

## Screen metamorphoses of a historical hero in varying aesthetic and political contexts in Polish feature films, series, television drama and documentaries on the example of the figure of Józef Piłsudski (years 1918-2021)

The main purpose of this study was to collect and systematise Polish screen productions released within the period of more than a hundred years, devoted entirely or largely to Józef Piłsudski – his political and personal biography, life's work and historical legacy. In three subsequent chapters – concentrating on the interwar period, Polish People's Republic and Third Republic – I discussed sixty-three screen works on the basis of literature and database review, including fourteen feature films, twenty-six documentaries, seven drama series, five television dramas, nine docudramas and two docudrama series.

In the research process, I compiled and analysed the most exhaustive list of cinematographic and television works available to date – produced over the last hundred years and devoted to the life and work of Józef Piłsudski, and his historical significance. Concentrating on each subsequent work, I describe how his screen image evolved depending on the changing aesthetic and political contexts. I also discuss the profile of the actor portraying the character in each of the productions, as well as the director of the film or teleplay. I would like to emphasize the fact that no thorough and detailed examination of Józef Piłsudski's relationships with cinematic art had ever been carried out prior to my study. Therefore, this dissertation is unique – in the sense that it supplements partly incomplete historical studies, and relevant – because, as mentioned before, over a dozen productions connected with, or entirely devoted to Piłsudski, have been released in recent years. A detailed bibliographical search query was conducted, including books, films and online sources.

The total of twenty-seven actors have played the Marshal in the feature films and docudrama productions discussed here, including truly great, even brilliant artists such as Daniel Olbrychski, Zbigniew Zapasiewicz, Mariusz Bonaszewski, Jan Nowicki, Jan Frycz, Jerzy Duszyński, Ryszard Filipiński, Janusz Zakrzewski and Borys Szyc. They created a fascinating array of Józef Piłsudski's screen characters. The works discussed in this dissertation show him at all stages of his life – in historical, political and personal contexts – painting a comprehensive, multifaceted film portrait of the eminent Pole. They also trace the evolution that his screen image has undergone over time – from the worshipped mythical hero of the Second Republic, through the controversial, grim

autocrat in the cinema of the Polish People's Republic, to the more complementary and balanced image known from the most recent productions. The works discussed here prove and illustrate how important – and at the same time ambiguous and complicated – Józef Piłsudski was in Poland's history, how eventful, paradoxical and twisted his life was, and how many valuable, sometimes even remarkable, films Polish cinema owes to his biography.

His devoted admirers see him as the conqueror of the Bolsheviks, a great visionary believing Poland to be a regional power of Europe, similar to the one from the age of the Jagiellonian dynasty – with mighty demographic and military potential, capable of resisting the imperial aspirations of Germany and Soviet Russia. His opponents consider him a dictator who brutally cracked down on the opposition and limited democracy, and at the same time accuse him of megalomania and instrumental treatment of his associates. They claim the Chief of State embroiled Poland in an unnecessary armed conflict with Bolshevik Russia, which almost cost the country a loss of its freshly regained independence and took a toll of thousands of Polish lives.

All of the above-mentioned contentious themes and issues are reflected in the respective films discussed in this paper. Complementarily, they form a mosaic, multi-dimensional portrait of the main architect of Poland's post-partition independence in historical, political, cultural, social and moral contexts throughout more than a century of Polish cinematography.

My own, nearly two-year long experience with the series *Young Piłsudski* makes the subject matter especially close to my heart, acting as a significant emotional impulse to cast a broader and deeper look at the Marshal's screen incarnations in Polish film and television of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

I devoted the last chapter of this dissertation to my own experience with an epic historical series spanning the period of thirty years. I describe each of the production stages of the series, its preparation, filming and postproduction, and talk to the co-creators of *Young Piłsudski* – another important personal aspect.

The production of the series began in May 2018 and finished in September 2019. The budget was over 18 million zloty. The thirteen episodes of the series were shot over the period of 125 days of filming, in a dozen or so locations including Modlin, Nowa Sucha, Nowogród, Żyrardów, Przemyśl, Chabówka, Trakiszki and Lublin. 240 actors, 1,346 extras, 70 stuntmen and pyrotechnicians participated in the filming. The technical crew consisted of 80 persons. The study refers to available production data, my own experiences, reflections and memories. For its

purposes, I conducted a series of interviews with representatives of all creative units in order to show the fullest possible picture of the project, including all conceivable aspects and contexts of the production.

The series *Young Piłsudski*, thanks to which the title character has also become part of my own creative biography, provided an important incentive to create this dissertation. When describing the course of production activities at each stage – from preparation, through filming, to postproduction – I often quote the co-creators of the series, including those who seldom get to be interviewed: scenographers, costume designers, make-up artists, film editor, CGI artist, stunt coordinator, assistant director or music supervisor.

The aim of the interviews with representatives of all creative units was to present the fullest possible picture of the production process, taking into account all its aspects and contexts. It is also my humble way of emphasizing their valuable contribution to the creative process. Therefore, the final chapter has an analytical and empirical character, implementing the method of semi-structured interviews and anthropological observation of the camera crew, combined with the story of making a television work on the example of the production of the series *Young Piłsudski*.