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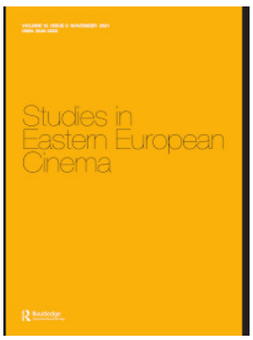

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Eugeniusz Bodo: the tragic face of Polish capitalism

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the career of Eugeniusz Bodo who was the greatest Polish male movie star of the interwar period, examines the character he created on screen and its connection to Bodo's off-screen persona. It also examines his position in Polish cinema after his death, especially during the period following the fall of state socialism, what is described here as 'poststardom'. It argues that Bodo owed his success to two principal factors. One of them was the conducive circumstances in the Polish film and entertainment industry and his ability to exploit them to the full. Another factor was the match between his artistic persona and certain traits of Polish national character and, especially, the fit between the ideas Bodo embodied in some of his films and the image Poland tried to create during the same period. It also claims that after 1989 Bodo's appeal was augmented because the details of his death, revealed in this period, rendered him the perfect tragic artist.

KEYWORDS

Eugeniusz Bodo; Polish cinema; interwar cinema; stardom; musical comedy; singing actors

Eugeniusz Bodo was the greatest Polish male movie star of the interwar period. This opinion survived to the present day and was even recently strengthened, as demonstrated by the biographical series *Bodo*, broadcast on Polish state television in 2016. In this article I intend to examine the specificity of his stardom at the time he was alive and after his death, especially during the period following the fall of state socialism, what I describe as Bodo's 'post-stardom'. I argue that Bodo owed his success to two principal factors. One of them was the conducive circumstances in the Polish film and entertainment industry and his ability to exploit them to the full. Another factor was the match between his artistic persona and certain traits of Polish national character and, especially, the fit between the ideas Bodo embodied in some of his films and the image Poland tried to create during the same period. I also claim that after 1989 Bodo's appeal was augmented because the details of his death, revealed in this period, rendered him the perfect tragic artist and a model for the new generation of Polish actors.

In my article I draw on Bodo's biography, Polish political and cinematic history, and work on stardom. I am particularly indebted to Barry King's division of stars into those who adapt their acting to the roles they play and those who adjust the roles to their personalities (King 2003) and the work of authors who consider 'national stars', such as that by Stephen Gundle on Sophia Loren (Gundle 2004), who argue that they embody 'national values' at specific political and cultural moments. My investigation is based on incomplete

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primary sources, including films which were lost in part or in full, and limited secondary sources concerning Bodo's reception in his native country at the peak of his career. This does not refer to the fact that film critics ignored Bodo; rather the opposite was the case, but to the lack of any deeper engagement with acting and stardom. Most articles referring to Bodo from the interwar press take his stardom for granted and merely provide factual information about his successes and, at best, a short assessment of his performance.

Polish politics and cinema in the interbellum

The First World War ended in 1918 and Tzarist Russia, Prussia and the Habsburg Empire, which had ruled Poland since the end of the eighteenth century, ceased to exist. In this way the great Polish dream of living again in one independent country could be fulfilled. For Poles, the regaining of statehood was a cause for great celebration. Other aspects of their situation, however, provided grounds for concern. The borders of Poland were fragile, due to conflict with its neighbours about regions with mixed populations and Soviet Russia's initial ambition to export communism to the whole of Europe. Transportation, communication and administration were difficult because of the legacy of Poland being divided between three states. A good measure of the problems facing Poland after the war was the fact that over four-fifths of industrial workers were unemployed in 1918. Poland was politically divided too, with several centres of power favouring competing visions of Poland. In summary, Poland between the two world wars was a poor country suffering from many political and economic crises, including the global crisis at the end of the 1920s-early 1930s. That said, although Poland suffered from many problems throughout the entire interbellum, such as high unemployment, the last four or five years of prewar Poland can be regarded as a period of progress towards greater prosperity– a march, which was halted by the outbreak of the Second World War.

Polish identity of this period, like its politics and economy, lacked stability. There were two competing visions of Poland: traditional and modern. The former was represented by the country's gentry, which attributed itself a special position as guardian of Polish culture during the period of partitions and was reluctant to reform its ways. It was also happy for the peasants to be kept in conditions similar to slavery. The second Poland was more cosmopolitan and urban; its poster boys and girls were people working in industry, engineers and inventors and those working in the media. Both of these Polands are visible on the Polish screen during the interbellum. The first, patriotic, dominated 1920s cinema, as demonstrated by an upsurge of historical dramas, often pitting patriotic Poles against vile Russian occupiers. The modernising Poland erupted in the 1930s cinema. In this period we find many films featuring industrialists, engineers and inventors, such as *Szpieg w masce*/*The Spy* (Mieczysław Krawicz, 1933), *Piętro wyżej*/*Upstairs* (Leon Trystan, 1937) and *Czy Lucyna to dziewczyna?*/*Is Lucyna a Girl?* (Juliusz Gardan, 1934). In these productions social promotion, rather than serving one's country on the battlefield is the characters' main pursuit. Bodo, as I will argue in due course, was identified with this 'modernising' strand of Polish cinema.

The political authorities intervened in the work of the Polish film business indirectly, introducing specific custom and tax regulations applied to film production and distribution. In the years 1919–20 imported films were classified as luxury goods, next to cognac, champagne, caviar, diamonds and silk (Banaszkiewicz 1966, 120). The autarkic character of the

Polish economy had an even greater effect on film production in the 1930s. During this period which is of specific interest here, to spare foreign currency, the government limited the import of foreign films and introduced tax relief for cinemas showing Polish movies (Stradomski 1988, 20; Zajiček 2015, 156–57). Given that cinema-going belonged to the cheapest forms of entertainment (Madej 1994, 62) and cinemas were centres of cultural life, the Polish film industry in the interwar period flourished. In total, during the two decades of its existence, Poland produced 292 full-length fiction films, of which the vast majority were sound films (Zajiček 2015, 227). The year 1938 was record in terms of production, as 26 new Polish films reached cinema in that year (Zajiček 2015, 226).

The filmmakers' main objective in this period was to attract viewers. Polish films had to repay their costs to the film producers, distributors and exhibitors to survive. This fact accounts for conservatism in the film fare, most importantly its adherence to the rules of genre cinema and favouring those genres, which have an immediate effect on viewers, by causing bodily reactions: melodrama (tears) and comedy (laughter). Linda Williams describes such films as 'films of excess' or 'jerkers' (Williams 2000, 207). An additional advantage of such genres, as opposed to war cinema, science fiction or proper musicals with hundreds of extras, was their relative cheapness. One consequence of operating in a market economy was the industry's reliance on stars (Madej 1994, 58–62) as it was assumed that stars attract viewers. By the same token, the greatest stars commanded high power – they were never short of work and could influence the scripts. Bodo was in this category. There was also a predilection to certain settings, such as music-hall, cabaret, ballroom and high-class restaurants, which can be seen as a way of offering the film audience expensive entertainment in an ersatz form. By the same token, this cinema lent itself to music, as these were places where music was played and consumed communally. This was especially the case once Polish cinema acquired sound, which happened in 1930. This shift was favourable to actors with a good voice and performance skills and Bodo belonged to this category. Many actors, who became stars in the 1930s, moved to cinema from the music hall and divided their time between playing in films and performing on stage, singing and dancing. Such a musical heritage also applies to Bodo, along with Adolf Dymsza, Loda Halama, Tola Mankiewiczówna and Helena Grossówna. The scripts of the films in which they played and the songs which they performed were often written by authors working for Polish music and revue theatres, especially the Warsaw Qui Pro Quo, such as Konrad Tom. Barbara and Leszek Armatysowie talk about a symbiosis of Polish cinema of the 1930s with popular theatre (Armatysowie 1988, 213). There was also a symbiosis of cinema, recording industry and radio (Milewska and Wyżyński 2003). In this period Polish cinema and popular music represented an integrated system, in which the fortunes of one part of the industry depended on and strengthened the success of the other. We can compare this system to Tin Pan Alley of song production, which was a Fordist, 'factory-type' institution, with standardised song form and strict division of labour between professional songwriters, musicians and star singers (Wall 2003, 22–4).

Bodo's life and career

Bodo was born as Bohdan Eugène Junod in Geneva, in 1899, of Swiss father and Polish mother. His father, Teodor Junod, an engineer, was an early cinema entrepreneur, who travelled in the Russian Empire and beyond, showing the invention of the cinematograph

to those who had never before witnessed it working, before settling in Łódź. There he set up a revue-cinema Urania, the first permanent cinema theatre in that city. Bodo's mother, Jadwiga Anna Dorota Dylewska, came from the Polish gentry class and in her later life became her son's manager.

Bodo started his career in 1917 as a singer and dancer in revue theatres, initially in Poznań and Lublin. In 1919 he moved to Warsaw, where he performed in the best known cabarets in the city: Qui Pro Quo, Morskie Oko and Cyganeria. However, only cinema brought him country-wide popularity. His screen debut was in 1925, but his greatest successes came in the 1930s, when Polish cinema acquired sound. He was best known for his roles in musical comedies, which were the most popular genre in interwar Polish cinema. In this period Bodo not only played in films, but actively shaped his career, and to a large extent, Polish cinema. In 1931, he became a founder of the B.W.B. film studio, together with the prolific director Michał Waszyński and fellow actor Adam Brodzisz. In 1933, he opened a private producers' company Urania, named after his father's cinema in Łódź. He also wrote scripts to several films in which he stared and, finally, made his debut as a film director. Bodo's role in developing film culture in Poland was recognised by the political authorities, as demonstrated by the fact that in March 1938 he was awarded the distinction of a Gold Cross of Merit (Złoty Krzyż Zasługi). He was only one of five film professionals whose work was acknowledged this way; the others were the actress Jadwiga Smosarska, novelist, playwright and screenwriter Ferdynand Goetel, film critic Karol Irzykowski and director Józef Lejtes (Hendrykowska 2007, 269). Bodo was only one of two actors in this group and the only member of this exclusive club who was unambiguously associated with popular cinema. Others, such as Irzykowski, either stood for a critical attitude to Polish cinema, or like Lejtes or even Smosarska, were associated with patriotic films.

Bodo's approach to his career epitomised the integrated media system characteristic of interwar Poland. He worked in cinema and theatre, often testing in theatre jokes and gags which he would subsequently include in his films. The songs which he performed in films, were also sold on records and played on the radio, providing him with extra income, prolonging the life of the films in which he played and strengthening his star persona. He also used films as a way of advertising certain products, which he also promoted off-screen. He was especially known for advertising clothes produced in Warsaw: tweed jackets from the (Polish) firm Old England on Krakowskie Przedmieście, shoes from Kielman on Chmielna Street, neckties from the Chojnacki workshop and hats from Młodkowski (Wolański 2012, 192). He was also paid several hundred Zloties per month by the owner of Café Bodo on the current Foksal Street in Warsaw, for using his name (Mieszkowska 2016, 78). The title of one of his films, *His Excellency the Shop Assistant*, can be regarded as capturing Bodo's position not only on, but also off-screen. The products which he advertised were not cheap, but neither were they very expensive – they appealed to middle-class men and those who aspired to find themselves in this category. By wearing garments from these firms Bodo projected the persona of an elegant and worldly man, as demonstrated by the fact that in 1936 he was awarded the title of King of Style by the readers of *Film* magazine and became a poster-boy of the successes of Polish consumer capitalism. These examples demonstrate that Bodo understood that fame constitutes a social capital, which can be converted into monetary capital and he exploited it to the full, as if sensing that the time when he could do it, was limited.

The actor performed in Palestine, toured in Germany promoting his Polish films, and the Yugoslavian press dubbed him 'Polish Maurice Chevalier', but till very late he did not actively try to break into foreign markets, such as Germany or the United States, competing with local stars for parts in the films produced there. The gossip was that he tried to move to Hollywood, but the war stopped him from this pursuit. It is, of course, possible, that he would do so, but it is equally plausible that he would shun the chance of such a career, aware that he would have much less autonomy there in comparison with Poland, where he had almost total control of his career and image.

Bodo was very popular among women and his affairs were known to the general public. He seemed to have a penchant for oriental beauties. He had an affair with the Polish star of Jewish origin Nora Ney and with Anne Chevalier, better known as Reri, a French Polynesian actress and singer, who gained fame thanks to playing in Murnau's silent film *Tabu: A Story of the South Seas* (1931) (Figure 1).

He persuaded Reri to stay with him in Warsaw, when she was touring in Europe, and subsequently cast her as his lover in the film *Czarna perła/Black Pearl* (Michał Waszyński, 1934), which he also produced. Despite these relationships or perhaps because of them, Bodo remained unmarried till the end of his life. As such, he offered a new type of masculinity – not a Polish Romantic, tormented by an unrequited or impossible love or a man who had to give up his love to serve his country, but a promiscuous hedonist, unable to settle. The fact that such behaviour was a 'public secret' and did not lead to condemnation either by the political authorities or cultural elites, but rather added to Bodo's star status, suggests that socially liberal attitudes were gaining ground in Poland of the 1930s and, conversely, Bodo's celebrity helped Poland to reinvent itself in this direction.

Throughout his life Bodo retained his Swiss citizenship, and identified himself as a Protestant, rather than a Catholic, although most likely religion played a minimal role in his life. His 'Swiss connection' was not widely known, perhaps because it was irrelevant to his screen image or might have undermined him as a perfect representation of the new,

Figure 1. Bodo and Reri.

liberal, yet still patriotic Poland. At two important moments in his life Swiss citizenship played a major role. The first time happened in 1929, when driving his Chevrolet from Warsaw to Poznań with four passengers Bodo caused an accident, in which a fellow actor, Witold Roland, was killed. Bodo received a suspended sentence of six months. In Bodo's biopic the mildness of this sentence is explained by the fact that the Polish court did not want to offend the Swiss government by treating its citizen harshly. The second time his citizenship proved a major factor in his circumstances was when he was arrested by the Soviet secret police (the NKVD) in Lviv in 1941, where Bodo worked in the musical team of Henryk Wars, and sent to prison and then to a gulag. As Adam Wyżyński observes, the two most likely reasons why Bodo was targeted was his Swiss passport and playing in two anti-Russian films (Wyżyński 1996, 15). Many of such Polish prisoners were released after Nazi Germany invaded Russia and the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was terminated. However, the amnesty for Polish prisoners did not apply to Bodo because he was treated as a Swiss, rather than Polish citizen. It is also likely that his 'double identity' was seen as suspicious by his interrogators and resulted in a particularly harsh treatment. Bodo died in captivity in 1943, most likely of hunger and sickness, and he was buried in a common grave (Wyżyński 1996, 15). His 'Western' citizenship thus conferred to him protection in Poland, indicating a Polish aspiration to Westernness, but it was an aggravating factor in the eyes of the Soviets, which saw itself as the morally legitimate alternative to Western Europe.

Bodo's type

Looking at photographs of Eugeniusz Bodo, many of which are available on the internet, I have difficulty describing his type of attractiveness. Although critics admit that female viewers loved Bodo, as previously mentioned, they also argue that his image was far from the 'romantic lover' type; for that his face was too wide and round; his nose was too 'meaty', his chin was sticking out, his hips were rather wide and he had a tendency to put on weight. Bodo himself in one of his interviews said: 'I don't' want to be a romantic lead' (Nie chcę być amantem!), because in his views he did not have the right physique and was more interested in psychological films (jj 1930, 6). It is worth mentioning that similar criticism was directed towards Hungarian interwar romantic star Pál Jávor, namely that his nose was too bulbous and lacked the natural grace of an authentic Hungarian (Gergely 2016). However, in some photos he looks positively handsome and romantic, most importantly in one with his beloved dog Sambo (who also appeared in some of his films), who rests his head on his arms. There is melancholy in the actor's face, somewhat matching the sad expression of his dog (Figure 2).

This tenderness might express the fact that, according to popular opinion, Sambo was Bodo's greatest love, as testified by Sambo's pictures circulated in the interwar press, adorning articles titled 'King Bodo and His Dog' (Król Bodo i jego pies) (1933).[1] Sambo is a name with colonial undertones and adds to the sense that in this way he conveyed his penchant to 'oriental beauties' and, perhaps, his distance from the hegemonic Polish identity.

In other pictures the potential attractiveness of the actor is obscured by a smile that is somewhat too wide, which makes his facial muscles contract and it is difficult to say whether it is a natural smile or whether the actor is pulling a face (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Bodo with his dog.

A wide smile is also something one remembers best from Bodo films. He smiles in them to charm people; much more rarely he smiles and laughs as a reaction to a funny situation. There is thus a suspicion that his characters are not genuine, that they are cunning and putting on a mask. Yet, at the same time, they are so seductive, that their viewers (both in the film's diegesis and those watching the film) forgive their performance; the mask is taken for the real self. It feels as if the actor wanted to say, 'You cannot resist my charm, can you?'. His performance in drag in *Upstairs*, impersonating May West, can be reflected as acknowledging that he plays people who are not genuine, who pretend to be nicer, more enthusiastic than they really are, and at the same time a way to challenge us to accept them irrespective of the masks they adopt. We can notice here a parallel between a kind of liminal position

Figure 3. Bodo with his signature smile.

Bodo adopted on screen and his liminal position off-screen, as somebody with Swiss-Protestant identity in Catholic Poland and inability or unwillingness to settle down, get married and have children. To see how Bodo's type aligned to what can be described as Polish national character and the ideal towards which Poland moved during the period between the two world wars, and the development of his screen persona, I will look in detail into two

types of films in which Bodo played in the 1930s: musical comedies and melodramas/criminal dramas. Let's begin with the first genre, which include, among others, *Jego ekscelencja subiekt*/*His Excellency the Shop Assistant* (Michał Waszyński, 1933), *Pieśniarz Warszawy*/*Singing Fool of Warsaw* (Michał Waszyński, 1934), *Czy Lucyna to dziewczyna?*/*Is Lucyna a Girl?* (Juliusz Gardan, 1934), *Jaśnie pan szofer*/*His Highness the Chauffeur* (Michał Waszyński, 1935), *Upstairs*, *Książątko*/*Little Prince* (Konrad Tom and Władysław Szebego, 1937) and *Paweł i Gaweł*/*Poe and Joe* (Mieczysław Krawicz, 1938). It is worth dividing them into two categories. The first one, which covers an earlier part of the most productive period of Bodo's artistic life, include *His Excellency the Shop Assistant*, *His Highness the Chauffeur* and *Singing Fool of Warsaw*. These films are full of situations in which Bodo demonstrates his immense resourcefulness, be it in repairing a broken car or becoming a musical star, while knowing only one song. By the same token, his creations embody Polish national character, given that, as Marek Krajewski argues, 'the ability to overcome any circumstance through cleverness, resourcefulness, and everyday know-how is the most important national characteristic' (Krajewski 2018, 756), reflecting the fact that Poles historically had little control over their destiny, being under foreign occupation for almost 120 years. In these films, Bodo's character hides his class identity, either for the sake of his self-advancement (in *His Excellency the Shop Assistant*) or to disclose some scam (in *His Highness the Chauffeur*). Finishing these masquerades coincides with a happy ending, in which the cheater is exposed and a happy couple is created through overcoming social division. Typically, the character played by Bodo does not gain materially from such a solution of the narrative. The reward is finding his true love, which in *His Highness the Chauffeur* is the impoverished daughter of a gentry man, in *Singing Fool of Warsaw* a girl working in a kiosk, and in *Little Prince* a post office clerk, whom Bodo's character did not notice, as is usually the case with people with whom we have only casual contact. These films thus present a somewhat static world, in which one person wins at somebody else's expense and, ultimately, everything stays the same.

In *Poe and Joe* and *Upstairs* Bodo's character still hides his true personal identity, but not his class background, which is that of a middle-class professional; a seller of radios and radio inventor in the first film and radio speaker in the second. Such jobs allow its performer a lot of flexibility and scope for improvement, and he wants to shine in his profession – be the best in his milieu and a trailblazer, rather than a 'cunning fixer'. His ambition and individualism render him as a perfect capitalist pioneer, for whom obstacles are merely challenges and who relishes situations when he needs to show his worth. In these films Bodo's attempts to embrace modernity by devising new technology, working in the media and in the case of *Upstairs*, moving from the province to Warsaw, to market his invention. He also tries to convince others to become 'modern'. The principal aims of Bodo's character in these films is still to get the girl and improve his social status, but not by conning people, but by allowing the world and his beloved woman to recognise his true value. The shift in the comedy characters Bodo played can be mapped into political and economic changes in Poland. *His Excellency the Shop Assistant* and *His Highness the Chauffeur* can be described as 'crisis films' – they recognise the difficulty of making a living in Poland during the economic crisis by suggesting that only a trick or a con can save an individual from his or her predicament. In *Poe and Joe* and *Upstairs* this is no longer the case – ambition, talent and hard work are sufficient. It is worth emphasising that these are films in which Bodo invested, writing the script to *Upstairs*, which suggests that either the actor identified with the message conveyed in the film, which can be read as 'be optimistic, ambitious and modern' or regarded

it as an appropriate lesson for the viewers at the time of the film's production. Watching Bodo in comedies, it is not difficult to see the similarity between Bodo's on- and off-screen persona, as in both circumstances he behaves like a salesman, whose purpose is to charm his potential customers with his 'signature smile' so that they would buy the product which he offers. In these films he engages in what Barry King describes as 'metonymic servitude', which 'rests on analogy; the actor as "natural" being is already a pre-given servant of narrative, with a minimal reliance on make-up, dramatic techniques and vocal control in the performance of characters. Here, the as if of metaphor is replaced by I am' (King 2003, 48). The problem with Bodo is that it is difficult to establish whether he brought to film his 'charmer-seller' persona or rather learnt it so well in films that he projected it perfectly in his private life.

Bodo also played in several crime/melodramas, such as *Black Pearl*, *Skłamałam/I Lied* (Mieczysław Krawicz, 1937) and *Za winy niepopełnione/For Crimes Not Theirs* (Eugeniusz Bodo, 1938). These melodramas, like his most successful musical comedies, were made in the second half of the 1930s. These films were particularly close to Bodo's heart, as he did not merely play in them, but was also involved in scripting *Black Pearl* and directed *For Crimes Not Theirs*. Their importance was confirmed by Bodo as early as 1930, when he said that he was 'most interested in psychological parts, but the Polish film industry was not ready for them yet' (jj 1930, 6). Russell Merritt argued that melodrama is a site for trying out new identities at a time of intense social disruption when religious and monarchical power were under challenge from urbanizing capitalism and secular democracy (Merritt 1983), and in these films we have a similar situation: there is conflict between love and a desire for material success which destroys relationships or prevents them from succeeding. Love in them is a costly luxury or the cause of a man's doom. In representing Bodo's character's erotic trials and tribulations, these films also come across as autobiographical, as they show men who are easily charmed by beautiful women, but equally easily get bored with them when other attractive women appear on the horizon. This is especially the case in *Black Pearl*, where Bodo plays opposite his Tahitian lover, Reri, here named Moana. Moana in *Black Pearl*, like Reri, followed his Polish lover Stefan, to share her life with him, and for this purpose learnt Polish, but he betrayed her when another woman attracted his attention. Despite his disloyalty, Moana remains faithful to Stefan and does everything she can, to retain his heart. This is conveyed most poignantly by her singing 'Dla ciebie chcę być biała' (For You I Want To Be White). Such a song might reflect a certain racism of Stefan and Polish society at large, or Moana's internalisation of the racist hierarchy, according to which white people are more attractive than non-white. More aptly, however, it reflects Stefan restlessness, his inability to settle on what is at hand and always searching for what he cannot get. The film has a semi-happy ending, as Moana saves the life of her lover, and the femme fatale with whom he fell in love loses her mind. However, much damage is done; Stefan disgraced himself and there is no guarantee that he would ever redeem his acts.

In *I Lied* Bodo plays Karol, a small-time pimp and crook, who corrupts a beautiful woman, Helena, played by one of the greatest Polish female stars, Jadwiga Smosarska, preying on her poverty and naiveté. When she tries to leave her shameful life behind, he blackmails her. The power of this role lies in Bodo's ability to present his character as somebody who is ultimately tragic rather than bad. This can be seen, for example, in a scene when he talks with his landlady, saying that he wants to have Helena for himself, because he fell in love with her; when he comes to her house to blackmail her, revealing that he is morally

bankrupt and, finally, when he confesses to his crimes and in this way sets Helena free. Throughout the film Karol's crimes are presented as his sacrifices at the altar of eking out a living. We are made to believe that under more prosperous circumstances Karol might end up as a decent and successful man.

In *For Crimes Not Theirs* Bodo again plays a criminal, a burglar called Torence, who falls for the daughter of his partner in crime Holski. This time the tragedy is precipitated by Holski's decision to follow a 'straight' path. Torence, however, does not have this option. His only path of redemption is through death and he ends up killing himself and Holski. *For Crimes Not Theirs* can be described as a film noir, on account of its visual style, which includes setting part of the narrative in dark places, such as a cave and a windowless shed and showing lingering shadows – a metaphor of the past which holds a firm grip on the characters, especially Torence. Bodo's character can be regarded as somebody unable to avoid his past, and as a metaphor of the past which does not want to go away, but hunts and destroys the present. In a way, *For Crimes Not Theirs* Bodo plays the same part as in many of his musical comedies – a man who puts on a mask and tries to achieve success using 'shortcuts'. However, there are also differences. Torence is an older, tired man who makes little effort to be charming. It is probably the only film in which Bodo does not smile, which adds years to his face and makes it look menacing at times, and one of the few movies, in which he does not sing. The message of the film is optimistic to a point, because the couple at the centre of the narrative manage to escape the crimes of their parents and it is suggested that they will be able to live happily ever after. However, for this to happen, Holski and Torence have to die. Such a development can be seen as a premonition of Poland's future, in which people associated with the capitalist regime would be punished or at least sidelined, to make way for a new generation. Paradoxically, although in this film Bodo's character pays for the crimes he committed, the title was used as a premonition of his subsequent fate, namely his imprisonment by the Soviet secret service, torture and death. Moreover, if it is true that he was not released because of his Swiss passport, then he ultimately suffered not for what for he did but, as the characters in the film, for his ancestry. The reviewers praised Bodo's for his acting in crime/melodramas claiming that he was convincing as a 'dark character' (Zahorska 2012, 310; "Skłamałam" 2012, 269). Such praise did not always reflect the critics' assessment of the films themselves, for example *I Lied* was chastised for being over-dramatic, unbelievable and harking back to silent cinema.

Bodo as post-star

It is difficult to imagine a more anguishing death than the one which befell Bodo, who perished in a Soviet gulag. However, by persecuting and killing him, the Soviet police and secret service helped Bodo's posthumous career. To demonstrate this, let's look at the position of the interwar cinema and careers of interwar actors after the Second World War, up to the fall of the Iron Curtain. During the period of state socialism, two important changes took place in Polish cinema which affected all actors and especially those who made their debut before the Second World War. One was nationalisation of the film industry. It brought much needed security into the institution of cinema and the lives of film professionals, and allowed for greater artistic experimentation than was previously possible, because achieving profit stopped being the main objective of filmmaking. Inculcating in viewers a specific set of ideas, either through expressing the position of political authorities or (since the late

1950s) of the director-auteur, became the industry's main goal. This approach moved the attention of critics away from stars to directors, who were furnished with the task of enlightening the audience, not unlike Polish poets during the period of Romanticism (Michałek and Turaj 1988). Actors, on the other hand, were downgraded from being the active creators of films to obedient executors of the will of the directors. The second change was a negative assessment of the interwar cinema, precisely as embodying a very different set of values than those promoted by the socialist cinema industry: entertainment, rather than art, and bowing to the taste of the least educated viewers, rather than trying to promote higher ideals. Such a negative attitude led to what can be described as 'institutional forgetting' of Polish interwar cinema, along with aspects of the interbellum. Film produced during this period stopped being shown in Polish cinemas, despite still being popular among audiences. When Polish television was set up, interwar films eventually found its 'home', but this home was reduced to a weekly programme *W Starym Kinie* (*In the Old Cinema*), broadcast from 1967 to 1999. As this very title suggests, Polish films of the 1920s and 1930s were presented there as old and old-fashioned, a perception reinforced by the introduction, showing the animated figure of a man in a bowler hat and an umbrella walking through an old town. One could not imagine a greater contrast between this image and that of modern Poland, which the socialist authorities tried to create after the Second World War. The programme's author and presenter, Stanisław Janicki, through his appearance and mode of speaking, perfectly projected the image of an older gentleman. While *In the Old Cinema* dignified Polish interwar cinema, it also ghettoised it as an interest of older audiences and eccentrics. There was little attempt to appraise this cinema on its own terms. The bulk of publications devoted to it were scornful or at best patronising (Madej 1994). For positive assessment were chosen films which, thanks to their concern for underprivileged workers, foreshadowed films of the state socialist era, such as *Dziewczęta z Nowolipek*/*Girls from Nowolipki* (Józef Lejtes, 1937) and *Strachy*/*The Ghosts* (Eugeniusz Cękalski and Karol Szołowski, 1938), in which Bodo also played.

In the light of the above it is not surprising that actors who survived the war had few opportunities to work in the nationalised Polish film industry. An additional factor in their demise was that during the war they lost their youth; and their ageing was most likely accelerated by difficult economic circumstances and lack of personal security. They couldn't easily just play the romantic leads anymore, even if they were given the chance. They were also sidelined because of their association with 'bad cinema', old-fashioned expressions and on occasion collaboration with the Nazi regime. When, despite these obstacles, they managed to be cast in films produced after 1945, they were given episodic roles. This referred, for example, to Jerzy Pichelski and Helena Grossówna. Of the interwar stars Adolf Dymsza, Bodo's frequent partner on screen and his main competitor, fared better in the socialist film industry than his contemporaries. This was because he fulfilled the appetite for nostalgic encounters with interwar cinema among Polish viewers, playing a Warsaw 'fixer' or a 'cunning Pole', in the same way Janicki's programme responded to a nostalgic yearning for old entertainment. Dymsza thus retained part of his old popularity, but at the price of his character being frozen in time, like a relic displayed in a museum.

By contrast, neither prewar actor managed to develop his or her artistic personality. Many of these actors were employed in one of Warsaw's theatres – 'Syrena', which continued the tradition of a revue theatre and remained very popular, despite attracting criticism from art-minded theatre critics. In the age of television, however, they could not compete with

the stars known from this medium. Although Polish postwar stars kept changing in step with the changes of political circumstances and viewers' tastes, what connected the greatest male stars from the 1950s till the 1980s, such as Zbigniew Cybulski, Daniel Olbrychski and Bogusław Linda, was a sense that the characters they created on screen were driven by higher goals than financial success; they even came across as irrational and aloof. I will conjecture that Bodo, with his optimism, pragmatism and earthliness, his lust for acting and desire to shape his career by dominating directors, as well as scripting, producing and directing films in which he played, would not suit such a company. Most likely, like Dymsza, he would be ghettoised as a relic of the past. Given the circumstances after the Second World War, one might wonder whether a better scenario for the interwar actors was emigration, most importantly to Hollywood, whose size made it welcoming for outsiders. This question is particularly appropriate in the light of the fact that Bodo, having conquered what there was in Poland to conquer, made plans to launch his career in Hollywood. We cannot exclude that he would be successful there. However, most likely achieving fame would be difficult, given that at the beginning of the war Bodo was already forty and that he had not played in English before. This difficulty can be also conjectured from the fate of those Polish actors who chose the path of emigration, such as Jadwiga Smosarska, Loda Halama and Ina Benita. From a career perspective, emigration proved to be a worse decision that staying in Poland. Smosarska, after emigrating to the States, limited herself to playing in the diasporan theatre (teatr polonijny) (Hendrykowska 2007). Benita gave up her career completely, becoming a housewife and, following her husband's death, was limited to menial work to support herself. Similarly, Polish actors who made their debut after the Second World War found it very difficult to make a career in Hollywood (Mazierska 2014).

Against this background, one could risk a statement that perishing during the war saved Bodo from being demoted from the position of the greatest Polish male star to – at best – a struggling actor in Hollywood or a relic from a non-glorious past, collaborating with the state socialist regime. Ultimately, his disappearance helped in sustaining Bodo's myth as the 'king of Polish prewar cinema'. During the period of state socialism Bodo's image became metaphorically frozen in his films. There was little talk about his life, reflecting the diminished interest in the Polish interwar cinema at large. His death was attributed to the Nazis. This image was unfrozen by the fall of the Iron Curtain, which allowed to look at Polish interwar cinema in a more positive way, as an institution which fulfilled its crucial function of entertainment, and did so in difficult circumstances, which included technical backwardness and lack of state support for production and distribution of films. This is reflected in the growing number of publications devoted to this period in Polish cinematic history (Gierszewska 2006, 2012; in part Jagielski 2013), blogs, as well as virtual and physical gatherings of fans of this cinema. At the same time, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Poland entering western supra-national institutions such as the European Union and NATO, allowed it to distance itself from Russia which was previously presented as Poland's main ally and benefactor. Consequently, wounds inflicted by Soviet Russia on the Polish state and its citizens could be revealed. The most important of these was uncovering of the Katyń massacre, in which over 20,000 Polish officers and members of the intelligentsia lost their lives at the hands of the Soviet functionaries, principally the NKVD. The death of Bodo belonged to the same type of crime: the senseless murder of Poles by their neighbours simply on account of being Polish and this deed was especially tragic, as it targeted those with the highest cultural capital. Hence, in postcommunist Poland,

Bodo acquired the position of a hero, who did not betray his country by collaborating with the communist regime, and a martyr who suffered for 'crimes uncommitted'.

The position of Bodo as a post-star is reflected in and augmented by dedicating to him a lavish biographical series, titled simply *Bodo* (Michał Kwieciński, Michał Rosa, 2016). In it, Bodo is presented as a man who is undeterred by any setbacks and always aims higher. His approach to career, which he equates with commercial and financial success, is in tune with the idea of success dominating in postcommunist times. Moreover, in this film Bodo's presumed indifference in all matters Polish is compensated by affording him a Polish girlfriend Ada, who is the love of his life and who reciprocates his feelings only towards the end of his life. Each episode begins with a fragment from the last stage of Bodo's life: his torture by Soviet perpetrators. In this way, its authors underscore the contrast between Bodo's successes in independent Poland, due to his talent, hard work and ambition, and his suffering and ruin under Soviet rule. This mistreatment can be seen as a metaphor of Polish suffering and demise after the Second World War, when the country became a satellite of the Soviet Union. The series' acknowledgment of Bodo's elevated status as the greatest star of Polish interwar cinema is achieved not only through its narrative, but also, paradoxically, by the fact that the status of the actor chosen to play the adult Bodo, Tomasz Schuchardt, is nowhere near to that enjoyed by Bodo. Watching the film I was thinking that it would be impossible to find in contemporary Polish cinema any male actor with a similar charisma and position. Bodo in this film thus not only points to what Polish cinema lost with the outbreak of the Second World War, but also outlines the horizon of what is possible to achieve for an actor in Polish or indeed any national cinema.

Note

1. To recognise the importance of Sambo, the photograph of the actor with his dog can be found on the cover of his biography (Wolański 2012), as well as in many articles, devoted to the actor.

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