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Recent Silesian Crime Dramas: Another Look at the “Reclaimed Territories” and Magical Realism in Polish Cinema and Television

Słowa kluczowe: magiczny realizm, gatunek kryminalny, Śląsk, Ziemie Odzyskane

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Abstract

This article discusses recent mystery crime films and premium TV shows that representations Poland’s southwestern borderlands in the mode of magic(al) realism. The works under analysis, *Pokot* (Spoor; dirs. Agnieszka Holland and Kasia Adamik, 2017), *Ciemno, prawie noc* (Dark, Almost Night; dir. Borys Lankosz, 2019), and the TV series *Znaki* (Signs; 2018–19) and *Rojst* (The Mire; 2018, 2021), infuse the crime drama with elements of magical realism that require a reckoning with the ideological underpinnings of this traditionally realist genre and of the complex history of the region. In this article, I will illustrate how these films and series—with emphasis on *Rojst* and *Znaki*—recalibrate our understanding of magical realism in Polish cinematography and constitute a unique development in the history of the representation of the so-called *Ziemie Odzyskane* (‘Reclaimed Territories’) on the screen.

Introduction

The mayor of the fictional Silesian town of Sowie Doły may be corrupt, but he knows how to represent his town, the setting of the mystery-crime series *Znaki* (Signs; 2018–19). A large banner featuring his own face advertises the town as a place “[g]dzie historia spotyka tajemnicę” (“where history meets mystery”).¹ *Znaki* is one of several mystery-crime TV series and films to represent Poland’s southwestern borderlands over the course of the past five years. *Pokot* (Spoor; dirs. Agnieszka Holland and Kasia Adamik, 2017), *Ciemno, prawie noc* (*Dark, Almost Night*; dir. Borys Lankosz, 2019), and the TV series *Znaki* (Signs; 2018–19) and *Rojst* (*The Mire*; 2018, 2021) do not just share a common regional setting – namely, the Giant Mountains (pl. *Karkonosze*, ger. *Riesengebirge*, cz. *Krkonoše*); they also combine the crime drama with the mode of magic(al) realism. The settings of these films and series – *Znaki*’s fictional Sowie Doły, *Rojst*’s unidentified Silesian town, *Pokot*’s Lufcug settlement in the Kłodzko Valley, or the backwatered Wałbrzych of *Ciemno, prawie noc* – could all be advertised as places “where history meets mystery.”

This article discusses recent crime films and TV shows that representations Poland’s southwestern borderlands in the mode of magic(al) realism. The works under analysis, *Pokot*, *Ciemno, prawie noc*, and the TV series *Znaki* and *Rojst*, infuse the crime drama with elements of magical realism that require a reckoning with the ideological underpinnings of this traditionally realist genre and of the complex history of the region. Although reason alone may be able to solve some of the crimes, other mysteries require the aid of affect, faith, intuition, or the supernatural in order for them to be solved – if they are (re)solved at all. If the classical crime genre demands clarity and explanations, the films and series discussed here require us to come to terms with our incomplete knowledge. The magical realist elements project alternative, subversive genealogies, chronologies, and topographies of the borderlands in which they are situated; importantly, these co-exist with (rather than resolutely topple) the ‘rational’ hegemonic systems that be. In this article, I will illustrate how these works – with emphasis on the two series, *Rojst* and *Znaki*—recalibrate our understanding of magical realism

1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

in Polish cinematography and constitute a unique development in the history of the representation of the so-called *Ziemie Odzyskane* ('Reclaimed Territories') on the screen. It is with this 'mythical topography' that I would like to begin.

Mythical Topography of the Karkonosze/Krkonoše/Riesengebirge

The locations of the films and series overlap conspicuously such that, with each progressive film and series, a mythical topography begins to emerge. Regardless whether the series are explicitly set in a real-existing town, the idiosyncrasies of the filming locations, the bread crumb trails of geographic details, and the convolute of local legends all situate these stories within a common regional locale. At times, the characters seem so close to each other that one could imagine their very stories colliding. *Znaki*, for example, takes place explicitly in the *Góry Sowie* ("Owl Mountains"), and *Ciemno, prawie noc* takes place in Wałbrzych, with many scenes being shot at the *Radkowskie skały* ("Radków Rocks") in the *Góry Stołowe* ("Stołowe Mountains"). In S1E3 of *Znaki*, the protagonists pass a road sign for Błędne Skały ('Errant Rocks'), which places them right at the Czech-Polish border in the Stołowe Mountains – closer both to the earlier film *Ciemno, prawie noc* as well as to the legends associated with the mountains. Furthermore, Bystrzyca Kłodzka – one of the settings of *Pokot* – has served as the backdrop for films that have been significant in the resignification of the so-called Reclaimed Territories in the Polish People's Republic (e.g., *Nikt nie woła* [No one calls; dir. Kazimierz Kutz, 1960]).² *Pokot*, *Ciemno, prawie noc*, *Znaki*, and *Rojst* continue the resignification of these territories for a different time and context.

Prior to 1945, cities in Poland's present-day western and northern regions had German names and had been populated by Germans. Waldenburg, for example, became Wałbrzych, and Habelschwerdt became Bystrzyca Kłodzka. As the borders were being revised toward the end of WWII, it was understood that populations would need to be transferred "orderly

2 L. Moliński, *Bystrzycki szlak filmowy*, Dolnośląskości.pl, <http://dolnoslaskosci.pl/bystrzycki-szlak-filmowy,1775.html>.

and humanely” in order to create homogeneous nation-states. While ethnic Germans were forcibly resettled west of the Oder and Neisse Rivers, Poles were transported west of the Bug and San Rivers, and Ukrainians and Belarussians were shipped eastward. Other minorities, however, such as Kashubians, Lemkos, and Jews, to name a few, did not fit neatly within the concept of the homogeneous nation-state. Those who did not align themselves with a discreet nationality faced persecution. For years after the war, the populations of the border regions remained in flux.

The way we talk about these territories and those who traveled them have been subject to debate, revision, and elision, whether in the postwar German states or in Poland. In postwar Poland, those who had been forcibly resettled from their homes east of the Bug and San Rivers were dubbed *repatrianci* (“repatriates”) along with those returning from exile or forced labor from beyond Poland’s prewar borders. After all, so the propaganda went, the territories had merely been under centuries of German occupation following the reign of the Polish Piast kings. In the early postwar period, the formerly German territories were therefore called the Reclaimed Territories; once they were officially deemed settled and re-Polonized, the seemingly neutral designation *Ziemie Zachodnie i Północne* (the Western and Northern Lands) replaced them and is still in use today.

The Reclaimed Territories in Cinema

Cinema has played a significant role in the ongoing process of the resignification and ‘integration’ of the formerly German territories. The postwar Polish state utilized film as a means of refashioning national identity, legitimizing the power of the state, and modeling social and economic reconstruction. In more ideologically-charged films of the 1960s, the territories emerged as battlegrounds against Nazis and *We(h)rwölfe* (a term used to describe Nazi German partisan groups) and as a land of settlement and opportunity. Yet the regions in question have also been featured as “normalized” vacation destinations in feature films or as the stages of Kazimierz Kutz’s Silesian family epics. If we fast-forward to the cinema of the 2000s, we find that many filmmakers (particularly of the Berlin School) turned their lenses toward the German-Polish borderlands, projecting and working through anxieties about EU eastward expansion and the dissolution of the border.

Although the cinematic Reclaimed Territories resumed, by and large, their status as the ‘neutral’ Northern and Western Territories following the 1960s, this changes in the 2010s.

In the 2010s (the primary context of the films and series discussed here), the borderlands become more entangled and historicized. In short, the “Reclaimed Territories” reemerge. Historical dramas such as *Róża* (Rose; dir. Wojciech Smarzowski, 2011) and *Wołyń* (Hatred; 2016), *Kamerdyner* (The butler; dir. Filip Bajon, 2018), and *Zgoda*, (The reconciliation; dir. Maciej Sobieszczęński, 2017) take place either in formerly German regions or in the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands. They grapple with what Simon Lewis calls “border trouble,” “a form of cultural trauma that transcends binaries of perpetrator/victim and oppressor/oppressed; it is also a tool for analyzing the ways in which spatial imagination, memory, and identity interact in visual and literary narratives.”³ These films – in contrast to those of the PRL period – thematize the transit and labor camps where Germans were interned prior to their forced migration, sexual violence committed against women, and the horrors of ethnic cleansing.⁴ Importantly, the newer films and series under discussion here explicitly frame crimes committed against Germans – regardless of their own culpability for crimes committed during the war – as a Polish (i.e., not just a Soviet) issue that needs to be addressed.

What has always been at stake in the cinema of the ‘Reclaimed’ or the ‘Northern and Western’ Territories is the incorporation of unknown territories and dislocated peoples into an imaginary collective that by their very incorporation creates a new collective. For years or even decades, residents of the former German territories still claimed unable to feel at home.⁵ Joanna Bator, author of the novel on which the film *Ciemno, prawie noc* is based, explains that that when her grandparents arrived in Wałbrzych,

3 S. Lewis, *Border Trouble: Ethnopolitics and Cosmopolitan Memory in Recent Polish Cinema*, “East European Politics and Societies and Cultures” May 2019, vol. 33, no 2, p. 525.

4 During the PRL period, films such as *Skąpani w ogniu* (Bathed by fire; dir. Jerzy Passendorfer, 1963/64) or *Rdza* (Rust; dir. Roman Załuski, 1981/82) attempt to grapple with the simplistic victim-perpetrator dichotomy that the recompense myth implies by addressing the ways in which Poles persecuted German-speaking minorities in Silesia or Masuria; however, these films, which remain few and far between, do not grapple with the persecution of Germans without any cultural or family ties to Poland.

5 See the chapter about “Das Syndrom der Vorläufigkeit” (“the syndrome of tentativeness”), [in:] G. Thum, *Die fremde Stadt. Breslau nach 1945*, Munich 2003.

“what my grandparents found was a strange, uncanny place.”⁶ Today, the borders go unquestioned and several generations of Poles have only known these regions as home. And yet, Bator says, “[Wałbrzych] was that for me, too”⁷ – an uncanny place full of the traces of absent Others. The new films and series question who is from where and when. If the new police commissar transferred from the metropole is an outsider, so, too, are the town’s inhabitants. One of the characters of *Rojst*, a member of Bator’s grandparents’ generation, reminds us that those living in the town are not truly *from there*. This character, a *kresowiak* compatriot of the fictional Pawlak and Kowalski families, offers a clear rebuttal of Kazimierz Pawlak’s self-assured claim that he and his family are locals.⁸ The films and series in question present the contemporary borderlands and formerly German regions as a palimpsest of pasts and origins, and even of multiple possible presents and futures.

The Film and Television Landscapes

While the “recovery” of place-specific myths, legends, and histories helps to develop the identity of a region that has had a turbulent past and which has only belonged to Poland as recently as 1945, the current films and series also link the regional and national with international audiences and markets. The crime genre, for example, has long enjoyed popularity in Poland and abroad. The current “golden age” of premium TV in Poland has already included quite a few crime series in its portfolio, beginning with *Wataha* (HBO, 2014) and *Belfer* (The teach; Canal+ 2016).⁹ Other producers of premium television such as Showmax (*Rojst*), Netflix (*Rojst* ’97), and AXN

6 J. Bator, *Heimat am Horizont*, interviewed by Serena Jung, “Schweizer Monat: die Autorenzeitschrift für Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur” 2014, vol. 1019, no 94, p. 30.

7 Ibidem.

8 Kazimierz Pawlak is one of the characters in the film *Sami swoi* (All our own; dir. Sylwester Chęciński, 1967), one of the most beloved (and quoted) films about the Reclaimed Territories.

9 See A. Majer, *Quality By Design: Feature TV Series From Premium Television in Poland*, [in:] *A European Television Fiction Renaissance. Premium Production Models and Transnational Circulation*, eds. L. Barra and M. Scaglioni, London, New York 2021, and R. Czyż, *Kto nas nauczył robić (i oglądać) seriale?*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 23 Jan. 2019. Both provide helpful overviews of the history of premium TV and crime series in Poland. Cf. also the informational photo gallery “Polska kocha kryminały!” on the website for AXN Polska.

(Sony Pictures Television [SPT] Networks Central Europe), the producer of *Znaki/Znaki 2*, have also invested heavily in premium crime series.¹⁰ Several of these new crime series share two common elements of interest: they take place in the borderlands and include elements of folklore and the supernatural.¹¹ *Wataha* and *Kruk* (Raven; Canal+ and Opus TV, 2018, 2021) both take place in eastern Poland, while *Rojst* and *Znaki* take place in Silesia.

The intriguing microcosms that *Rojst* and *Znaki* create reach beyond the local, creating links between the regional/national to international audiences, aesthetics, and tropes. While the series and films include and play with familiar tropes from crime dramas (e.g., the commissar with a secret, troubled past) or fairy tales (e.g., Little Red Riding Hood), the series are openly influenced by domestic and foreign productions. One of the touchstone influences of these series is David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (1990/91/2017), which had also just celebrated a comeback third season in 2017. Other influences include Scandinavian crime shows, the Netflix series *Dark* (2017–20), as well as earlier Polish series like *Pitbull* (2005–08).¹² *Dark*'s oversaturated colors and sweeping bird's eye views of the woods find their counterparts in *Rojst* and *Znaki*, just as they do in *W głębi lasu* (The woods; 2020) – the first Polish-language crime series on Netflix. Krzysztof Varga laments the inclusion of elements reminiscent of Scandinavian or Netflix productions in *Rojst*; however, the series is aimed at Polish viewers who, unlike their PRL counterparts or former selves, are far less insular and far more in tune

10 Despite the success of *Rojst* and other shows, the owner of Showmax Polska, Naspers Group made changes which resulted in the withdrawal of Showmax from Poland in January 2019. For more information about the decision, see S. Kucharski, *Showmax wycofuje się z Polski. Przykro nam, że ta historia się kończy*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 12 Dec. 2018.

11 For more on the "folkloric" elements in the series, see 'Kruk. Czorny woron nie śpi'. *Posłuchaj singla promującego serial i przenieś się do krainy Szeptuch i Południc*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 26 June 2021.

12 See P. Guszowski, *Niech nikogo nie zmylą walkmany i polonezy. W tym serialu z peerełowskiego bagna wpadamy w kolejne*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 10 lipca 2021 and K. Varga, *Varga o serialu 'Rojst': We mnie Peerel siedzi głęboko, mam w szafkach niedorzeczne zapasy papieru toaletowego*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" (Duży Format) 20 Aug. 2018 on *Rojst*. See R. Czyż, *Program TV na wtorek, 7.04: powrót 'Znaków' i początki randek online*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 7 April 2020 on *Znaki*.

with global viewing/streaming trends.¹³ For Varga, the PRL of *Rojst* is more PRL than the PRL ever was (“Peerel jest jeszcze bardziej peerelowski”) – far more beautiful and far uglier, too. In her review of a recent biographical film, Iwona Kurz has called such highly stylized representations of the past “hipsterrealizm.”¹⁴ This aesthetic – a more dynamic, palpable version of what Fredric Jameson calls the “glossy surfaces of nostalgia film”¹⁵ – can be found across genres in both domestic and international productions.

The series and films participate in a strategy of marketing the specificity of place (e.g., the iconic boulders of the Giant Mountains and local, multi-ethnic legends) with globally recognizable aesthetics and tropes. In writing about *Pokot*, Bartosz Staszczyszyn refers to this strategy as “city placement” and “kino małego patriotyzmu.”¹⁶ Staszczyszyn explains that such films (and series) “promote the region without even transforming into a cycle of moving slides born in an advertising folder.” *Znaki* in particular has had success in promoting the region, at least domestically. In addition to the numerous articles and YouTube videos that present the mysteries and legends of the various filming locations, many Tripadvisor and Google reviews for specific locations highlight that they appear in the series.¹⁷ *Rojst*, *Znaki*, *Pokot*, and *Ciemno, prawie noc* all ‘promote’ the southwestern borderlands, not just as destinations for those who are interested in Nazi lore or dark tourism; they

13 K. Varga, *Varga o serialu ‘Rojst’*... See for example, J. Szczerba, *Kto króluje w wyszukiwarce Google’a? Tych kulturalnych hasel szukaliśmy najczęściej*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 15 Dec. 2021, in which Szczerba compares the rankings of Google search terms for different series.

14 I. Kurz, *Rewolucja, której nie było*, “Dwutygodnik” Feb. 2017, no. 207. Cf. W. Mrozek, *Dlaczego warto wybrać się do lat 90. z Ogrodnikiem, Bielenią i Różczką?* “Gazeta Wyborcza” 30 July 2021, in which Mrozek cites Kurz’s term in his review of *Rojst*.

15 F. Jameson, *On Magic Realism in Film*, “Critical Inquiry” Winter 1986, vol. 12, no 2, p. 309.

16 B. Staszczyszyn, *City placement po polsku*, “Culture.pl.” 3 March 2020.

17 Examples include the article *Podróż w Góry Sowie (i nie tylko) tropem kadrów serial ‘Znaki’*, “Magazyn Travelist” 14 May 2020 and the following YouTube videos: *My tu i tam, Góry Sowie, Projekt Riese, Muchotapka oraz DAG Molke i serial Znaki*, “YouTube” 9 Feb. 2022 and *Travel for a hundred, Magiczny KAMIENIOŁOM w Świerkach. Góry Sowie – film Znaki*, “YouTube” 27 March 2022. The mystery crime series are not alone in this regard. The new fantasy Netflix series *Krakowskie potwory* (Cracow monsters; 2022) also seeks to combine local – or in this case, Slavic – myths, history, and ‘local color’; for Robert Piaskowski, plenipotentiary of the mayor of the city of Cracow for culture, the production provides the city with a wide range of economic and culture opportunities for development. See M. Skowrońska, *Netflix tropi krakowskie potwory. Nowy serial nakręcony pod Wawelem wystartuje w pierwszym kwartale 2022 roku*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” (Cracow) 23 Dec. 2021.

also promote a sober (i.e., not nostalgic) image of the multiethnic borderlands and revise the history of the region as the former Reclaimed Territories. Like those that came before them, *Ciemno, prawie noc*, *Pokot*, *Rojst*, and *Znaki* continue the work of developing a sense of how to belong in the formerly German regions of Poland—in addition to, as Kim Sasser writes of magic(al) realism, in the world at large.¹⁸

What is Magic(al) Realism?

Simply put, magical realism can be defined as a mode of writing, or in this case, filmmaking, that engages variably with its composite terms: magic and realism. “In the narrow sense in which the term is used by literary critics,” write Christopher Warnes and Kim Sasser, “magical realism refers to a mode or a style – sometimes a genre – of writing in which magical elements are presented alongside realistic ones as if there were no difference of kind between them. ... It will incorporate, without surprise, fantastic elements into the realm of history and objective materiality.”¹⁹ This definition conjures up Gabriel García Márquez’ world of Macondo, where violent political conflicts rage across the same ground where the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar casually reappears to José Arcadio Buendía. García Márquez’ *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), a global bestseller, has been widely recognized as the foremost example of magic realist literature.

The success of authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, and others amid a boom of Latin American magic realist novels in the mid-20th century has long branded magic realism as a Latin American phenomenon. From the very outset, such a ‘territorialized’ definition has proved to be controversial, for it fails to account for the range of older and contemporary texts that present supernatural or fantastic elements as part of everyday life, including, for example, the works of Franz Kafka, Salman Rushdie, Haruki Murakami, or Poland’s own Olga Tokarczuk.²⁰ The contributors to the vol-

18 K. Sasser, *Magical Realism and Cosmopolitanism. Strategizing Belonging*, New York, Houndsmills (England) 2014, p. 40.

19 C. Warnes and K. Sasser, *Introduction*, [in:] *Magic Realism and Literature*, eds. C. Warnes and K. Sasser, Cambridge 2020, p. 1.

20 In the chapter titled “The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America: Self-Affirmation and Resistance to Metropolitan Paradigms,” Amaryll Chanady refers to the

ume *Magic Realism and Literature* (2020) argue that in order to understand magic realism in all of its manifestations, we must consider it as a “mode of narration” (rather than the historically or geographically delimited categories of genre or movement) of polygenetic origins.²¹ This is the approach that informs my conception of magical realism.

In her monograph on magical realist literature, Kim Sasser identifies three *modi operandi* that describe the ways that the codes of magic and of realism interact with one another in a given text. Sasser names these *modi operandi* “subversion, suspension, and summation,”²² noting that any one text may function according to one *modus operandi* or a combination the three. Although this is also the case in the films and series discussed here, the *modus operandi* of summation is most frequently in operation. Despite instances in which the realist world of the crime drama and the world of magic prove “unable to synthesize,”²³ for the most part, the world of magic cooperates with or even attempts to foil the realist code of the crime drama in the manner of non-fantastic criminals. Sasser writes, moreover, that the tension between and co-existence of ‘magical’ and the ‘realist’ ontologies “might be seen as intersecting at this single concern: how people develop senses of belonging in the world.”²⁴ According to Sasser, while the magical ontology opens up spiritual possibilities or “affiliations with the transcendent,”²⁵ the realist ontology also grounds us in political and cultural ways of belonging. To the extent that the films and series introduce ambivalence, uncertainty, and even in some cases ‘play’, they open up the opportunities for negotiating these senses of belonging through both ontologies.

“territorialization of the imaginary” to designate definitions of magical realism, such as those of Alejo Carpentier or Angel Flores, that restrict its production to Latin America. A. Chanady, *The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America: Self-Affirmation and Resistance to Metropolitan Paradigms*, [in:] *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. L. Parkinson Zamora and W.B. Faris, Durham, NC 1995. For more information about the history of the “barometer of authorship” (4) – when and why certain authors become included in studies of magic realism, see K. Sasser, *Magical Realism*.

21 C. Warnes and K. Sasser, *Introduction*, p. 7.

22 K. Sasser, *Magical Realism*, p. 25.

23 Ibidem, p. 31.

24 Ibidem, p. 40.

25 Ibidem.

Scholarship on magical realism focuses overwhelmingly on its literary manifestations, and with good reason. Although works in their own right, many magical realist films – from *Die Blechtrommel* (The tin drum; dir. Volker Schlöndorff, 1979) to *Chocolat* (dir. Lasse Hallström, 2000) – are adaptations of novels. This is also true of magical realist films in the Polish context, including *Pokot* and *Ciemno, prawie noc*, which are based on novels by Olga Tokarczuk and Joanna Bator respectively.²⁶ These authors and their works have come to be associated internationally with magical realism in Polish literature.²⁷ Despite the strong association between magical realism and literature, film studies are by no means lacking, and that includes the Polish context.

Polish cinema has played a role in the (partial) theorization of magical realism in cinema at large. Of the three films that inspired Fredric Jameson's essay *On Magic Realism in Film* (1986), one of these was Polish: *Gorączka* (Fever; dir. Agnieszka Holland, 1981). In this essay, Jameson argues that these films exemplify a particular kind of magic realism defined by its genre (historical film), color, and particular "dynamic of narrative."²⁸ The 'magic' of these films lies not in the co-existence of the supernatural with the natural, but rather with the "revelation of the marvellous within the real"²⁹ in the tradition of Franz Roh and Alejo Carpentier. Despite the title of the essay, Jameson is far more invested in theorizing cinematic approaches to history rather than the manifestations of the magical realist mode in cinema. He contrasts the three magical realist films with the actual object of his critique—the then dominant "nostalgia film" referenced earlier. Whereas the nostalgia film offers glossiness and "a pseudopast for consumption," the magic realist film offers us color that "constitutes a unique supplement and the source of a peculiar pleasure, or fascination, or jouissance, in its own right," together with a "perforated history."³⁰ According to Jameson, this

26 The two novels are J. Bator's *Ciemno prawie noc*, Warsaw 2012 and Tokarczuk's *Prowadź swój pług przez kości umarłych* (Drive your plow over the bones of the dead), Cracow 2009.

27 See, for example: J. Bator, *Heimat am Horizont*, p. 14 and T. D'Haen, *Magical Realism. The European Trajectory*, [in:] *Magical Realism and Literature*, eds. C. Warnes and K. Sasser, Cambridge 2020, p. 130.

28 F. Jameson, *On Magic Realism in Film*, p. 304.

29 F.C. Gee, *The Critical Roots of Cinematic Magic Realism: Franz Roh, Alejo Carpentier, Fredric Jameson*, dissertation, University of London June 2013, p. 205.

30 Ibidem.

represented history may be “perforated” as a result of gaps in knowledge, an extreme ‘close-up’ position, or structural transitions.

Barbara Klonowska takes Jameson’s essay as a starting point for her theory of magical realism as part of a survey of its manifestations in Polish cinema.³¹ According to Klonowska, Jameson overemphasizes the “importance of the socio-historical, if not overtly political aspect of magical realism shifts his attention from the purely aesthetic qualities of the convention to its ideological agenda.”³² According to Klonowska, the primary characteristics of magical realism in Polish film include its de-emphasis on politics and its penchant for nostalgia. She argues: [T]he majority of Polish magic realist movies tend to present idyllic versions of Polish past or Polish provincial life, preserving them as memory and thus rescuing them from oblivion. In doing so, they sublimate and elevate the nostalgically portrayed worlds. The use of this convention for representation of the present, however, particularly its more mundane non-idyllic problems, is limited and such movies are significantly rare in Polish cinema.³³

Like Klonowska, Aga Skrodzka similarly concludes that Polish magical realism tends toward escapism. According to Skrodzka, films by directors such as Jan Jakub Kolski or Dorota Kędzierzawska “have created cinematic microcosms, where the source of spiritual, economic and cultural replenishment is found in the rural countryside, provincial town, often the *terra incognita* of childhood, or the margins inhabited by an ethnic community.”³⁴ In an article about the filmmaker Jan Jakub Kolski, however, Ewa Mazierska emphasizes that the very flight into nostalgia constitutes a response to rather than ignorance of the changing conditions of the day. Mazierska describes magic realism as an “art of ‘post’” that “conveys the feeling of a profound crisis of change – in history, in politics, in social relations, in art, in human consciousness.”³⁵ Klonowska’s – and by extension, Jameson’s – observations

31 B. Klonowska, *Far away from the present: Magical Realism in Polish film*, “Studies in Eastern European Cinema” 2010, vol. 1, no 2.

32 Ibidem, p. 185.

33 Ibidem, p. 186.

34 A. Skrodzka, *Magic Realist Cinema in East Central Europe*, Edinburgh 2012, p. 2.

35 E. Mazierska, *Between the Sacred and the Profane, the Sublime and the Trivial: The Magical Realism of Jan Jakub Kolski*, “Scope” Jan. 2000, p. 2. By and large, the mode of magical realism has come to be associated with the prefix “post-,” whether postcolonial, postmodern, or even postmemorial. See Sasser, *Magical Realism...*, pp. 15–17.

about Polish magical realist films need to be revisited, especially given the recent cluster of films and TV series that combine magical realism with the (contemporary) crime drama. If a crime drama introduces the provinces as an idyllic microcosm, it is only so that it can expose the corruption and crime that both lurk beneath and make the false idyllic image possible. *Pokot*, *Ciemno, prawie noc*, *Rojst*, and *Znaki* are all heavily invested in the present – even if, on the surface, *Rojst* appears to be charmed by vintage glamor.

The Films and TV Series and the Magical Realist Mode

In what follows, I introduce the films and TV series and provide my rationale for framing these crime series/films within magical realism rather than another related genre or mode. Fantasy, fairy tale, supernatural thrillers, horror, science fiction—reviewers invoke all of these terms, which are all, to varying degrees, valid³⁶; however, as Klonowska reminds us, one of magical realism's key characteristics is its very hybridity.³⁷

Ciemno, prawie noc

In the film *Ciemno, prawie noc*, a Warsaw reporter, Alicja Tabor, travels to her hometown of Wałbrzych in order to investigate a series of child disappearances that turn out to be linked to an underground child pornography ring. With the help of her neighbors and the “kociary” (‘kittens’), women/good spirits in the woods, Tabor discovers the history of (sexual) violence in the town and in her own family. The film locates the source of intergenerational trauma at the close of the war, as the Soviets indiscriminately raped and committed violence against the local population, including children. Despite the number of mysteries involving different characters and their

³⁶ In his review of *Ciemno, prawie noc*, B. Staszczyszyn writes, among other things, that the film “connects magical realism with the aesthetic of King’s novels.” B. Staszczyszyn, ‘*Ciemno, prawie noc*’, reż. Borys Lankosz, “Culture.pl.”

³⁷ B. Klonowska, *Far away from the present: Magical Realism in Polish film*, “Studies in Eastern European Cinema” 2010, vol. 1, no 2, p. 184.

histories, the viewer is left with few answers—one of several points of frustration for reviewers.³⁸

Pokot

In *Pokot*, a “kind of ecological crime film,”³⁹ a string of prominent hunters is murdered; we learn – spoiler – that it is the protagonist Janina Duszejko who has committed the murders in order to punish the hunters for the murder of wildlife and of her two dogs. In the end, her sympathetic friends help her escape across the border to Czechia, though the dreamlike manner of the scene suggests that this may be a fantasy. This final scene is not the only instance of the fantastic, however. Duszejko’s belief in the rights of animals and the value that she ascribes to astrology put her at odds with the logic of the Roman Catholic church, government, justice system, educational institutions – all of which are joined by the cult of hunting and the exploitation of nature.⁴⁰ For some reviewers, like Bartosz Staszczyszyn, Holland only manages to create an “infantile, somewhat caricatured vision of the world”; however, such a reading fails to grapple with the consequences of the “final plot twists.”⁴¹ As Holland says, “Jest w ‘Pokocie’ coś anarchistycznego, amoralnego.”⁴² Even if the film does seem to create a fairy tale world of good versus evil, it ultimately suspends the moral scales.

38 See, for example, reviews by B. Czartoryski, ‘*Ciemno, prawie noc*’: *a miało być tak pięknie. Nie wyszło*, “WP Film” 19 March 2019; M. Prymas, *Strzeż się kotojadów – recenzja filmu ‘Ciemno, prawie noc’*, “Pełna sala” 22 March 2019; and M. Kędziora, ‘*Ciemno, prawie noc*’, *czyli film, prawie dobry*, “Filmawka.pl” 25 March 2019.

39 A. Holland, interviewed by S. Smoliński, *Człowiek człowiekowi wilkiem*, „Kino” Feb. 2017, p. 19.

40 In part, through Duszejko’s stance, the film resembles the work of Jan Jakub Kolski. E. Mazierska explains that “[e]very film by Kolski contains a message which can be described as ‘ecological’; accordingly, human beings are only one of the many inhabitants of the Earth and have neither reason nor right to feel privileged or to behave in a superior manner towards animals and plants. People have a moral duty to treat animals as their friends and partners. Those in Kolski’s films who violate this law, harming their innocent ‘younger brothers’ are always severely punished.” E. Mazierska, *Between the Sacred and the Profane*, p. 10.

41 B. Staszczyszyn, ‘*Pokot*’, reż. Agnieszka Holland, “Culture.pl.”

42 A. Holland, *Człowiek człowiekowi wilkiem...*, p. 20.

Znaki/Znaki 2

The two TV series weave elements of mystery and the (potentially) supernatural into their convoluted provincial dramas. *Znaki* and its second season, *Znaki 2*, combine the conventional crime thriller with elements of folklore, mystery, and – in an unusual twist – Nazi conspiracy theories. Typical crimes for the genre such as drug production and trade, murder and kidnapping, or local government corruption intersect with remnants of World War II, including: a cemetery at the old melaphyre mine; the “*Muchotałka*,” a concrete structure rumored to be connected to alleged Nazi UFO experiments; the tunnels of the Project Riese complex; and the ghost of a concentration camp inmate and of an SS officer with a deformed face.⁴³ Curiosities such as ghost sightings and visions or the days-long interruption of cell service that severely hampers the investigations merely confirm the *Weltanschauung* of long-term residents and their beliefs about the local legends. Whether a third season will tie up remaining loose threads and release the protagonists from their various states of limbo remains to be seen.

Rojst/Rojst '97

In contrast to *Znaki* and the films, *Rojst* and its second season, *Rojst '97*, take place in the past, in 1984 and 1997, respectively. As in the other series, the forest is the primary *locus criminis*. In the first season, as the journalist-duo Witold Wanyecz and Piotr Zarzycki investigate the murder of a prostitute, we also learn that the town has a history of burying and silencing its crimes. In the second season, the Millennium Flood uncovers another murder and forces a reckoning with repressed crimes – namely, the brutality involved in the expulsion of the German population after the war. While Wanyecz struggles to find the courage to write about what happened to the Germans (and his long-lost love, Elsa Koepke), Zarzycki takes over direction of the dying newspaper, recently purchased by a German company. Anna Jass – a police sergeant from Warsaw who speaks Romani, reads horoscopes, and falls in love with Zarzycki's reciprocating wife – collaborates with Zarzycki and

⁴³ For more about the legends of the Owl Mountains, see *Legendy i ciekawostki*, “Góry-Sowie.pl,” www.gory-sowie.pl/legendy.

another local sergeant to solve the mystery of the murder and of the luxury residential project, Oaza, which was conspicuously spared from the flood.

The Anthropological Magic Realism of the Films and Series

William Spindler identified three categories of magic realism that are defined by their relation to the term “magic”: metaphysical, ontological, and anthropological.⁴⁴ Although the films and series overlap with the other two categories as well, they best correspond to the third category. In this context, “magic” is understood in anthropological terms, as “a process used to influence the course of events by bringing into operation secret or occult controlling principles of Nature.”⁴⁵ It illustrates the “survival in popular culture of a magical and mythical *Weltanschauung*, which coexists with the rational mentality generated by modernity.”⁴⁶ These two *Weltanschauungen* do not just coexist – they are on equal footing, with neither one privileged over the other.

In these films and TV series, the magical and supernatural are not necessarily accepted at face value or treated as nonchalantly as the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* – but then again, neither are the murders and crimes that happen in the ‘natural’, rational world. The supernatural is just as real and confrontable as the empirical, criminal world. At times, the works in question do indeed seem to lack the authorial reticence that Amaryll Chanady argues is a necessary defining feature of magical realist works.⁴⁷ In *Znaki*, for example, after the local drunk Paweł Piotrowski’s daughter goes missing, he sees her in the woods and she leads him by the hand to her mangled bicycle. The shift to an objective full shot from behind allows us to see that his daughter is not there – he walks along the road with his arm extended. Is this an alcohol – and grief-induced hallucination or a spectral encounter? As soon as the police locate the bicycle based on Piotrowski’s account, they confirm the veracity of the vision. Such

44 See W. Spindler, *Magical Realism: A Typology*, “Forum for Modern Language Studies” Jan. 1993, vol. 29, no 1, p. 80.

45 Ibidem.

46 Ibidem, p. 81.

47 See chapter four of A. Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic. Resolved versus Unresolved Antinomy* (1985), New York, Milton Park (UK) 2020.

instances posit alternate ways of seeing and knowing; they slice through time, and supplement rather than replace or undermine the empirical world.

Trickster Figures

Pokot and *Znaki* create and revive local trickster characters—liminal, ambiguous figures who disturb the order of things and exemplify the ambiguity of the codes of magic and realism in the films and series.⁴⁸ Though they are not the only source of ambiguity in the films and series, they present a specific link to anthropological magical realism. William J. Hynes lists six attributes of trickster characters: At the heart of this cluster of manifest trickster traits is (1) the fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality of the trickster. Flowing from this are such other features as (2) deceiver/trick-player, (3) shapeshifter, (4) situation-inverter, (5) messenger/imitator of the gods, and (6) sacred/lewd bricoleur. Not every trickster necessarily has all of these characteristics. Still, more times than not, a specific trickster will exhibit many of these similarities.⁴⁹

These attributes can be found in *Pokot*'s Duszejko and the SS-officer qua *Duch Gór* ("mountain spirit") of *Znaki*. In *Pokot*, the protagonist Duszejko resembles the shapeshifter, a metaphorical attribute that is represented on the poster advertising the film: the face of a wolf with one human and one animal eye. In *Znaki*, the SS-officer, in life as in death, occupies a space in between and in excess: in life, as a man with a facial deformity (i.e., who does not represent the racial ideals of the Nazi party but is a member of its arguably most brutal paramilitary organization) provokes terror as a We(h)rwolf partisan in their name; and in death, as the spectral embodiment of the *Duch Gór*, *Rübezahl* or *Liczyrzepa* (he even appropriates the antlers common to several representations of *Rübezahl*). As Hynes list of attributes attests, the trickster is difficult to delineate; by nature, they provoke and discomfit.

48 In *Ciemno, prawie noc*, the dual figures of the *kociary* ("kittens", good spirits) and *kotojady* ("cat eaters", evil spirits) at first appear to behave like trickster figures; however, the very fact that they are split into two beings with two clear sets of attributes aligns them more clearly with the fairy tale.

49 W.J. Hynes, *Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide*, [in:] *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*, eds. W.J. Hynes and W.G. Doty, Tuscaloosa and London 1993, p. 34.

The tricksters are uncomfortable characters who challenge us to contend with the baggage of the regions and of their people, legends, and histories. They transgress the borders of extant social and moral codes or of storytelling (or history-telling) conventions. Angi Buettner, drawing on the work of Lewis Hyde, describes such transgressive “acts of disturbance” as “cultural work”⁵⁰ that can either preserve or establish a status quo or that can forge a new identity and set of relations.⁵¹ In the films and series, tricksters (but also marginalized ‘Others’ who challenge binaries) open up alternatives to hegemonic conceptions of the sacred (according to Roman Catholicism), of Polish national history, or of Western time (e.g., the astrological calendar as a replacement for the Gregorian calendar that, at least in *Pokot*, has been overwritten by the hunting seasons).⁵²

Spectral Figures

Regardless which calendar is in use, both the past and present of the films and series are, to use Jameson’s term, “perforated.” As much as the object of the crime genre is to investigate and explain causally linked events, the series emphasize our inability to know or clearly define everything. Instances of time traveling and the appearance of ghosts or ghostly apparitions in particular upset attempts to reconstruct events linearly. While the tricksters and marginalized characters open up the analytical world of the crime drama to the magical real, what of the pectrality of the magical real?

The questions we have to ask are why and to what purpose do the ghosts of these films and series haunt? These are two of the driving questions of the volume *The “Spectral Turn” – Jewish Ghosts in the Polish Post-Holocaust Imaginaire* (2019). Several of the key insights of the volume are applicable to the films and series in question, which summon ghosts of various forms. Dziuban, reading Judith Butler, writes: [I]t is not the past that produces

50 A. Buettner, *Mocking and Farting: Trickster Imagination and the Origins of Laughter*, “Kunapipi” 2009, vol. 31, no. 2, p. 125.

51 Cf. W.G. Doty and W.J. Hynes, *Historical Overview of Theoretical Issues: The Problem of the Trickster*, [in:] *Mythical Trickster Figures...*, p. 32.

52 Although *Rojst* does not boast any trickster characters, the lesbian detective Jass defies gender conventions and, although she operates in a world of cause-and-effect, makes room for the cosmic in the form of palm readings, tarot cards, horoscopes.

ghosts but the present, drawing from the (unreworked and unresolved) past. It might be that colonization, slavery, and the Holocaust are historically over and denounced, but they *live on* through repressive configurations of power and violent mechanisms of culture so long as those configurations have not been revoked or transformed.⁵³

Specters cut through time and space, providing a shorthand testimony of the continuities and ruptures between past and present. Although ghosts are commonly thought of as restless souls who need to settle ‘unfinished business’, Konrad Matyjaszek explains how the living “employ”⁵⁴ ghosts to suit their own business. Ghosts, Matyjaszek writes, are “irreplaceable for legitimizing the haunted groups in their hegemonic status.”⁵⁵ Dziuban explains that the presence of a Jewish ghost casts Polish nationhood as haunted and traumatized, and thus becomes a source of various symbolic and political gains: the invisibilization of Polish involvement in the Holocaust and in wartime and postwar dispossession of the Jews, and the authorization of particular visions of Poland and Polishness. Disposability is the ghosts’ defining feature.⁵⁶

The very exploitation and disposal of the Jewish ghost constitutes a repetition of the structures that led to the death and expropriation of the Jewish individual to begin with. As such, “it is not the ghost who causes the haunting but the haunted subject, and this subject is being haunted as a result of his or her own participation in hegemonic practices.”⁵⁷ Dziuban’s and Matyjaszek’s contributions in particular challenge the validity of the concepts of *Tätertrauma* (“trauma of the perpetrator”) or of the “traumatized Polish witness”⁵⁸ by identifying what is at stake when a Jewish ghost is conjured in Polish culture.

53 Z. Dziuban, *Introduction: Haunting in the Land of the Untraumatized*, [in:] *The “Spectral Turn” – Jewish Ghosts in the Polish Post-Holocaust Imaginaire*, ed. Z. Dziuban, Bielefeld 2019, p. 31.

54 K. Matyjaszek, *Not Your House, not Your Flat: Jewish Ghosts in Poland and the Stolen Jewish Properties*, [in:] *The “Spectral Turn” – Jewish Ghosts in the Polish Post-Holocaust Imaginaire*, Bielefeld 2019, p. 197.

55 Ibidem, p. 190.

56 Z. Dziuban, *Introduction*, p. 34. Cf. K. Matyjaszek, *Not Your House...*, p. 190.

57 Ibidem.

58 K. Matyjaszek, *Not Your House...*, p. 191.

If ghosts are instruments of the haunted, to what purpose(s) are *German* ghosts invoked in Polish cultural productions? Curiously, *Znaki* is the only one of the four works to include actual specters. In *Rojst*, for example, the eerie green fog of the forest—a cipher of the unmarked cemetery at the site of the dismantled transit and labor camp—seems to intercede on behalf of Wanycz and Zarzycki at a critical moment, creating a momentary distraction that enables them to gain the upper hand against the murderers. Otherwise, in *Rojst* as in the films, we encounter ‘ghosts’ who are not dead. In the opening title sequence of *Rojst*, an old woman in white stands at the center of the living, creeping forest floor, but we never see her face (by the end of the series, we can surmise that this woman is Wanycz’s long-lost love, Elsa Koepke, who survived the camp and was expelled to what became West Germany). These hauntings tease the viewer with foreclosed knowledge or interrupt linear and cyclical time. What work are the ghosts of *Znaki* accomplishing?

There are numerous apparitions in *Znaki*: the local drunk Piotrowski’s visions of his daughter and of a severed deer head; Zofia Bławatska’s vision of her long-deceased daughter (the first unsolved murder of the series) in the shape of a lost child, her sightings of the *Duch Gór* (the ghost of the SS-officer), and her awareness of the souls disturbed by the mine project; the mayor’s brief vision of a concentration camp inmate working in the mine; and the mysterious reappearance of the child’s missing parents who, after being released from questioning, are subsequently rediscovered—as corpses that have been dead for two weeks.

While this final set of apparitions owes to the apparent time-traveling capacity of the activated *Mucholapka*, the other apparitions appear either as a result of guilt or affinity. Bławatska and Piotrowski see their daughters as a result of feelings of guilt and out of an egocentric need for redemption and forgiveness. This is the framework of the Jewish ghosts that Dziuban and Matyjaszek discuss. In this series, however, the specter of the concentration camp inmate silently condemns the mayor, who has sought to re-open the mine with a business partner who has just as little respect for history as for his (hired) workers’ rights. Although the mayor will try to present himself as a victim as a result of his injuries, his encounter with the ghost indicts him as a representative of unethical business practices and development schemes that cast him – a Pole – as a direct heir to Nazi practices. Bławatska and Feliks Szmidt – the remaining ethnic Germans in the town – are cast as

protectors of the dead and of (Nazi) German heritage. As such, they emerge as anachronistic specters of the “fifth column,” the threat from within; and yet, they live as outcast and hermit.

When the films and series focus on the historical crimes against the German population – a complex topic that entails unraveling the victimization of the collective victimizer population and potentially trivializing the role of individuals in the Shoah – the Jewish population fades into the background. With the focus of past crimes on the German-Soviet-Polish nexus, misogyny and the persecution and marginalization of other groups – gays and lesbians, Roma, people with disabilities and mental illnesses, including alcohol-dependency – are confined to the present. It should be noted, however, that these groups were specifically persecuted during the Nazi regime as well. As far as the films and series are concerned, whatever animosity there had been between Germans and Poles, it is, by and large, a historical animosity. Although the persecution and marginalization of these other groups are not explicitly framed as a historical continuity, they are relevant issues in society’s narrative present.

The overt structures and circumstances that led to the crimes against the Germans have been dismantled or simply no longer exist; yet, as the series and films highlight through the tropes of the crime genre, many of the underlying issues remain the same. Like the crimes that made the Shoah and the violence against the German civilian population possible, contemporary crimes are also motivated by the prospect of monetary gain at the expense of others. Since the debates following the publication of Jan T. Gross’ *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2001), several films have addressed the material motivations for Polish passivity and violence against their Jewish neighbors. Agnieszka Kotwasińska writes that “arguably most of them did not manage to escape cheap sentimentalism and faux universality that characterize a great many Polish productions focused on national history and, specifically, the Second World War and its social and political repercussions.”⁵⁹ Kotwasińska argues that the film *Demon* (dir. Marcin Wrona, 2015), by contrast, “showcase[s] the ripple effects of a spectral haunting, a Gothic shattering of social order, and

59 A. Kotwasińska, *Dis/Possessing the Polish Past in Marcin Wrona’s Demon*, “Humanities” 2020, vol. 9, no 59, p. 4.

a hauntological process of remembering, reliving, and recasting the past as part of the present, a hyper visible absence that demands the viewers' – our – attention."⁶⁰ Whereas *Demon* tackles the consequences of the adjective *pożydowski* ("post – or ex-Jewish"), *Rojst*, based on a screenplay by Wrona and Paweł Maślona, addresses the issue of *poniemiecki* ('post – or ex-German') property.⁶¹ Just as violence was required in order to make modern homes and goods *poniemiecki*, so it is that violence lies at the heart of the luxurious Oaza development. Even though Wanycz's ill-fated love story falls prey to "cheap sentimentalism," the flashbacks that accompany Wanycz's writing process entangle this story with the present of the series and beyond. The film exposes how those Polish-Soviet perpetrated crimes have been repeated in different forms, how they have created and perpetuated the mire that is the namesake of the series. Even in this piece of historical crime fiction, the question remains for us to reflect on – what has been built in the wake of the flood? Is Poland still in the mire?⁶²

This is the importance of these films and series for our understanding of Polish magical realism in film and television. Polish magical realism is no longer a flight from the present, as Klonowska reads it, but a grappling with our present circumstances through an uncomfortable engagement with the past in the present. This includes the incrimination of present-day business practices through the past and tackling current-day political issues as well – even if, as the title subheading of a *Guardian* article about Holland's *Pokot* claims – the director "did not intend to create a political film."⁶³ *Pokot* in particular addresses misogyny in Polish society, with Duszejko representing the frustrations of Holland's own generation of women, and the current

60 Ibidem, p. 13.

61 J. Holoubek and Ola Salwa discuss the adaptation of the screenplay in the interview *Horror na niewesołych bagniskach*, "Kino" July 2021.

62 See R. Zieliński, 'Woda wymywa wszystko i odsłania prawdę'. Jan Holoubek o nowym serialu Netflixa 'Rojst '97' z powodzią w tle, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 7 July 2021, in which director Holoubek discusses the potential opportunities for changes that an event such as the Millennium Flood provide as well as the need for confronting the past in order to move forward and learn. Cf. J. Holoubek, interviewed by A. Kyzioł, *Jan Holoubek o drugim sezonie 'Rojsta' i Polsce sprzed ćwierćwieku*, "Polityka" 7 July 2021.

63 K. Connolly, *Agnieszka Holland: Pokot reflects divided nature of Polish society*, "The Guardian" 16 Feb. 2017.

government's adversity toward ecological protections and stance on climate change.⁶⁴

The films and series can leave the viewer frustrated due to multiplying plot lines, the incommensurability of the realist and magical modes, and the way in which this requires us to sit with uncertainty and incomplete knowledge.⁶⁵ Even though *Rojst* unravels the grand majority of the mysteries, this series, too, insists on imperfect knowledge, leaving Zarzycki, Wanycz, and the viewer in ignorance. If it seems as if the ghosts have been laid to rest (i.e., re-repressed) so that the younger generations can live in their modern homes without guilt or shame, it is only ignorance that allows us to conceive of these spaces as homes. The body that was found after the flood was that of Zarzycki's son (though Zarzycki never knew of his existence). On the night of his murder, the son broke into the house next to Zarzycki's and observed his father through the windows. It is from this same position that we watch the loving and playful father dance with his daughter, completely unaware that his family has crumbled – an unknown son murdered, a wife in love with another woman.

Even if the otherworldliness of the forest diminishes as Wanycz finally begins to write about what happened there, even he does not receive perfect closure. The face of the woman in white remains foreclosed to us, just as it does to Wanycz, who never establishes contact with Elsa Koepke. The viewer, moreover, is not permitted to see what Wanycz does, namely Koepke's painting, her vision of the forest and the figure that lurks within it.⁶⁶ Though the magical realism fades from the visual realm, its ontology remains – a world of imperfect knowledges. Once we have uncovered one mystery, another remains just beyond our grasp – one in which Enlightenment causality and reason can function alongside horoscopes, tarot cards, and sympathies or affinities.

64 See ibidem and Holland: 'Pokot' to film o moim pokoleniu, "Culture.pl" 30 Sept. 2015.

65 See, for example, reviews by A. Kyzioł, *Szopy i ziemianki*, "Polityka" April 2020, no. 14, 1–7; R. Czyż, *Kto nas nauczył robić...* and *Program TV na wtorek...* Beata Giska, however, praises the series precisely because it demands active watching and encourages online discussions among fans who are eager to decipher the riddles. See B. Giska, *Co obejrzyć w weekend? 'Znaki' najoryginalniejszy polski serial kryminalny*, "Blog Orange Polska" 19 March 2021.

66 The title of the series was originally "Co widziała Elsa Koepke?" ("what did Elsa Koepke see?"). J. Holoubek, *Horror na...*, p. 31.

Conclusion

As the fictional town of Sowie Doły prepares to celebrate its 800-year history, a news crew arrives to interview the mayor about the history of the town. His plans to revive the melaphyre mine have been recently thwarted by the discovery of a cemetery of a labor camp at the site. Exasperated, he yells at his assistant: “Which history? With or without the bones? With or without the Jews?” We could ask the same questions of the small towns that populate *Rojst*, *Pokot*, and *Ciemno, prawie noc* as well. By infusing the crime drama with magical realist elements, the films and series show us what these histories and presents are or could be like – not as an either-or, but as an and-and. They project alternative genealogies, chronologies, and topographies of Silesia; importantly, these co-exist with and complement extant hegemonic systems. If nostalgia and escapism had dominated Polish cinematic magical realism, these films and series redirect the imaginative, disruptive potential of magical realism to the present. Moreover, they force a reckoning with the grand narratives that have shaped the history of the cinematic representation of the so-called Reclaimed Territories. Given that these films and series have been produced so recently, the question remains: When will the next season of the magical realist Silesian crime drama come out?

Filmography

Belfer (The teach), 2 seasons, Łukasz Palkowski, Maciej Bochniak (dirs.), TVN /ITI Neovision (Canal+), 2016–2017.

Die Blechtrommel (The tin drum), Volker Schlöndorff (dir.), Franz Seitz Filmproduktion/Bioskop-Film GmbH/Artemis Filmgesellschaft mbH/Hallelujah-Film GmbH/Argos Films S.A./Hessischer Rundfunk/GGB Gesellschaft für Geschäftsführung und Beteiligung GmbH & Co., FRG/FR 1979.

Chocolat, Lasse Hallström (dir.), Miramax Films/Buena Vista International, UK/USA 2000.

Ciemno, prawie noc (Dark, almost night), Borys Lankosz (dir.), Aurum Film/Odra Film/Centrum Zasobów Cyfrowych, PL 2019.

Dark, 3 seasons, Baran bo Odar (dir.), Netflix, DE 2017–20.

- Demon*, Marcin Wrona (dir.), Magnet Man Film/Telewizja Polska/Chimney Poland/Krakowskie Biuro Festiwalowe/TransFax Film Productions/Instytucja Filmowa Silesia Film/Wajda Studio/Lava Films, PL/Israel 2015.
- Gorączka* (Fever), Agnieszka Holland (dir.), ZF X, PL 1980/81.
- Kamerdyner* (The butler), Filip Bajon (dir.), Filmicon Dom Filmowy, PL 2018.
- Krakowskie potwory* (Cracow monsters), Kasia Adamik and Olga Chajdas (dirs.), Telemark/Netflix/Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, PL 2022.
- Kruk* (Raven), 2 seasons, Maciej Pieprzyca (dir.), Opus TV/ITI Neovision (Canal+), 2018/2021.
- Nikt nie woła* (No one calls), Kazimierz Kutz (dir.), ZF Kadr, PL 1960.
- Pitbull*, 3 seasons, Patryk Vega, Xawery Żuławski, Dominik Matwiejczyk, Kasia Adamik, Greg Zglinski (dirs.), ATM Grupa/Telewizja Polska – Agencja Filmowa, PL 2005–08.
- Pokot* (Spoor), Agnieszka Holland and Kasia Adamik (dirs.), SF “Tor”/Heimat-film/Nutprodukce, PL/DE/CZ/SE/SK/FR 2017.
- Rdza* (Rust), Roman Załuski (dir.), ZF Kadr, 1981/82.
- Rojst* (The mire), 5 episodes, Jan Holoubek and Kamil Misztal (dirs.), Showmax/SF Kadr, PL 2018.
- Rojst '97* (The mire '97), 6 episodes, Jan Holoubek (dir.), Netflix, PL 2021.
- Róża* (Rose), Wojciech Smarzowski (dir.), Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych i Fabularnych/SF Tor/SF Perspektywa/SF Oko/Lightcraft, PL 2011/12.
- Sami swoi* (All our own), Sylwester Chęciński (dir.), ZF Iluzjon, 1967.
- Skąpani w ogniu* (Bathed by fire), Jerzy Passendorfer (dir.), ZF Iluzjon, 1963/64.
- Twin Peaks*, 3 seasons, David Lynch (dir.), Lynch/Frost Productions, Propaganda Films, Spelling Television, Twin peaks Productions, Showtime, Rancho Rosa Partnership, USA 1990, 1991, 2017.
- Wataha* (The pack/The border), 2 seasons, Michał Gazda, Kasia Adamik, Jan P. Matuszyński, Olga Chajdas (dirs.), ATM Grupa, HBO Polska, 2014–2019.
- W głębi lasu* (The woods), 6 episodes, Leszek Dawid, Bartosz Konopka (dirs.), ATM Grupa/Netflix, PL/USA 2020.
- Wołyń* (Hatred), Wojciech Smarzowski (dir.), Film It/Narodowy Instytut Audiowizualny/Polskie Sieci Radiowe/Canal+ Polska/Bemar/Telewizja Polska/Andrzej Łudziński Productions/Odra Film/Narodowe Centrum Kultury, PL 2016.

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