("People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs", a Soviet secret police organisation) for destroying Polish Army elite and facilitating Russian invasion. It was necessary the end of URSS for having an investigation of Russian Prosecutors General that confirmed Soviet responsibility for the massacre, formalized in November 2010 with a declaration approved by Duma.

Truth about Katiń massacre was one of the most important Polish opposition battles since the '50s and was made known in “flying schools” in the '70s.

And Katiń was subject of one of Wajda's last movies (2007), because of its symbolic importance but also for the personal commitment of the film director, whose father was one of the Officers killed.

Katiń win the nomination for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar, as other three Wajda's films: *The Promised Land* (1975), *The Maids of Wilko* (1979), *Man of Iron* (1981), his masterpiece, inspired to another capital event in Polish last history, Solidarność Revolution, in progress during film production.

Many others Wajda's movies have historic subject: *A Generation* (1955), *Kanal* (1956), *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), *Samson* (1961), the story of Jacob, a Jewish boy, who wants to survive during the

Nazi occupation of Poland, *Landscape After the Battle* (1970), *Pilate and Others* (1971), *The Wedding* (1972), *The Promised Land* (1974), *Man of Marble* (1976), showing the episodes of Stalinism in Poland, *Danton* (1983), set in 1794, a source of recall to Polish Post-Revolutionary Terror, *Korczak* (1990), a story about a Jewish-Polish doctor who takes care of orphan children, *The Crowned-Eagle Ring* (1993), *Holy Week* (1995), on Jewish-Polish relations, *Wałęsa. Man of Hope*, Wajda's biography of Lech Wałęsa.

Wajda's interest in history came from his personal life but also from his direct political engagement for freedom and democracy. Born in 1926, when he was 16th years old, he joined Polish resistance and served in the Home Army (1942). After the war, he studied to be a painter at Kraków's Academy of Fine Arts before entering the Łódź Film School: in his first movies (such as *A Generation*) he contested nationalism.

In the '70s and '80s he was activist in Solidarność movement: in *Man of Iron* (1981), sequel of *The Man of Marble*, he celebrated Solidarność leader Lech Wałęsa, appearing as himself in the film, and Ana Walentynowicz, hero of socialist labour and activist of the movement. For this involvement with Solidarność, Polish Government forced Wajda's production company out of business, but in 1989 first free polls he was elected Senator in Solidarność side.

In 2011 he made “Knight of the Order of the White Eagle”, Polish highest decoration.

The artistic career give him some important awards too: besides the already mentioned four nominations for Oscar Prize, Wajda was honoured with the Louis Delluc Prize and a César Award for Best Director (1993) for *Danton*. He was the President of the Jury at the 16th Moscow International Film Festival. In 1990 he was honoured by the European Film Awards for his lifetime achievement. In the early '90s, he appointed artistic director of Warsaw's Teatr Powszechny. In 2000 he obtained honorary Oscar, in 2006 the Golden Bear for lifetime achievement at the Berlin International Film Festival, in 2009 with *Sweet Rush* was awarded by Alfred Bauer Prize at the Berlin International Film Festival and by the Prix FIPRESCI during the European Film Awards. In 2013 *Wałęsa. Man of Hope* had its world premiere at the 2013 Venice International Film Festival.

Finally just a curiosity: *Man of Marble* figure poster is “The Man for Peace”, created by Italian painter Franco Scepi in 1977 and inspired by Karol Wojtyła. This image was an anticipatory symbol of the fall of Berlin Wall, chosen in 1999 by Mikhail Gorbachev as Nobel Peace Prize emblem.

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