

THE ON-SCREEN LIFE OF MYTH

Warsaw Uprising in Polish Feature Films

Summary

The scientific objective of the monograph is to present the images of the Warsaw Uprising in Polish feature films from the 1940s until today, as well as specifying and describing various ways of their presentation and showing dominant problems typical of the periods of time when the films were made. Due to their scope and influence, feature films shape the social perception of the past to a much greater extent than documentaries. They also shape the memory of the past and the ways of understanding it, and it creates and disseminates political and historical myths. The analysis of the changing images of the Warsaw Uprising in Polish feature cinema sheds light on the issues of memory, identity, ways of understanding and manifesting patriotism, creating, popularizing and functioning of national myths, but also of cinema as a means of shaping and perpetuating the perception of history by the society.

In the collective consciousness, the Warsaw Uprising largely functions as a myth of heroism and martyrdom. There is a set of specific symbols and meanings attributed to this event. On the one hand, films on this subject set themselves against the myth of the Warsaw Uprising created by a collective imagination and consolidated in the social consciousness of generations of Poles in a specific, changeable way, depending on the political and cultural circumstances. On the other hand, due to the myth-creating character of the film as a medium, cinema itself creates the collective image of a historical fact, often imbuing its representation with symbolism and metaphor.

The monograph concentrates on a description of changes concerning the presentation of the Uprising subject matter both in the period of the Polish People's Republic and the one after the system breakthrough. Moreover, it will refer to the influence of political, cultural and technological conditions of the film presentation of the Warsaw Uprising. The specific character of the subject of the Uprising causes makes the analyzed films say more of the period of time when they were made rather than the historical event itself. The ways of presenting the Warsaw Uprising in films were undoubtedly influenced by issues connected with using history as a means to legitimize the authorities, the propaganda of the Polish People's Republic and the changing attitude of communist authorities towards

the Home Army, which influenced the attitude to the Uprising and, furthermore, the system breakthrough, abolishment of censorship as well as the current political history. The analysis of the latest films about the Uprising took into account the transition from analog to digital media, embracing the subject by popular culture, the commercialization of history, and the changes in senders and recipients (these are new films made by young directors and aimed at young audiences), which entail changes in communication and clearly influences the poetics of the films. The research subject matter of the monograph also extends the knowledge of films used as tools to shape national identity and historical memory, and to mythically represent history. The analyzed issue also acquires significance and topicality in the context of changes in today's world and culture (globalization, cultural homogenization, tension between what is universal and local, issues connected with national culture and national cinema, creation and dissemination of political and historical myths).

The conducted research approaches the topic of the Uprising in an extensive way. The analysis concerned films in which the Uprising is the main subject, those in which it is a secondary or episodic event and those in which it functions only in allusions, quotations or as an intertext). The analyzed films are shown against the background of historical and cultural policies of given periods of time (from Stalinist regime until today). The context for interpretation is also provided by literature (from the 1940s to the 1990s, most of films screenplays were based on literary work of such authors as: Jerzy Stefan Stawiński, Jerzy Krzysztoń, Roman Bratny, Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz), documentaries, cartoons and comics (recently films about the Uprising have been functioning in completely different conditions, which is a consequence of the Uprising becoming a kind of "fashionable" part of popular culture). Carrying out the study was justified by the significance and specific character of the subject, as well as its meaning for today's culture, national heritage and its position in the current Polish political history. Following all the changes of the perception and reinterpretation of the Uprising in Polish feature films helps to capture the universal mechanisms of manipulating history but also to put history straight, memorialize and mythologize it.