



Andrzej Wajda: Portraits of History and Humanity

# The Ashes Popioły

## The Ashes Popioły

Director: Andrzej Wajda

Production Company: Zespół Filmowy 'Rytm'

Assistant Directors: Andrzej Zulawski,

Andrzej Brzozowski

Screenplay: Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski

Based on the novel by: Stefan Żeromski

Director of Photography: Jerzy Lipman

Sets: Anatol Radziwiłowicz

Costumes: Ewa Starowieyska, Jerzy Szeski

Music: Andrzej Markowski

Cast:

Daniel Olbrychski (*Rafał Olbromski*)

Pola Raksa (*Helena*)

Bogusław Kierc (*Krzysztof Cadro*)

Beata Tyszkiewicz (*Princess Elżbieta*)

Piotr Wysocki (*Prince Gintult*)

Józef Durasz (*Piotr, Rafał's brother*)

Tadeusz Hanoza (*Rafał's father*)

Jadwiga Andrzejewska (*Rafał's mother*)

Stanisław Zaczyk (*Prince Józef Poniatowski*)

Jan Świdorski (*General Sokolnicki*)

Jan Nowicki (*Captain Wyganowski*)

Jan Koecher (*De Witt*)

Poland 1965

227 mins

Digital (restoration)

Restored by Fixafilm

The screening on Sat 28 Feb will be introduced by writer Michael Brooke

## Andrzej Wajda: Portraits of History and Humanity

### The War Trilogy: A Generation Pokolenie

Sun 1 Feb 18:30; Sun 15 Feb 12:10

### The War Trilogy: Kanal Kanał

Mon 2 Feb 18:00; Sun 15 Feb 15:20 (+ pre-recorded intro by Professor Annette Insdorf, Columbia University)

### The War Trilogy: Ashes and Diamonds

Popiół i Diament

Wed 4 Feb 18:10 (+ KINOTEKA Polish Film Festival Opening + extended intro); Sun 15 Feb 18:15; Tue 24 Feb 20:50

### The Maids of Wilko Panny z Wilka

Thu 5 Feb 18:00 (+ intro); Wed 25 Feb 20:45

### Innocent Sorcerers Niewinni czarodzieje

Thu 5 Feb 20:40; Fri 20 Feb 17:55

### Everything for Sale Wszystko na sprzedaż

Fri 6 Feb 18:15; Thu 19 Feb 20:30

### The Ashes Popioły

Sat 7 Feb 14:10; Sat 28 Feb 16:25 (+ intro by writer Michael Brooke)

### Hunting Flies Polowanie na muchy

Sat 7 Feb 20:15; Sat 21 Feb 17:40

### The Wedding Wesele

Sun 8 Feb 15:10; Wed 11 Feb 20:40 (+ intro by Professor Ewa Mazierska, University of Lancashire); Sat 21 Feb 20:50

Not to be confused with *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), *The Ashes* was adapted from Stefan Żeromski's 1904 novel, and conceived on a massive scale. The action spans the period 1797 to 1812, including the bulk of the Napoleonic Wars; but while old Boney is glimpsed, Wajda focuses on a trio of Poles (Daniel Olbrychski, Bogusław Kierc, Piotr Wysocki) whose differing social and military statuses symbolise the national and personal confusion that followed Poland's then-recent absorption into the Habsburg Empire. The Poles fight alongside Napoleon in the hope of regaining independence, but this forces them into 'only obeying orders' situations, such as having to massacre Black rebels in Santo Domingo for having the temerity to assert their independence.

The first half is primarily a deft social satire, as the complexity of the Poles' relationship with their Habsburg rulers is explored from multiple angles, including a Masonic initiation involving ritualised bloodletting. Moments like that anticipate the second half's more upfront horrors, the more hallucinatory parts of which foreshadow the films of assistant director Andrzej Zulawski (*The Devil*, 1972; *On the Silver Globe*, 1977/88). If *The Ashes* ultimately doesn't quite achieve the full-blown transcendence of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* (1966) and František Vlácil's *Marketa Lazarová* (1967), the brilliance of individual set pieces at least points in their direction.

Michael Brooke, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 2020

*The Ashes*, a work written by Stefan Żeromski at the beginning of the 20th century, belongs to the most outstanding achievements of the Polish modern literature. The author depicts the tragic fate of ten thousand Poles who, acting under the magic spell of the greatness of Napoleon's genius, followed him blindly across Europe in the sincere belief that their blood shed so willingly on all battlefields will give their enslaved country the long expected freedom.

One of the most tragic dramas in Poland's history is being filmed by Andrzej Wajda, a film author who devoted almost the whole of his talent to the problem of the so called 'case of the Poles'. In his famous trilogy – *A Generation*, *Kanał*, *Ashes and Diamonds* – Wajda exposes those problems against the background of our times. Filming *The Ashes* he wants to show their historic origins for which the epoch of Napoleonic wars was a period of greatest sacrifices and tragic defeats, giving the most profound document of those errors which in the more and less distant past led the nation to disasters.

Indoor sequences are shot at Łódź. The battle of Raszyn – in the vicinity of Warsaw, in a place close to the historic battlefield. Later on, the team moved to Bulgaria where the famous cavalry charge in the Somosierra gorge was to be shot. The Bulgarian sun and landscape don't differ much from those of central Spain. Finally, the team went back to Wrocław where 'storming of Saragossa' was shot.

The work began at the well-equipped Łódź Studio. But not as smooth as expected. And although Wajda lit at the first clapper a large 'John Wayne' cigar which he saved for the occasion for over a year – difficulties started to mount the very first day of the shooting. The ballet of the Baltic Opera was to appear in the scenes of a ball which takes place in Orłowski's palace. The programme of the opera was accordingly altered. And then everything started to get upside

#### An Introduction to Andrzej Wajda

Wed 11 Feb 18:20

#### The Solidarity Trilogy: Man of Marble

Człowiek z marmuru

Mon 16 Feb 17:50; Sun 1 Mar 12:10

#### Rough Treatment Bez znieczulenia

Tue 17 Feb 20:30; Mon 9 Mar 20:20 (+ intro by film critic and scholar Michał Oleszczyk)

#### The Solidarity Trilogy: Man of Iron

Człowiek z żelaza

Sun 22 Feb 12:00; Sun 1 Mar 15:00;

Sun 15 Mar 18:00

#### The Promised Land Ziemia obiecana

Sun 22 Feb 17:45; Wed 11 Mar 18:45 (+ Q&A with actor Daniel Olbrychski)

#### The Conductor Dyrygent

Thu 26 Feb 20:55; Mon 9 Mar 17:50 (+ intro by film critic and scholar Michał Oleszczyk)

#### The Solidarity Trilogy: Wałęsa: Man of Hope

Wałęsa. Człowiek z nadziei

Sun 1 Mar 18:20; Mon 16 Mar 20:30

#### Korczak

Mon 2 Mar 19:10 (+ Q&A); Fri 13 Mar 20:45

#### Katyn Katyn

Thu 5 Mar 20:30; Tue 10 Mar 18:15 (+ pre-recorded intro by film critic Carmen Gray)

#### Afterimage Powidoki

Thu 12 Mar 18:20; Wed 18 Mar 20:40

#### With thanks to

Marlena Łukasiak, Michał Oleszczyk,  
Jędrzej Sabliński

Presented with the ICA and Ciné Lumière, who will also be hosting screenings of Wajda's works in February and March



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down. Beata Tyszkiewicz who performs one of the leading female parts fell ill only a few days before the planned shooting. There was no chance to bring her from Warsaw to Lodz.

Things turned even more complicated because the sets for the next sequence in a freemasons lodge were not ready. Yet, there was no chance to postpone anything for a train load of soldiers was on its way to Warsaw to take part in the famous Battle of Raszyn. Hundreds of phone calls, orders, decisions had to be made to find a solution of a problem which seemed to be without one. Finally the 'great breakdown' was overcome: Wajda shot first the 'freemasons lodge' sequences, then the ball and after all that was finished he started his Battle of Raszyn.

Some 1,500 uniforms worn by different armies at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, were prepared for the filming of *The Ashes*. Each of those uniforms consists of 15 different parts. There are 40 buttons on each of them. A military cap consists of eight parts. There are three belts to every one of them: service belt, cartridge belt and a chopper-belt. The officers were given additionally a whole collection of distinctions, embroidery, medals and things like that. The light cavalry horses were to get proper harness. Hundreds of the guard soldiers had to be 'fitted' with proper moustaches. When the whole work was finally finished, the troops looked very much like those which took place in the real battle.

The historic costumes were the biggest problem. In the battle scenes there are some 130 professional actors and over 1,500 extras. The whole production-plan however, anticipated only 30,000 full pay working hours for the extras. If anything went wrong in the course of shooting – the whole financial plan would turn into a fiction. It looked rather simple but the battle ground is full of marshes, water-canals and dikes. There are scenes of a cavalry charge, hand-to-hand fighting and bayonet charges. After a part of the battle was finished the uniforms looked like rags. The team had only a very short time to get them cleaned so they could be used again the next day, and then to be sent by train to Bulgaria for other battle sequences.

Some 200 soldiers were specially drilled to get the whole 'know how' of the historic period. Those 200 were always in the front of the more than 1,100 extras. In one sequence the troops 'played' the Poles, in the other – the Austrians. The continuous changing of uniforms was another technical problem for production management and men.

One of the scenes required three horses. The horses were brought but not a single foot of the film could be shot. Today a horse's mane is trimmed short. It could be quite an error when you make a historic film. Horses used to have very long manes. The horses had to be sent back.

The siege of Saragossa took place in Wrocław. The Wrocław Studio built a huge artificial Spanish town for a film by Wojciech Has, *The Saragossa Manuscript*. After a little redecorating the same settings were used for the murderous fights that led to a destruction of the town.

*Films and Filming*, January 1965