



Studia
Filmoznawcze
33
Wrocław 2012

Ryszard Waksmund

University of Wrocław

HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD — HISTORY OF CINEMA

History of childhood as a new discipline in the humanities dealing with, among others, the situation of the child in the family and society from Antiquity to this day, also takes into account the child's ludic needs: toys, books, forms of entertainment, etc. Information about this topic is provided mainly by memoir-based sources, especially autobiographies, which since Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* have made childhood experiences a measure of honesty and completeness of personal reflections. 20th century, sometimes called a "century of the child", produced innumerable testimonies of this kind, not only of documentary but also artistic value, a phenomenon that can be seen as a split in the writers' attitude – between fabrication and truth. In that century cinema became an important experience in the child's life, though it was not always an important theme. When Antoni Słonimski recalls his very wise grandfather, associated all his life with Warsaw, he points to an important intergenerational difference – the fact that the grandfather personally knew Bolesław Prus, who even portrayed him in his novel *Lalka*, but he did not know the car, the plane or the hydrogen bomb, nor did he know cinema¹.

The most matter-of-fact are memoirs of peasants, but we will not find there the material that interests us, because before WWII cinema as an institution for decades linked only to the city was an unknown phenomenon to children from the countryside². This obviously also applies to memoirs of members of the landed gentry. Only when we take into consideration accounts of intellectuals and, especially,

¹ A. Słonimski, *Wspomnienia warszawskie*, Warsaw 1957.

² The only reason behind the existence of cinema in the countryside in the inter-war period was the showing of educational films promoting progress in agriculture. See J. Chałasiński, *Młode*

people living in cities or, more precisely, big cities, does the subject in question come to some prominence. For example, in addition to chapters entitled “‘Thursday’ at Deotyma’s”, “School entertainment” (including school theatre), “At the circus” and “Evenings at the concert hall” we also find in Jadwiga Kopeć’s book a chapter entitled “Iluzjon” [name of a cinema - translator’s note]³. Other similar chapter titles include “Cinemas” (Zbigniew Raszewski⁴), “At the cinema” (Jan Sztaudynger⁵), “Passion for cinema” (Michalina Wisłocka⁶), “Hollywood” (Józef Hen⁷).

However, we are mostly dealing with perfunctory remarks, as in the case of Jan Brzechwa, who encountered cinema only when he went to the city. They were included, seemingly accidentally, in chapter nine, “Polina” (the name of a girl whom he tormented with his child’s passion), subchapter 36, “Kijów – miasto górzyste”:

I was greatly impressed by the films, which I saw for the first time. There were two cinemas in Kiev at the time: one – A. Mianowski’s “Witograf”, the other Szancer’s “Biograf”, later renamed “The Express Bio”, both in Khreshchatyk. The programme comprised colourful productions involving transformations of butterflies and magical blossoming of flowers, as well as Foolshead’s funny adventures. Foolshead was played by one of the first film actors – André Deed. Everything flickered, jumped, quavered, broke, but enchanted with movement and still imperfect novelty of the cinematic art. As a bonus, the audience saw performances by jugglers, conjurors and transformers, and once I even saw a violin performance by Roza and Żozefa Błazek, Siamese sisters joined at the hip bone⁸.

Brzechwa, as a son of a Polish engineer working in Russia, did, as we can see, have an opportunity to come across this fashionable novelty in his childhood. Children from poorer families could count at best on seeing some amateur theatrical performances, colourfully described by Gustaw Morcinek as he remembered his youth in a small town in the Cieszyń Silesia:

We looked goggle-eyed, listen open-mouthed, held out our breaths with emotion, swallowed tears, roared with laughter, moved to a different world, while a Jew sat in a barrel on stage or someone snored when ordered, or Maryśka Płachcińska was a girl recruit, or we cried with the

pokolenie chłopów. Procesy i zagadnienia kształtowania się warstwy chłopskiej w Polsce, vol. 3. “Rola kół młodzieży wiejskiej w społeczno-kulturalnych przeobrażeniach wsi”, Warsaw 1938, p. 181.

³ J. Kopeć, *Dziecko dawnej Warszawy*, Warsaw 1981, pp. 302-304.

⁴ Z. Raszewski, *Mój świat*, Warsaw 1997, pp. 23-29.

⁵ J. Sztaudynger, *Szczęście z datą wczorajszą*, Kraków 1974, p. 152. In this case it is not so much the cinematic impressions of the author himself, but those of his parents, disgusted by a smell coming not from other spectators sitting next to them – whom they upbraided for that reason – but, as it turned out back at home, from their own bag in which they had put some freshly bought cheese.

⁶ M. Wisłocka, *Malinka, Bratek i Jaś*, Warsaw 1998, pp. 105-110.

⁷ J. Hen, *Nowolipie*, Warsaw 1991, pp. 128-134.

⁸ J. Brzechwa, *Gdy owoc dojrzewa*, Warsaw 1965, p. 341. The already mentioned André Deed (1884-1931) was an acrobat and singer in a Parisian cabaret, and from 1905 – a film actor playing comic roles. He won fame as Cretinetti (*Cretinetti – King of Policemen*, *Cretinetti – the Inventor*, *Cretinetti – the False Monk*, *Cretinetti – the Fisherman*), known in France as Gribouille (simpleton) and in Russia as Glupyuskin.

miller, because his daughter died, and rejoiced when he kicked the bucket, or we wandered with the shepherds and the Magi to the Bethlehem manger, or we were moved by the Star of Siberia or the story of St. Genevieve, or we swore vehemently at the tsar in the 10th Pavillion or we howled when the candle went out, or we were duped by the magic circle or laughed till our bellies hurt, when some Dandin was walloped by a woman with a slipper⁹.

Morcinek reels off both performances of this type as well as travelling shows with wax figures representing characters from the Bible, nihilists, robbers, fairy tale princesses, moving thanks to a hidden mechanism of course.

They were also seen on the streets of Warsaw, alongside stuffed animals, a man with rubber skin, an Indian fakir, a couple of midgets, attractions that competed with a peepshow, opened around 1900, showing views of the Alps, Bavarian castles, finest European capitals and exotic lands. As Józef Galewski recalls: “You could sit there and watch all day”¹⁰. However, for him a prototype of film was a booklet with 50 photographs on a thick cardboard, which, when flicked through at a right speed, gave an impression of movement: “so you could see someone walking, entering a room, opening the door, welcoming someone. Some of my friends practised that – at school and at home. They achieved considerable perfection”¹¹.

As the 20th century began, cinema begins to enter this world and is treated initially as a trivial form of entertainment, sometimes demoralising, and, as such, not worthy of the attention hitherto devoted to books and theatre. It was not until the writing of an autobiography ceased to be the privilege of the well-born and the well-educated that the history of childhood could take into account also childhood fascinations with cinema – at its very beginning, as can be seen in Brzechwa’s case. It is undoubtedly worth mentioning here the account by Jadwiga Kopeć, recalling her secondary school years, including the first trip to a Warsaw cinema with her friend Roman:

It was in a dark and gloomy room. There was a sheet hanging on the wall, ruffled by constant gusts from draughty windows and doors. We sat near the middle of the auditorium. The seats were not numbered, everyone sat wherever they could.

The lights were turned off, with only side lamps left, covered with red crepe paper.

We waited in the semi-darkness. Finally a leotard-clad stout lady appeared on the screen, spreading her arms and shaking them in the darkness. This was to be a “butterfly dance”.

The next number was called “Watering man”. A man appeared on the canvas, watering flowers by means of a rubber hose. A boy runs in, stamps on the hose and water stops flowing. The watering man does not know why, he looks into the hose outlet, while the little rascal, hidden behind a bush, releases the rubber and the water goes sploosh! – right into the man’s face.

We roar with laughter.

An inscription comes onto the screen: “Ten-minute technical break before the next part”¹².

⁹ G. Morcinek, *Dziela wybrane: Czarna Julka*, Katowice 1979, p. 354.

¹⁰ J. Galewski, L.B. Grzeniewski, *Warszawa zapamiętana – ostatnie lata XX stulecia*, Warsaw 1961, p. 148.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 150.

¹² J. Kopeć, *op. cit.*, pp. 302-303.

This reflection concerning the 1906–1907 period contains the very essence of the birth of cinema as an art and an institution – from a vulgar form of entertainment to the first film anecdote¹³. During the same showing the girl would hear the name Lumiere and see the next act, probably featuring Junosza Stępowski, an “American picture”, *Express Train Robbery*, and, the biggest attraction of the show, a melodrama entitled *American Princess*, the story of which she proceeds to tell. At the end she confesses:

We were delighted by the whole show, despite the fact that people on screen gesticulated wildly, as if they had been fighting, that they fluttered their artificial lashes, that all rooms in the background had the same wallpaper...¹⁴

The silent film period made its mark on the mind of the generation born in the first couple of decades of the 20th century. A representative of the same generation of viewers, Vladimir Nabokov, went with his friend to the cinema in Saint Petersburg to see the actor Mozzhukhin against a backdrop of an elegant manor house, which, as he claimed, appeared in many film productions at the time¹⁵. Later, chasing butterflies on his own, he met him personally, trying to control a horse, on the set of *Hadji Murad*¹⁶. Younger children may have reacted differently to this sort of cinema, which can be seen in a confession by Jean-Louis Barrault: “I was scared by silent films, constantly showing thieves on the roofs, climbing drainpipes and entering houses through windows. Fear remained present in my heart forever”¹⁷. Opposite impressions were created, on the other hand by grotesque films featuring Charlie Chaplin, who was remembered by e.g. Bohumil Hrabal (*Krasosmutněni*), Günter Grass (*Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*) and Kazimierz Brandys (*Mała księga*). For Lubomir Czapkowicz, who encountered silent films in Nowy Targ, they were “an even bigger attraction than the circus”¹⁸.

After leaving Paris for the provinces, Julien Green was taken with his family to shows taking place at a landed estate and having an additional attraction in the form of squeals and laughter of countryside youth. From his perspective as a child, the first contact with cinema was not very exciting: a male voice would announce the title of the film and comment on the action, touched spectators sniffed, but he

¹³ See: J. Płażewski, *Historia filmu dla każdego*, Warsaw 19863, chapter I “Okres prymitywów i kina jarmarcznoego (1895-1908)”.

¹⁴ J. Kopeć, op. cit., p. 304.

¹⁵ Ivan Ilyich Mozzhukhin (1889-1939) became famous as an actor thanks to his role in *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1911). Nabokov probably thinks about his other roles in *Defence of Sevastopol* (1911), *The Little House in Kolomna* (1913) and *Nikolay Stavrogin* (1915).

¹⁶ V. Nabokov, *Other Shores*, translated into Polish by E. Siemaszkiewicz, Warsaw 1991, pp. 177-178, 187.

¹⁷ J.-L. Barrault, *Souvenirs pour demain*, Polish translation by E. Krasnowska, Warsaw 1977, p. 35.

¹⁸ L. Czapkiewicz, *Opowieść polskiego chłopca*, Komorów 2004, p. 17.

was scared in particular by a devil chasing a young girl who was rescued only by the Virgin Mary.

The show seemed of very little importance to us, but thinking that over now, I am a trifle surprised. Had we no presentiment of seeing something new? I do not think so. None of us could take seriously pictures that moved on a white sheet. After all, we thought, it was not much more than another form of magic lantern, an amusement for children¹⁹.

Religious films appeared in children's life as a form of religious instruction. In the Holy Week children would be taken to see films about the Passion. For Wiesław Kielar, watching Golgotha during a religious instruction lesson was also the first contact with cinema, which only later became for him the "theoretical foundation of emotional life"²⁰. A member of a Spanish aristocratic family, Constanca de la Mora watched a film about the Passion already when she was six, with her guardians not forgetting to take a Thermos flask with warm milk for her. As she confesses:

We broke down in tears at the cinema and after returning home I managed to utter some childish "pearls of wisdom" of the kind that are usually repeated to the guests in all families to amuse them. I was a sensitive child and the story of the Lord's Passion shook me deeply²¹.

Maria Kann, who was associated with Warsaw all her life, went to the cinema for the first time when still a kindergarten pupil, accompanied by a friend, and was amazed "how pictures came to life on a white sheet as if on a huge page from a book": live piano music accompanied the tragedy of the passengers of a sinking ship, and the film was entitled *The Tragedy of the Titanic*. "From then on I was scared of the cinema," she adds. "My favourite pastime was sitting down with a book, trying to solve the mystery of the black letters"²². Only when she was in form eight did she go with a friend to the "Sfinks" cinema in Senatorska Street, where she watched Charlie Chaplin and cowboy films. Sixteen-year-old Simone de Beauvoir, without such company, was groped by an unknown man during a showing of a travel film. When she grew up, her parents allowed her to go to cinema on her own or with a girl friend²³.

Boys did not stop at being just spectators and, whenever they could, they liked to climb to the operator's booth after a show. As Zdzisław Kaliciński, a Warsaw resident, recalls:

¹⁹ J. Green, *Partir avant le jour*, Polish translation by Z. Milewska, Warszawa 1969, pp. 71-72.

²⁰ W. Kielar, *Nasze młode lata. Wspomnienia*, Wrocław 2004. It should be noted that similar principles applied to Styka's painting also entitled *Golgotha*, which became one of the attractions of Warsaw's cultural life. See J. Galewski, L.B. Grzeniewski, op. cit., pp. 140-141.

²¹ C. de la Mora, *Doble Esplendor*, Polish translation by Z. Szleyen, Warsaw 1954, p. 31.

²² M. Kann, *Koniec i początek świata*, Warsaw 1936, pp. 36, 37.

²³ S. de Beauvoir, *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, Polish translation by H. Szumańska-Grossowa, Warsaw 1960, p. 373

there was a large metal box with a fireplace lined with asbestos inside and in it two black rods – carbon electrodes. As they came closer to each other, there came a dazzling noise – sparks came from them as if from some huge sparklers and soon there was a characteristic smell in the booth. Behind the box were some giant reels – one up, one down – some gears, some belts and a crank! An ordinary crank, which the operator would turn. The reels began to turn slowly, then something began to flicker on screen, the picture became sharper – people moved, dogs ran, cars sped and we knew that the “cinema was playing”²⁴.

He also noticed, already as a boy, that when the operator’s hands went numb and he began to turn the crank more slowly, the movement on screen became slower, and when he increased the turning speed, the actors moved too lively, provoking catcalls in the auditorium, which forced the operator to adjust the speed of the film. From the pre-1929 repertoire he remembered, in addition to Chaplin’s film, the exploits of the bandit-chasing dog Rin Tin Tin, Sindig’s *Frühlingsrauschen*, accompanied by piano music played by Tamara Gajewska, *Ponad śnieg bielszym się stanę*, *Iwonka*, *Dzikuska* and *Trędowata*, *Tajemnica przystanku tramwajowego* and *Czerwony błazen*, and, from among more ambitious films: *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *The Nibelungs* and *Storm over Asia/Potomok Chingiskhana*. Kielar remembered not only the violinist and the pianist playing “Entrance of the Gladiators” or Schubert’s “Serenade”, but also active participation of the audience:

Some spectators read aloud the content of the various episodes, which distracted others. Scenes of kissing were accompanied by loud lip-smacking of those sitting the closest to the screen, where on-screen beatings aroused the biggest enthusiasm²⁵.

Thus, we are approaching sound films, which reached Warsaw cinemas in 1930, depriving cinema pianists’ of their livelihood. The first showing of this type – of *Sunny Boy* – took place in a Lviv cinema and was witnessed by Milo Anstadt, who was taken to it by his uncle. It was to be a reconciliation gesture for the boy for an “undeserved slap in the face”²⁶. Another Lviv resident, Stanisław Lem, claims that the film’s theme song was “immediately picked up by street singers”²⁷, but when it comes to the sound film period, he remembered only *King-Kong* and *Frankenstein*. Disney’s *Snow White* so enchanted Polish seamen from Gdynia – a fact recorded by Zygmunt Betański – that they would sing the famous dwarf song in a paraphrased version: “Heigh-ho, Heigh-ho, it’s to Gdańsk from work we go” instead “It’s home from work we go”²⁸. Józefa Radzymińska, on the other hand, remembered not the title of a Russian film she had seen, but the melody of a soldiers’ march “the same

²⁴ Z. Kaliciński, *O Starówce, Pradze i ciepokach*, Warszawa 1983, p. 121.

²⁵ W. Kielar, op. cit., p. 46.

²⁶ M. Anstadt, *Kind in Polen*, Polish translation by M. Zdzenicka, Wrocław 2000, p. 138.

²⁷ S. Lem, *Wysoki Zamek. Wiersze młodzieńcze*, Kraków 1975, p. 80.

²⁸ Z. Betański, *Obraz XX wieku we wspomnieniach*, Warsaw 2003, p. 89.

later made famous in the times of guerrilla fighters by the song *Rozszumiały się wierzyby płaczące*²⁹.

New faces appeared in film. They included Maurice Chevalier, Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Lyubov Orlova, Jadwiga Smosarska, Mieczysława Ćwiklińska, Antoni Fertner, Eugeniusz Bodo, Witold Conti and others. “We did not miss,” recalls Kaliciński, “a single Polish film; during breaktimes at school film was the most frequent topic of conversations”³⁰. This did not, of course, eliminate his fascination with theatre or even opera, towards which the boy would save for weeks, “nicking” pennies from his father’s pockets. It was easier for children from intelligentsia families, who were taken to the cinema by their parents³¹. Stanisław Lem mentions that during dramatic scenes he used to nudge his father with his elbow³².

Stalin’s daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva, recalls, in addition to Moscow theatre outings, night-time showings at the Kremlin, beginning at 9pm. At her father’s side, she had an opportunity to see the latest Soviet productions on a small screen: *Chapayev*, *Maxim Trilogy*, *The Circus*, films about Peter I, etc.

My father believed that it would be more beneficial for me to see a film rather than stay at home. In fact, he probably did not think about any benefits for me, he simply found it pleasant to have me with him, play with him, diverting his attention from other things and making him laugh³³.

Despite her governess’ indignation, she accepted invitations to these showings and, as the tyrant’s beloved daughter, she led a procession of security officers. However, she was not always able to see two films at a time, as this prolonged the showing till 2am, and she had to go to school the following day. It was not until she was a teenager, when her relations with her father deteriorated, that she would venture outside the Kremlin – to the Cinematography Committee building to see American films with a VIP girl friend. The girls saw, e.g. Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Young Mr. Lincoln*. “There were only two of us in a fairly small auditorium...”³⁴

Going to the cinema was customary for some Jews from Kraków. They list such names [of cinemas] as “Świt”, “Apollo”, “Atlantic”, “Uciecha”, “Adria” – where they watched films featuring Adolf Dymśa, Tarzan, Laurel and Hardy, as well as *Krzyk ulicy*, *Znachor*, *Doktor Wilczur*. The Bagatela Cabaret presented shows for younger children, e.g. *Snow White* and *Cinderella*. Whole families went to see Jewish films, usually produced in America. Boys’ appetite for western films was catered

²⁹ J. Radzymińska, *Podróż do początku*, Warsaw 1998, p. 189.

³⁰ Z. Kaliciński, op. cit., p. 236.

³¹ See K. Sierakowska, *Rodzice, dzieci, dziadkowie... Wielkomięjska rodzina inteligentka w Polsce 1918-1939*, Warsaw 2003, p. 132.

³² S. Lem, op. cit., p. 81.

³³ S. Alliluyeva, *Twenty Letters to a Friend*, Polish translation by W. Radolińska, H. Lewandowska, E. Fietkiewicz, Łódź 1996, p. 112.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 134.

for by the “Świt” cinema run by priests in the Podwale district. Girls favoured melodramas (*Znachor*, *The Tragedy of Mayerling*, *Madame Walewska*) and “when the film was sad,” recalls Lea Shinar (Lea Weinfeld), “we would leave the cinema in tears! I would go to some corner to have a good weep, because I was ashamed to walk the streets with such eyes!”³⁵.

Some titles, e.g. *Romeo and Juliet* or *Krzyk ulicy*, were banned by parents, but young people found ways around the ban, putting on high heels or wearing the mother’s hat. Joanna Chmielewska would later do something similar to see *Les Enfants du Paradis*, which was for the over-18s³⁶. According to Lucy Urlych, another method was to sneak into the operator’s booth, which she herself did with a friend³⁷. Those who admit to watching films regarded as not suitable for young people include Magdalena Samozwaniec, who with her sister Lilka and the good Frojlusia watched, with bated breaths, a silent melodrama entitled *Dziecina wola* – about a maid seduced by a young master³⁸. Horst Bienek was too small to watch *Ofiara*; he had to be satisfied with reading³⁹. On the other hand, Günter Grass was lucky, because thanks to his uncle, a cinema operator, he could see *Kapiel na klepisku*⁴⁰. Henryk Markiewicz, too, admits to a similar transgression, but he does not mention any prohibited title, though he has no problem reeling off the titles of theatrical productions he attended at the time⁴¹.

People began to develop a passion for cinema, a phenomenon that also affected the younger generations. This is very well illustrated by the reminiscences of Michalina Wisłocka, who in order to go to a cinema in Łódź had to first save up pennies, then smuggle her four-year-old brother into the auditorium and suffer the excesses of salacious spectators. The plot of a film seen at the cinema became a script of games at home, and at school – the content of stories for friends, who often regarded such oral accounts as more interesting than the film itself. On the other hand, boys were so impressed by cowboy films that, according to Wiesław Kielar, they tried to imitate their protagonists. Jean-Paul Sartre even played cinema games, making pictures using “real furniture and real walls”⁴².

The burgeoning cult of stars also involved teenage viewers. Monika Żeromska remembers older school friends who were in mourning after Rudolf Valentino died⁴³,

³⁵ A.D. Pordes, I. Grin, *Ich Miasto. Wspomnienia Izraelczyków, przedwojennych mieszkańców Krakowa*, Warsaw 2004, p. 62.

³⁶ J. Chmielewska, *Autobiografia*, vol. 1. *Dzieciństwo*, Warsaw 2000, p. 215.

³⁷ L. Urlych, *Naprawdę widzę*, Bydgoszcz 1999, p. 70.

³⁸ M. Samozwaniec, *Maria i Magdalena*, Kraków 1956, p. 57.

³⁹ H. Bienek, *Podróż w krainę dzieciństwa. Spotkanie ze Śląskiem*, Gliwice 1993, p. 238.

⁴⁰ G. Grass, *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*, Polish translation by S. Błaut, Gdańsk 2007, p. 111.

⁴¹ H. Markiewicz, *Mój życiorys polonistyczny z historią w tle*, Kraków 2003, p. 31.

⁴² J.-P. Sartre, *Les mots*, Polish translation by J. Rogoziński, Warsaw 1965, p. 111.

⁴³ M. Żeromska, *Wspomnienia*, Warsaw 2007, p. 125.

while Kazimierz Dębnicki quotes a conversation between boys, who regarded the star to be the ideal of male beauty: “Novarro can’t hold a handle to Rudolf Valentino, can he, did you see *The White Sheik*?”⁴⁴. This was followed by a passion for collecting posters with film stars. According to Henryk J. Chmielewski, such posters were sold even in a Warsaw market square⁴⁵. As Jadwiga Żylińska writes:

My younger sister’s beloved star was Marlene Dietrich.

In any case, Marlene was highly rated among us. One Marlene could be exchanged for two Joan Crawfords, one Gary Cooper, and for Joan Crawford you could get Lilian Harvey, Myrna Loy and, say, Carole Lombard, so eventually, Marlene was equal to ten other stars combined. Since each poster, whether it was a Marlene or an ordinary Norma Shaerer, could be bought for 30 groszy in Mrs Mieloszyńska’s bookshop or in another bookshop in the Market Square, or in the third one in Gimnazjalna Street. Mum was very surprised by these transactions, especially ruinous to my sister. But she thought that the exchange was completely fair. For there was an unwritten rule in our hobby that neither of us would buy a poster that the other one had already bought⁴⁶.

Józefa Radzymińska, in turn, had an elder sister, Halszka, who was besotted with Witold Conti, whom she met in the Parish House in Otwock, where she also watched *Na Sibir* with Jadwiga Smosarska and *Dziesięciu z Pawiaka* with Józef Węgrzyn. These patriotic pictures shook her so much that she became ill. Polish films of this kind were also remembered by Józef Hen (*Nowolipie*), when during puberty he began to notice the differences between the blonde-haired heroines and the girls he knew⁴⁷. But Radzymińska also saw foreign films: *The Indian Tomb* and *Mother of Kings*. “Though they were foreign, not patriotic and did not move like the Polish films did, their charming exoticism fascinated me, arousing an interest that in the case of India lasted a lifetime”⁴⁸.

Günter Grass, who spent his childhood in the Free City of Gdańsk, thought that the child film star Shirley Temple was “silly and moderately good-looking”; he was fascinated instead by Harry Piel, and amused by Laurel and Hardy as well as Charlie Chaplin, who as a “gold-digger eats a shoe together with the laces”⁴⁹. Silent films were preceded by *Fox Movietone News*, which Maria Kurecka must have seen during the time of her high school leaving exams, remembering the so-called annexation of Austria by the German Reich from one of such showings⁵⁰.

The Second World War turned the German newsreel into some dramatic documentary show. This is why Janina Wiczerska did not want to watch *Die deutsche Wochenschau* showing the capitulation of the Warsaw Uprising: “I had already seen

⁴⁴ K. Dębnicki, *Życie jak życie*, Warsaw 1986, p. 229.

⁴⁵ H.J. Chmielewski (Papcio Chmiel), *Urodziłem się w Barbakanie*, Warsaw 1999, p. 53.

⁴⁶ J. Żylińska, *Dom, którego nie ma. Drogi, które prowadzą dalej*, Warsaw 1983, pp. 52-53.

⁴⁷ J. Hen, op. cit., p. 165.

⁴⁸ J. Radzymińska, op. cit., p. 190.

⁴⁹ G. Grass, op. cit., p. 29.

⁵⁰ M. Kurecka, *Niedokończona gawęda*, Gdańsk 2000, p. 183.

our soldiers as prisoners once. I was afraid I'd start blubbing"⁵¹. This looks different from the German perspective. Grass, for example, recalls, without any great emotion, images of the ruins of German cities, with banners displaying pro-war slogans: "We are not to be undone!" and "Our walls may crumble, our hearts never!". He adds ironically:

Goebbels, the Reich's minister of propaganda, had recently appeared on the screen of the Tobis Palace, skilfully playing himself: bucking up men and women whose houses lay about them in ruins, shaking the hand of a soot-black air-raid warden and patting the heads of awkwardly grinning children⁵².

The teenage Anna Elisabeth Marks mentions newsreels showing successive stages of the Battle of Stalingrad, and after the evacuation to the west, thousand miles from her home in the Borderlands – harrowing pictures of heroically dying German soldiers watched, despite air-raid alarms, in a cinema in Cieplice, Lower Silesia. She is just as exalted, without a trace of embarrassment, when writing about the reasons behind the early termination of the last cinema showing in her wartime wanderings:

During a subtle emotional scene, a film operator comes in with a piece of paper in his hand. The operator reads, his voice trembling with emotion: "Our Leader Adolf Hitler, fighting bolshevism till his last breath, died for Germany yesterday evening at his post in the Reich Chancellery". After an artistic pause he added: "After this announcement, would you please leave the cinema with dignity". People rush to the door in silence. The warm afternoon sun shines on the street, in which hard-working life is going on⁵³.

Repertoire in areas liberated from the occupiers was to a large extent shaped in Poland by American and Soviet films. When in 1944 a cinema was opened in a former Franciscan church in Zamość, Bohdan Królikowski, who before the war had seen only Disney's *Snow White*, could watch there *Sekretar raykoma* together with his friends. "A war film, of course. The content did not matter. In any case, I didn't understand everything. The film was a revelation to me as a film. [...] Real people, soldiers, battles. Brilliant! I remembered one scene really: a heavy machine gun shooting straight at the spectators. Fascinating!"⁵⁴. In the ruins of a former synagogue Zofia Mitosek watched a film about a girl who fell in love and became pregnant. It was not so much the content but the location of the screening that irritated Zofia's father. What is more, she got a lower conduct mark, because the communists did not tolerate young people's attending evening shows⁵⁵.

⁵¹ J. Wiczerska, *Moja babcia, Niemcy i wojna*, Wrocław 2006, p. 141.

⁵² G. Grass, op. cit., p. 111.

⁵³ A.E. Marks, *Tausend Meilen: Eine Kindheit in den Jahren 1938-1946*, Polish translation by D. Stańczyk Kolny, Poznań [no date given], p. 119.

⁵⁴ B. Królikowski, *Grzechy pamięci*, Warsaw 2002, p. 143. Zbigniew Szpil remembered the same film, a fact he describes in his book *Dobra pamięć*, Kraków 2007, p. 163.

⁵⁵ Z. Mitosek, *Pelargonie*, Kraków 2006, pp. 119-120.

Julian Kornhauser remembered Soviet animated films, especially *The Hump-backed Horse/Konyok Gorbunok*, after a screening of which the ladybird song kept ringing in his ears. The magic of this film fairy-tale, as he understood years later, involved “hiding” the grey post-war reality, in which young generations lived. Eleven-year-old Marek Hłasko immediately recorded in his notebook, under 5 May 1945, his impressions after watching the French comedy *La Crise est finie* and another film, by the VAU film studio, entitled *Dangerous Love*, the plot of which he describes in colourful detail, even including the dialogues⁵⁶. The description of the plot, taking place on a French warship near the coast of Africa must have been a valuable writing experience for him, since the very next day he began creating his own battle-themed short story. As Kornhauser recalls, as he grew up, cinema deepened his awareness of ideological schizophrenia:

On the one hand J. was nearly force-fed with *Podhale w ogniu*, with teachers smiling mysteriously at each other seeing the brave Kostka Napieralski fighting for the dignity of his oppressed social class, and on the other, already during the Thaw, watching *Apache* and *Rio Grande*, acquired by some hard to comprehend miracle, he discovered the existence of a different, so to speak historical, dimension. It was not just dream apparitions or melodious caresses of grass that filled the entire hour-and-a-half space of the miracle, but also civilisation, threatened by the forgeries of politicians and the neglect of historians or repairers of history, that demanded its due recognition. Seen with a glint in the eye, the Indian or highlander heroes shouted slogans about freedom, which may not have been very clear to the boy yet, but their wise words about friendship and betrayal were easily understood⁵⁷.

The post-war youth generation would particularly remember the Soviet Film Days, always organised in October. During this festival Teresa Bogucka went to the cinema with the entire school every three days to watch “stories from the times of war and reconstruction”. The only title she remembered was *Zastawa v gorakh*, which provided the author’s family with an opportunity for joking comments⁵⁸. Films were also shown at school, usually after classes, because during their lessons pupils were shown, at best, popular science films, which before the war in Warsaw had been shown during morning screenings. However, unlike the school, the cinema not only provided the spectators with a picture of a distant, better world, but also gave them a pleasant feeling of comfort: “I will never forget,” writes Czesław Sikorski, “this sense of contrast between the elegance of the cinema auditorium with its soft seats and the smell of perfume, and the coarse daily reality of Krawczyk’s courtyard”⁵⁹.

The most important event for the post-war generation was undoubtedly the film 1960 adaptation of *Krzyżacy* [*The Teutonic Knights*] directed by Aleksander Ford,

⁵⁶ M. Hłasko, *Pamiętnik (1945–1946)*, edition, introduction and commentary by A. Czyżowski, Warsaw 2002, pp. 104–105.

⁵⁷ J. Kornhauser, *Dom, sen i gry dziecięce*, Kraków 1995, p. 30.

⁵⁸ T. Bogucka, *Cienie w ogrodzie*, Warsaw 2000, p. 93.

⁵⁹ C. Sikorski, *Zapamiętane z dzieciństwa. Szkice o kulturze organizacyjnej*, Łódź 2003.

which inspired boys to enact the Battle of Grunwald. This required the boys involved not only to be divided into the Poles and the Teutonic Knights, but also to prepare the necessary costumes and props:

Huge general armament began. We needed everything that could be turned into costumes and weapons, especially lids, sticks, rods, catapult rubber and even wooden coat hangers. The latter could be used to make crossbows! Sheets suddenly disappeared from many homes of the Teutonic Knights⁶⁰.

What the Turkish Noble laureate Orhan Pamuk remembered from his post-war childhood were, among others, “films by Charlie Chaplin, Walt Disney, Laurel and Hardy”⁶¹. They were shown, many times in some cases, in his parents’ house over the fireplace. As a teenager he came across film crews shooting black-and-white films on the streets of Istanbul, films that would deepen the writer’s feeling of nostalgia after the past as he watched them years later on television. This feeling is by no means alien to our post-war generations, for whom film is increasingly connected not with going to the cinema, but with television. In Poland television would show Disney’s cartoons and the studio’s *Mickey Mouse Club*, a programme for children watched on black-and-white screens, just like films featuring Laurel and Hardy, and Zorro. From that period comes the well-known Polish nursery rhyme: “Na górze róże,/ Na dole schab,/ My się kochamy/ Jak Flip i Flap” [“Flip” and “Flap” were Laurel’s and Hardy’s Polish names - translator’s note]⁶². As time went by television began to show Polish series, readily mentioned by the youngest memoirists: *Miś Uszatek*, *Reksio*, *Bolek i Lolek*, etc. Children growing up in communist Poland were excited by the *Czterej pancerni i pies*, *Stawka większa niż życie*, *Return to Eden* series, thus becoming card-carrying consumers of mass culture. When martial law was proclaimed on 13 December 1981, some Polish children deprived of *Teleranek* [a popular television series for children - translator’s note] associated it, not without some reason, with a war like the one they saw in *Czterej pancerni* [a war-time series]⁶³.

There are no childhood retrospections today that would omit the influence of film on the development of each memoir author’s personality. In this respect, works shown in cinemas and those broadcast by television are treated equally. In Poland they become an organic component of the generation’s biography, just like sports events or hit songs, to which television undoubtedly contributed. As Gabriel Maciejewski, born in 1969, writes, in ordinary months the television screens were

⁶⁰ K. Rytka, *Opowiadki wrocławskiego urwisa*, Wrocław 2009, p. 64.

⁶¹ O. Pamuk, *Istanbul: Hatralar ve Şehir*, Polish translation by A. Polat, Kraków 2008, p. 32.

⁶² K.A. Weiss, *Gra w kapsle, czyli autolustracja dziecka PRL-u*, Poznań 2008, pp. 99-100. For more about the influence of television films on the verbal folklore of youth, see D. Simonides, “Telewizja a folklor słowny dzieci”, *Literatura Ludowa* 1974, no. 3; and K. Marcol, “Wpływ mediów na folklor dziecięcy”, [in:] *Media wobec wielorakich potrzeb dziecka*, ed. S. Juszczak, I. Polewczyk, Toruń 2005.

⁶³ K.A. Weiss, op. cit., p. 171.

dominated mainly by Soviet war films, for instance *Father of a Soldier/Jariskatsis mama* or *Remember Your Name*, whose horrors, unlike eroticism, for example, did not raise parental objections, while during Christmas or Easter periods television showed Disney's cartoons and other American productions, which forced many priests to change mass times. In addition,

All children in communist Poland, whether they wanted it or not, had to watch, at least twice a year, several strangely clad men impaling Daniel Olbrychski [in *Pan Wołodyjowski* - translator's note]. Twice a year, too, they had to watch strangely clad Arkadiusz Basak burning the said Olbrychski with searing iron, while Olbrychski, tied to the ceiling, hurled terrible insults at him [in *Potop/The Deluge*]. Twice a year children watched Mieczysław Czechowicz order the late lamented Marek Perepeczko to be hanged on a hook [in the *Janosik* series]. Twice a year they had to suffer a wartime epic entitled *Kierunek Berlin*, where, for the first time since the end of the war, a good German could be seen...⁶⁴

Polish productions, like *Pan Wołodyjowski*, *Janosik*, *Czterej pancerni i pies*, *Stawka większa niż życie* or *Jak rozpętałem drugą wojnę światową*, provided a counterpoint to American gangster and cowboy films, which in Maciejewski's boy eyes were an apotheosis of freedom. His attitude to Soviet cinema was ambivalent sometimes: he was irritated by *Belyy Bim* and *Chyornoe ukho*, but not by the *Seventeen Moments of Spring* television series featuring the brave spy Stierlitz, whom he admired as much as he did the Japanese monster Godzilla. In addition, he mentions regular battles with boys from a different street en route to an attractive film showing and the disappointment of young spectators at the Hungarian film *Egymásra nézve*, featuring the Polish sex bomb Grażyna Szapołowska, whose body was this time covered by hospital bandages.

It would seem, from the examples given here, that cinema, being an important part of childhood experience, will generally be given due credit in autobiographical accounts. We could not be further from the truth. The memoir writing tradition put reading and books on a pedestal, as they could always be returned to, if one wanted to recall their content and the impressions they made. On the other hand, a film screening had its perceptive limitations, determined by the spectators' age and experience: "There was this film about a man who kept running away, jumping on the roofs and firing his gun. Then he kissed a lady and that was that," remembers Lubomir Czupkiewicz, recalling his first contact with cinema. "I had an adventure at the beginning of the film, because I sat down in my seat, then got up to see something and when I tried to sit down, I landed on the floor, because I didn't know that seats folded"⁶⁵. Concern for an authentic rendition of the experience is more important than a chronicler's record of the title and origin of the work in question, which rarely happens in the case of children's books. Even when the titles are given, it can easily be seen

⁶⁴ G. Maciejewski, *Dzieci peerelu*, Warsaw 2011, p. 67.

⁶⁵ L. Czupkiewicz, *Opowieść polskiego chłopca*, Komorów 2004, p. 86.

that they include both those of important films in the history of cinema, and those of second-rate works. The same goes for the names of remembered names of actors.

The ideal would be an autobiography consistently built on cinematographic memories, but is there a human memory capable of recording all aspects related to the circumstances, content and impressions of each film screening? When memory is helpless, what remains is only imagination and invention, a fact perfectly understood already by Goethe, who in his autobiography harmoniously combined fiction or poetry (*Dichtung*) with truth (*Wahrheit*). This is a perspective from which we can also look at the novel by the Chilean writer and film-maker Alberto Fuguet (b. 1964), *The Movies of My Life* (*La películas de mi vida*, 2003). Its protagonist, Beltrán Soler, a seismologist by profession, spent the first 13 years of his life, just like the author himself, in California, priding itself on its film industry, among others. During a flight to Japan a charming fellow passenger encourages him to create a list of the best remembered titles, and it turns out that it comprises typically children's films (*Doctor Dolittle*, *Dumbo*, *The Jungle Book*, *The Adventure of Tom Sawyer*, etc.) as well as family and popular films (e.g. *Born Free*, *The Reivers*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Jaws*) and even ambitious works (*Bullitt*, *Woodstock*). Each of them contains information about the date and location of production, duration and credits, including the names of the director and the leading actors; we also get the year and the place, where Soler saw the work in question. In the case of *The King and I*, the narrator-protagonist recalls a visit to his parents' house by Yul Brynner, who played the title character and to whom the author confessed as a child that the film he liked best was *The Poseidon Adventure*. Given his profession, Soler cannot fail to mention *Earthquake*, which he saw years before in Santiago de Chile and which moved his grandfather, also a seismologist, so much that, forgetting about the boy, he ran out of the cinema terrified. As he grows up, the author becomes more interested in art cinema and the way in which it deals with sex:

One that really thrilled, shocked and scared me was *Carrie*. Especially the shower scene, which starts off like a porn flick – with all these naked girls together – but quickly becomes bloody and horrific, when Carrie, who is homely and doesn't understand anything about anything, starts to menstruate in the shower. Luckily, the first time a man ejaculates, it's semen and not blood, I thought, relieved. If blood had shot out of my penis instead of semen while I was fantasising about Jacqueline Bisset, I'm sure I would have gone crazy⁶⁶.

There is no doubt, however, that a different perspective for the assessment of the role of cinema in a child's life is provided by the pre-television period, making film experiences unique, almost a ritual constituting a part of an urban child's life. The current crop of memoir literature brings, as we can see, an increasing number of testimonies documenting the presence of cinema in the consciousness of generations born after World War Two. Perhaps there could be a place as well for travelling

⁶⁶ A. Fuguet, *Las películas de mi vida*, Polish translation by M. Sarna, Kraków 2008, p. 273-274.

cinema reaching schools and villages, summer camps and boy scout camps, parish houses and churches. Our times, as we know, have not done away with cinemas; they have even raised them to the rank of “multiplexes”. In addition, they have made it possible, thanks to DVDs, to watch films on television and computer screens, which everyone can enjoy regardless of his or her age.

What is disappearing, however, is a tradition of writing diaries describing various events, a tradition that has been replaced by a mania for photographing or filming even the smallest manifestations of our social and ludic activity. In the hands of parents a video camera is usually pointed at children, who thus become involuntarily the protagonists of a film anecdote, often made for a competition, for television or for sale. But children, too, in this microscale, can become, as far as their skills and ambitions allow, script writers, directors and actors, involving in the plots they come up with not only their peers or family members, but also their favourite animals and toys. Thus, photographs from family albums, which illustrate memoirs and diaries, are fading to the background.

Whether the inexhaustible power of cinema, even more strongly present in children’s life than it was in the 20th century, will continue to be an attractive topic of reminiscences is difficult to say. We can only hope that the natural human need to talk about oneself will not omit this interesting area, adding more noteworthy examples to the collection presented here.