



---

## **The Beast of History: Human to Animal and Animal to Human Transformations in Polish Horror Films**

*Agnieszka Jeżyk*

### **Abstract**

This essay presents a comparative analyses of four Polish horror films—two from the communist period: *Lokis: A Manuscript of Professor Wittembach* (1970) by Janusz Majewski, and Marek Piestrak's *The Return of the She-wolf* (1990), and two recent works: *The Lure* (2015) by Agnieszka Smoczyńska and *Werewolf* (2018) by Adrian Panek. In the context of the marginal popularity of the horror genre in Poland, the essay finds their focus on human to animal or animal to human metamorphosis intriguing, and studies it as a symptom of repressed national fears. It argues that what is subjugated in particular through this type of narratives is the anxiety of political, ideological, and social change. In this interpretation of the seemingly non-historical films, the essay will demonstrate that these surprisingly common depictions of transformations of subjectivity serve as vessels that expose the problematic approach of collective Polish consciousness to history. Some of the theoretical concepts used in the essay are Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of becoming as well as their demonic animal, Jacques Derrida's, Alexandre Kojève's, and Giorgio Agamben's insights on human and non-human subjects and language, Freud's uncanny, and Žižek's interpretation of the Radical Evil in the context of Holocaust.

**Keywords:** *Metamorphosis, Transgression, Subjectivity, Polish Horror Films, Cinema of Dread, Polish History, Animal Studies*

Do you desire a healthy man, do you want to have him disciplined, stable, and safe? Well then, wrap him in darkness, idleness, and heaviness. We have to become as stupid as the animals to become wise; blinded, to be guided.

– Montaigne (qtd. in Birnbaum and Olsson 81)

### **“Chess Pieces on the Chessboard”: Polish Cinema and the Impossible Horror**

“In Anglosaxon culture, storytelling is a basis. It’s about dragging the viewer into the game. We [Poles] don’t have this skill,” claims the director Jacek Koprowicz in the interview given to Paweł Józwiak-Rodan (Józwiak-Rodan). Later he speculates about possible reasons for this serious deficiency: “Maybe it is some genetic defect that we are simply unable to tell stories. Maybe it is connected to the fact that historically we have always experienced failures, disintegration is inscribed in us, and we cannot construct anything.” Similar is the view of Bolesław Michałek, who, in a 1967 article “We are Different, Weird”<sup>1</sup> points out the idiosyncratic position of the Polish cinematography so heavily reliant on the geographical location, the difficulty of the language, and historical circumstances: “Polish film is haunted by a ghost of historical fatalism. It has aesthetical consequences. For example, in Polish film protagonists as such don’t exist [...] they are chess pieces on the chessboard” (Michałek 3–4).

Even if Koprowicz’s diagnosis appears a little too far-fetched, Michałek’s account proves symptomatic of Polish cinema. Polish cinematography, compared to American tradition, unquestionably lacks versatility in horror story-telling, and consequently such movies, which follow the specific objectives of the genre, inhabit a very thin margin of cultural production even today (Fiołek-Lubczyńska 2014). In Polish films, a vampire, a zombie, or a madman with a chainsaw has the face of a Nazi or Soviet occupier, the tales of metaphysics elevate the battle of good and evil to the realm of a writer’s or artist’s moral dilemmas, and the unknown is usually quite familiar embodied in historical or political forces destroying the nation. However, it can also be argued that it is actually in these Polish horror films only that the repressed collective fears, originating in the experienced complexity of history, become apparent. This essay argues from the position that what is subjugated in these movies is the anxiety of change which, taking into account the overwhelming time of the last two hundred years when Poland was not an independent state, may seem like a troubling paradox. This shared fear of change has been analyzed in this essay through the lens of four movies that discuss the transition of subjects from human to animal and vice versa. These depictions of metamorphosis of subjectivity is then perceived as vessels that expose the problematic approach of Polish collective consciousness to the idea of an abrupt change in history.

---

<sup>1</sup>All Polish sources have been translated by the author.

This essay also intends to show that Poland's past and present as well as the aesthetics of horror cinema are not mutually exclusive. In fact, most Polish "cinema of the dread," while depicting reality, is also heavily reliant on social and ideological changes resulting from the country's turbulent and often tragic history. The events of history—partitions of Poland between Russia, Prussia, and Austro-Hungarian Empire, failed uprisings, World War II, Stalinism, the deterioration and fall of communism—set the background, accelerate the plot, and/or even serve as *deus ex machina*, not only in the cinema of moral anxiety, or the critically acclaimed work of Andrzej Wajda, or Krzysztof Kieślowski, but they are also equally significant for Polish popular culture and genre cinema. Speculating on why the situation did not change after the fall of communism in 1989—which, at least initially, remarked Fukuyaman, was seen as, "the end of history"—Ewa Mizerska feels that, at that time, Poland also experienced the influx of American pop culture, which included not only blockbusters, such as *Ghost* or *Back to the Future*, but also classics of horror: *Silence of the Lambs*, *Scream* series, or *The Frighteners*. Rather than blaming the weak presence of Polish horror on the inability to tell stories, Mizerska points out more a practical justification: poor funding and insufficient technical skills.

By and large, Polish filmmakers choose genres for which visual exuberance is not a necessary component of success. This situation, which is typical of all countries of the old Eastern Block, primarily reflects the fact that the Polish film industry is not ready to compete with Hollywood in the field of technical mastery that films belonging to these genres require. To an extent, the lack of horror or fantasy films and the prevalence of realistic genres suggests that, contrary to the widespread accusations of critics, Polish directors do not escape from what is widely regarded as their principal obligation, namely depicting the present. (Mizerska 16–17)

### **Cinema of Dread: Brief History of Polish Horror Movies**

Instead of producing exemplary films within the horror genre, Polish cinematography has historically utilized its elements to create a domestic equivalent of horror: *kino grozy* (cinema of dread). Early examples of this phenomenon can be found from 1921 in *Pan Twardowski* by Wiktor Biegański, based on a famous legend of an alchemist who sold his soul to the devil to master magic arts. The year 1923 saw the first artistic success of a scary film: the expressionist *Son of Satan* by Bruno Bredschneider (Skaff 78), which used fashionable techniques of hypnosis as the main focus of the otherwise romantic plot and gained acclaim from critics and audiences. Similar themes were

explored in *Atakualpa* (1924, dir. Henryk Bigoszt, Ignacy Miastecki), an “exotic contemporary love affair with elements of the occult,” (FilmPolski.pl) which sadly did not survive the war. It shared the same fate as Leon Trystan’s *Szamota’s Lover* (1927) disliked by its own director but popular because of Igo Sym’s—interwar period poster boy turned Nazi collaborator—appearance than for its aesthetic value (Hutnikiewicz). The film, based on a novella by Stefan Grabiński, (“Polish Edgar Allan Poe”) follows the relationship of an editor and the beautiful ghost of Jadwiga Kalergis (Skaff 185). Lastly, Michał Waszyński’s Yiddish masterpiece *Dybbuk* (1937), despite being mostly a melodrama, included content not suitable for younger audiences: a pact with evil, demonic possession, and the inevitable death of the lovers (Gross 92–98).

Polish postwar cinematography experienced decreasing interest in “cinema of dread” for numerous reasons. The disastrous state of country’s economy and infrastructure after the war, death, and emigration of many of the top actors, writers, and filmmakers, Stalinist enforcing of the socialist realist doctrine in art, and the emphasis on the war testimonies and experiences as a topic in moving pictures are but a few reasons (Janicki). Horror (and thriller) made its spectacular comeback with the series of five mid-length television pictures from 1967–1968 (*Checkmate!* by Andrzej Zakrzewski, *The Stub Track* and *Conflagration Site* by Ryszard Ber, *I am burning!* by Janusz Majewski, *Dance master* by Jerzy Gruza) entitled *Tales of the Extraordinary*, which gained high critical acclaim. Each of the films, based on a short story or a novella by Polish authors Henryk Rzewuski, Józef Korzeniowski, Ludwik Niemojowski, and Stefan Grabiński is connected by the character of Kazimierz Rudzki, a literary figure, who is visited by a storytelling ghost (FilmPolski.pl).

The 1970s and 1980s mark the peak of interest in horror and, just like in the West, Poles had their share of artistically satisfying as well as much less successful scary movies. *Lokis* (1970) by Janusz Majewski belongs to the former group. The critics valued how the director provides a wholesome and nuanced film with a plot that expertly blurs the line between legends and reality, folk beliefs and science, manipulation and madness leaving audiences unsettled. A similar ambiance can be observed in *The Phantom* (1984) by Marek Nowicki. Another ambitious domestic horror with strong historical links is Jacek Koprowicz’s *Medium* (1985) set in 1933 in the then German town of Soppot. It continues the interwar period fascination with the occult, esoteric salons, and hypnosis while also asking questions about the authenticity of being and free will against the backdrop of rising nazism. More mainstream horror films closely follow American B-movie

patterns: the vampiric *I Like Bats* (1985) by Grzegorz Warchola gained popularity as a curious native example of the subgenre, and *She-wolf* (1983) and *The Return of the She-wolf* (1990) by Marek Piestrak are iconic examples of the 1980s camp aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Andrzej Żuławski's films fall into a separate category. His gory *Devil* (1972) is an "[...] agonizing revision of patriotic phantasms referring to the topos of a madman patriot incarnated in vampiric Jakub obsessing over the idea of the fatherland" (Olszewska-Jończyk 180). Frenetic, sexually explicit, and, at times grotesque, the film was banned by communist censorship, which forced Żuławski to flee to France shortly afterwards. Some elements of horror can also be found in *Possession* from 1981 in "[...] shocking scenes of abjection and the horror provoked by a woman's relationship with a tentacled monster" (Goddard 248).

With films such as *The Legend* (2005) by Mariusz Pujso, *Hyena* (2006) by Grzegorz Lewandowski, and *Time of Darkness* (2008) by Grzegorz Kuczeriszka post-communist cinematography in Poland unsuccessfully followed Western models and failed to bring idiosyncratic Eastern European twist to the genre (Dziduszko 25); for example, the socio-economical situation after the political transition of 1989 or local folk imaginary. The situation changes with the youngest generation of Polish filmmakers such as Marcin Wrona, Agnieszka Smoczyńska, Jagoda Szalc, Adrian Panek, and most recently Bartosz M. Kowalski who bring a breath of fresh air to the derivative and uninspiring "cinema of the dread."

### **Beastly Kinships: Humans, Animals, and Horror**

In order to establish why this metamorphosis of the animate matter, more specifically, the transfiguration of a male or female into an animal subject, or vice-versa, has a powerful potential in horror films, the essay will make a basic distinction between a human and an animal. At first glance, the issue may seem trivial as it is ancient and fundamental to the development of Western civilization. Elizabeth Grosz emphasizes, in her book *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections of Politics and Art*, that since antiquity this relationship has been based on a radical rejection of the animalistic element within the human, and the establishing of a strict hierarchy in which the animal must be subservient to the human. Grosz claims that this structure functions according to the rule of the approval or denial of the access to power: "whether it is reason, language, thought, consciousness, or the

<sup>2</sup>In her famous essay "Notes on 'Camp,'" Susan Sontag refers to camp as a certain type of aesthetics that is based on exaggeration, artifice, and the attempt to make something extraordinary. Some of the examples the author gives are Tiffany lamps, Swan Lake, the Cuban pop singer La Lupe, and the old Flash Gordon comics (Sontag 515–530).

ability to dress, to bury, to mourn, to invent, to control fire, or one of the many other qualities” (Grosz 12). In other words, by using technology as a means to tame and control nature, humans have legitimized their sense of superiority over whatever is not human. In “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” while discussing one of the crucial scenes from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* where Alice realizes that a cat doesn’t purr for “yes” and meow for “no,” Jacques Derrida points to a privileged human technology: language. The philosopher interprets it as a moment of realization that an animal’s speech does not follow any distinguishable rules. It does not produce meanings that order reality and leaves us with no response. The inability to generate what humans recognize as language is the basis for the process of othering non-human subjects:

Animal [...] as in a virgin forest, a zoo, a hunting or fishing ground, a paddock or an abattoir, a space of domestication, are *all the living things* that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brother. And that is so in spite of the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee, the camel from the eagle, the squirrel from the tiger or the elephant from the echidna. (Derrida 402; italics in original)

Derrida argues that the failure to recognize animals as our own kind permits humans to take advantage of non-human energy and life. This exploitation occurs on multiple levels. It might be motivated by religious practices, where the animals serve as a sacrifice to gods, it is also ingrained in the practices of human economy such as hunting, fishing, controlled breeding, testing on animals, products of animal origin, and the meat industry. Since the animal body is already dehumanized at its core, it can easily function as potential nutrition without producing a cognitive dissonance.

Understanding the dynamic and hierarchy between the human and non-human is crucial in the context of how fear is created and disseminated in animal-oriented horror films. Stacy Alaimo points out that one of the recurring motifs in the genre cinema is a local or global catastrophe that serves as nature’s revenge for the perpetual and persistent exploitation of the environment by humans. This theme becomes especially significant today when we witness open discussions concerning climate change and human responsibility for the destruction of our natural surroundings. The same debate is also occurring in Poland and movies such as *Spoor* (2018) by Agnieszka Holland, based on Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, play a valuable part by problematizing animal rights and the

part potentially played by non-human agency in the said destruction. Alaimo, however, emphasizes another significant aspect of this revenge scenario. In particular, she is interested in the situations where the boundary between what is human and non-human is put into question. Even though such plots may be incessantly attractive for the audience, they also introduce a serious theoretical problem:

Monstrous natures pose challenges not only for environmental politics but also for ecocriticism and theory since the very thing these creatures embody as horrific – the collapse of boundaries between humans and nature – is what many theorists, such as Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, and Donna Haraway, promote. How effective can stressing the continuities between humans and nature be when popular films represent this kinship as beastly? (Alaimo 280)

Alaimo makes it clear that regardless of the endless efforts of academicians and activists, who advocate for the shift in thinking about human/non-human relations, being exposed to images of a man turning into an animal remains one of the most terrifying cinematic experiences for a regular consumer of mainstream culture.

There are various possible explanations for this phenomenon. Certainly, the human to non-human transition produces the feeling of dread since it is a model example of the Freudian uncanny: something “secretly familiar [heimlich-heimisch], which has undergone repression and then returned from it” (Freud 243). In this type of man to animal transformation, the idea of facing the animalistic in a human becomes apparent. The subject is forced to step out of its privileged and set position into the realm of marginalized and unstable non-identity. And how does one talk about the ontological status of the *it* in the process of becoming? This is why it does not come as a surprise that Freud himself, in *Totem and Taboo* (1912), connects the term uncanny to “[...] residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression” (Freud 240). This process occurs not only in the individual but also on a social, economic, and philosophical scale. Hence, the kind of metamorphosis being discussed here functions as a scandal, which shakes the whole ontology.

The moment when the wild within resurfaces to disturb what has been constructed by culture is also a time of suspended progress. From this perspective, human to non-human transformations serve equally as a cause for anxiety about the end of civilization and the demise of humanity as such. Whatever form the subject will take next—animalistic, humanoid, robotic, or other—it will never be the same type of agency and intention which Western tradition ascribes to humans. In

the book *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben further discusses this problem stating that humanity will vanish with the human language. What will be left? The speculations concerning what happens after the end of the civilization were already expressed by another philosopher, Alexandre Kojève, in 1968:

If Man becomes an animal again, his arts, his loves, and his play also become purely “natural” again. Hence it would have to be admitted that after the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas, would play as young animals play, and would indulge in love like adult beasts. (159)

As Kojève claims, the end of language is neither equivalent to the collapse of culture nor does it stand for the end of the world. Indeed, there is a possibility that a post- or rather pre-civilization will emerge bearing some resemblance to human modes of existence and patterns of behavior. Its character will not be anthropocentric but Kojève’s arguments seem optimistic: animate matter, including non-human subjectivity, will always find ways to express itself. However, for Poles, tormented by history, the images of man to animal transitions become a realm of ultimate dread since each metamorphosis foreshadows a deadly change. The images of metamorphosis are a way in which Polish cinema works through historical traumas generated by periods of political, ideological, and social transition.

### **Human and Non-Human Languages: Anthropomorphism and Zoomorphism in *Lokis***

Based on Prosper Mérimée’s short story, Janusz Majewski’s *Lokis* (1970) is set in nineteenth-century Lithuania. The film follows Wittembach, a German pastor and a professor of linguistics, who ends up at young Michał Szemiot’s estate in search of an obscure catechism. Having accepted the sojourn, the scholar soon learns about the dark secret of his benefactor’s mother who had lost her mind after a savage bear attack. Soon after, the woman had become pregnant with the little count but the identity of the baby’s father was left to rumor and speculation. As the plot progresses, Wittembach’s reason and logic, along with the viewer’s, are regularly challenged by a sense of uncanny. Until the very end, it remains indecipherable whether one should trust in peasant sorcery and uncivilized stories or science and common sense.

The movie makes both subtle and overt attempts to disrupt the audience’s fixed perception of human and non-human subjectivity. Beginning with the title, which means “bear” in Lithuanian (*lokys*) but has been meaningfully misspelled, the viewer is immediately alerted



that language is one of the platforms where transgressions occur. It becomes a space that interestingly interrogates would claims about the inherently human nature of speech. In *Lokis*, language functions as the catalyst of the plot. The story originates from Wittembach's desire to retrieve the rare manuscript and to translate the Bible into Samogitian to evangelize the autochthons more effectively. From this perspective, the first conversation between the pastor and the count, which focuses on the questions of language, subjectivity, and agency, proves crucial. While Wittembach argues that endangered species need to be preserved, Szemiot brings up Alexander Humboldt's anecdote concerning a parrot who was the last user of a forgotten language of a tribe long-exterminated by smallpox. The statement provokes no reaction other than a puzzled sigh. The pastor, who clearly believes in the flawlessness of the Agambenian (Agamben 33–37) anthropological machine,<sup>3</sup> refuses to deal with the messiness of the story. Do words recited by a bird actually exist, or was the language spoken by an animal already dead? Does speech produced without an intention, based purely on mimicking sounds, fail to be speech? Why is it a failure then, if it can be understood, classified, recreated, and reused? Who is the speaker, the subject: the parrot, or the person who taught her how to talk? Or, in other words, can a bird "purr" for yes, and "meow" for no? The film is successful at keeping the problem nuanced and ambiguous. One of the suggestions it provides is that the non-human subject needs a human translator to interpret the message in order to communicate at all. In the Western worldview, this obviously could only be a folk person, since they are closer to nature due to their uncultured position. A village witch, traditionally viewed as combining animality and femininity (Deleuze and Guattari 246–247),<sup>4</sup> functions as such a figure, and in one

<sup>3</sup>In his book, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben describes the concept of the anthropological machine which is a distinction between man and animals that works like a device for either humanizing the animal (ancient anthropological machine) or animalizing the human (modern anthropological machine). Agamben recalls late nineteenth century researchers (Haeckel, Steinthal) who were theorizing about "the missing link": a humanoid, or a man-ape that could undoubtedly prove the interconnection between animal and human world. One of the factors, which was supposed to determine this link was the emergence of language: "In identifying himself with language, the speaking man places his own muteness outside of himself, as already and not yet human" (Agamben 34–35). This view on the place of animal and human in the world establishes a strict hierarchy in which "the missing link" is just an intermediate stage on the ladder of evolution. Wittembach shares this frame of mind and applies it to thinking about human nationalities and races. His visible sense of superiority over East Europeans confirms this assumption.

<sup>4</sup>In the essay, "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible..." Deleuze and Guattari draw a close connection between the demonic animal and sorcerers/witches, which is sanctioned by a pact with the Devil or contagion ("alliance and contagion, pact and epidemic"). The authors quote anthropologist Edward Leach, who states: "Witch influence was thought to be transmitted in the food that the women

of the scenes she passes on unfavorable news, supposedly produced by a snake, concerning Szemiot's love life.

The above-mentioned questions that Wittembach would rather leave unanswered keep accumulating as the plot moves. Nevertheless, despite the attempts to deconstruct the rigid distinctions between human and non-human, Majewski does not break from the anthropocentric perspective. In *Lokis*, animals are the real heroes of the story, they chirp and howl in the background, they flit in the court (horses, dogs, rabbits), run through the forest (bison), and escape hunting (ferrets), but their status becomes elevated only to the extent that they are humanized by whoever is in control of language. By this token, they create structured societies (the witch's assumption about the elections of the animal king) or are able to recognize human intentions (Wittembach's diagnosis of their dislike for Szemiot). In the end, however, or so it seems, it is the human who draws an ironic distance between himself and animal life. The count's taxidermy collection or his capturing of the hawk are just two examples of how humans not only use non-human subjects for utilitarian reasons, but also purely for entertainment.

Moreover, there is an opposite operation occurring in *Lokis*. A person or a group viewed as lesser and other by the speaker is immediately zoomorphized. This status is ascribed to the witch, who is first aimed at by a rifle, and then locked up in a cage with the animals by the resentful count. Szemiot's mother is also degraded to a mere link between humans and non-humans and pushed to the margin. After the nervous breakdown caused by the notorious encounter with the bear, she behaves as if she has got "infected with animality." Trapped in the moment of trauma, her language deteriorates to moans, roars, and other inarticulate sounds. It is also significant that the only time she speaks up, the countess goes back to the accident. "Fast, kill the animal!" she screams just before her son's wedding, predicting the tragic fate of the couple. Through her insanity Szemiot's mother regresses to an animal state, unable to communicate or take care of herself. The paradox of her situation is that the category of madness does not hold in the animal kingdom because it is abstract and requires delineating normality. You can be either mad or an animal, but the way the countess is impossibly positioned in-between enhances her otherness. Due to her inability to produce language and her unpredictable behavior she is stigmatized as

---

prepared..." (247). By the same token, it is not a coincidence that Szemiot and Wittembach first meet the witch when she walks around the forest picking mushrooms. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari claim that becoming-woman is preceded by an act of sorcery (248), and the sole status of "becoming" occurs to "minoritarian groups" (105), for example, from male to female. Curiously, the witch is played by Stanisław Miński, making it one of a very few cases in Polish cinematography when the male or female actor was cast to perform the opposite gender.

crazy and, at the same time, her inner animality resurfaces metonymically through her association with the bear.

Both of these mechanisms, anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, take place simultaneously in one of the opening scenes of the film when the pastor meets countess Pacowa, young Julia, and her governess on the train. At one point through the window, the travelers notice a group of Romani with a domesticated bear dancing on the platform. Wittenberg jokingly inquires: "Is it a Prussian, Russian, Lithuanian, or Polish bear?" To which the matriarch responds: "I fear he is cosmopolitan like his owners, the gypsies." Seemingly lighthearted, the exchange exposes ideological hierarchy of power, and shows that the category of nationhood, which emerges during the time of Romanticism and Spring of Nations, plays a crucial role in creating potentially racist divisions. Elevated to the level of other performers, the animal suddenly gains human qualities, including nationality. However, this process is concurrent with the deprecation of the disorderly and uncontrollable Romani. The ordering structure manifests itself in Wittembach who relishes in stories of the cultured and the savage. In his worldview, barbarians, including the native dwellers of Samogitia, need to be dragged out of their natural animality through exposure to the written word of God. This again reinforces language, at least in the form of a text, as a civilizing tool, and positions it as a major distinction between human and non-human. As a German, he grants himself a privileged status of a westerner, which seems to establish him as a rational, scientific subject but, in fact, only legitimizes his ignorance. This situation is clearly visible when Julia tricks the pastor to believe that a ballad by Adam Mickiewicz, an iconic Polish-Lithuanian Romantic poet, is an authentic Samogitian folk text.

In *Lokis*, Eastern barbarism is epitomized in the supposedly refined count Michał Szemiot, and as his savagery is exposed throughout the film. It also becomes a manifestation of insecurities and inferiority complexes of 'the other' Europeans. Right from the start there are traces of evidence pointing towards his double, human and animal, identity. The bear performer at the station, anxiety that the count provokes in dogs, a bear figurine music box which Michał drops during the wedding dinner, and a dead bear near the train tracks towards the end of the movie are just a few examples of the allusions to his questionable origin. The witch, a suspicious subject herself, further confirms this impression. She addresses Michał while watching a group of European buffalos running through the forest: "You will be their king, you are big, strong, you have claws and teeth. You will be their commander." Casting these doubts will cost the old woman her freedom but Szemiot surprisingly incriminates himself confirming her

implications. In the scene where Wittembach and the doctor find him in the ruins of a castle, Michał delivers a monologue about the duality of a human who desires to jump into an abyss but at the same time fears it. As a matter of fact, other information that he reveals about himself, such as his passion for taxidermy or an accidental attack on a friend, exposes Szemiot's nature as predatory. This diagnosis is confirmed in the climax when the young bride lies murdered as Michał vanishes on the wedding night, although the viewer does not get a definitive answer as to whether the count transformed into a murderous beast or if a more ordinary human monster is responsible for the tragedy.

### **The Howl of Lust: Human and Non-human Pleasures in *The Return of the She-wolf***

The link between rough sexuality and human to animal transitions is also the topic of Marek Pietrak's horror film, *The Return of the She-wolf* (1990).<sup>5</sup> Shot as a sequel to the more successful *She-wolf* (1983), the picture is set at the turn of the century Kraków, the capital city of the artistic milieu, and it follows a young poet, painter, and womanizer Kamil who is about to marry Krystyna. As the couple is leaving for their honeymoon in the estate that belongs to the groom's cousin Stefania, Kamil is cursed by his former lover. This scene prefigures future tragedies since the estate is haunted by a she-wolf, Julia, who tries to attack the bride during the wedding night. As a result of this incident, the young bride undergoes a nervous breakdown and is sheltered by the family until she later meets her death at the paws of the she-wolf.

As the maid Agata reveals to Kamil, Julia targeted the girl because she wanted to take the poet as her lover. Sex, as Agata claims, is what provides the countess with eternal youth. Interestingly, in this case, the beast does not seem to be primarily a slave to her passions but is rather overpowered by vanity. This essentially human trait marks Julia's lack of self-reflection upon her two-fold identity. Mistaken on who she really is, the she-wolf focuses her animal energy on the power she has over other characters due to her inhuman strength, and not on the uncontrolled desires of the flesh. The attempt to dominate on Julia's part could be read through Grosz's insights on animal/human hierarchy as an effort to win back her lost human status. In *Becoming Undone*, Grosz presents traditional modes of thinking about Darwin's theory of evolution and asks if we can "understand life as no longer bound by and defined through a hierarchy in which man is the pinnacle of the all living forms?" (Grosz 4). While the Australian philosopher tries to read Darwin's work in the spirit of diversity and equality, Pietrak's she-wolf

---

<sup>5</sup>Labeled by some as "the worst movie in Polish cinematography" (Filmweb).

legitimizes the well-established order that subjugates animals to humans. Torn between her animalistic and human nature, Julia strives to regain her higher status through conquering a human lover but, since she is lacking recognition of the duality of her liminal character, all her efforts are in vain.

Unable to function as a sexual subject herself, Julia serves as a catalyst sexualizing all her surroundings, especially Stefania and her daughters, Ania and Iza, who all fall under Kamil's spell. Unhappy in her marriage, Stefania tries to get back with her former lover, while the girls experience their first erotic fascination with the charming and flirty poet. Through female characters, *Return of the She-wolf* shows a significant change in behaviors, habits, and values of the turn of the century Polish aristocracy. Interestingly, the movie does not offer a moral lesson about the degeneracy of Poland's upper classes but depicts the shift in thinking and, especially with young girls' awaking femininity, the pursuit to break "the psychological and theological separation of women into two stock types in polar opposition: Mary/Eve, Snow-White/Rose-Red, Saint/Witch, nun/succubus; all these abound" (Allen 9). In this perspective, Julia's troubling presence in the estate precedes all types of societal processes—the rise of women's movements, urbanization, access to education, and active participation in politics—destabilizing patriarchal order. Ideally, these practices aim at:

[...] not only the production of alternatives to patriarchal (racist, colonialist, ethnocentric) knowledges but, more urgently and less recognized, a freedom to address concepts, to make concepts, to transform existing concepts by exploring their limits of toleration, so that we may invent new ways of addressing and opening up the real, new types of subjectivity, and new relations between subjects and objects. (Grosz 83)

Finally, interpreted through the feminist lens, Julia also embodies the anxiety of a vast part of conservative Polish society: unruly female sexuality which disrupts male power and limits patriarchal control over female bodies—a topic that is still sadly relevant in today's Poland.<sup>6</sup>

The focus on female sexuality is an intriguing element in *The Return of the She-wolf*. In one of the first scenes, the viewer is exposed to a very rare image in Polish cinematography: a woman masturbating. This display of passion takes place in a library, where one of the females is looking through a sketchbook containing suggestive graphics. The

---

<sup>6</sup>Poland currently has the most severe anti-abortion laws in Europe. The attempt to further restrict it resulted in a series of protests mobilizing not only activists but also regular citizens (Król & Pustułka 366–384).

drawing, which makes her sexually aroused, depicts a woman pleasuring herself in front of a dog. Loaded with meanings, the picture juxtaposes the instinctive part of human nature connected to sexual impulses with the rational element represented by the setting and the presence of books. This act does not belong to this space, but its performance gives rise to another transgression. Here one system of signs, i.e. language, is substituted with another, i.e. images, simultaneously moving from the realm of what is exclusively human to a more inclusive, sensual territory. Secondly, the act itself escapes the power dynamic imposed by the patriarchal system inscribed in most erotic relationships. It is about pleasure and the body, not dominance or subjugation. Lastly, the presence of the dog poses additional questions. For Derrida, the gaze of an animal “[...] offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the unhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the border crossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself” (Derrida 381). The animal gaze may surely function as a tool of self-exploration, but in this case, the implications are sexual. The woman looking at the image filters the erotic situation not only through her own eyes but also through the presence of the dog. In this context the animal serves as a mirror for the female in the sketch; therefore, it becomes a narcissistic gesture while the pleasure remains voyeuristic for the real observer.

The image of the masturbating woman, one of the women who live on the estate but is never identified, aptly represents the erotic atmosphere of the place. It also visibly contrasts with the virginal innocence radiating from the young bride, Krystyna. During the first night of the honeymoon, she rejects the rough advances of her husband claiming she doesn’t want to do it “like that.” Her dismissal is also a denial of animality within the human and of privileging sex over eroticism. Krystyna does not want to give herself away since it would seal her reliance on Kamil’s desire. After the trauma of confronting the beast in her spouse, she falls sick. As one might expect, the court’s medic, caricatural Freudist doctor Nussbaum, interprets her visceral disagreement to the violence of the intercourse as the fear of defloration: a normal condition among young women as he claims. He argues that the rejection comes from associating aggression with animality and, consequently, taking the husband for a dangerous predator. This instinctive reaction proves to be accurate. Krystyna does not have to take him for a beast for he is one. His attitude towards women in the film is, at its best, questionable. Kamil not only flirts and seduces but also breaks the rules of personal space and intimacy, writes suggestive erotic poetry, paints nudes without any realization of what damage they may cause, and later on even fails to mourn his dead wife. The other predator, Julia, keeps appearing in the estate reflecting Krystyna’s

inability to undergo a transition from a girl into a woman, from a maiden into a wife, from a virgin into a sexually experienced woman. The bride does not allow herself to explore her passionate side and embrace the non-human element of the self. In this way, her role is to balance Kamil's excessive and disordered sexuality. Interestingly, Krystyna dies strangled in the bathtub, not ripped apart by Julia, making the murder more an act of a human, an almost intimate gesture, rather than the attack of a savage animal.

**“We are not humans, we are on vacation”: Hybrid Identities in *The Lure***

The connection between femininity and monstrosity, especially in the sexual context, is also a significant theme in *The Lure*, a 2015 film by Agnieszka Smoczyńska. Exceeding the genre of horror, this quirky “Polish musical about man-eating teenage mermaids” (Abrams) is focused on two sisters, Golden and Silver, who have been fished out of the waters in Poland's capital to become a sensational singing duo in the 1980s Varsovian nightclub. What might be striking for a viewer familiar with Polish cinema is not only the subversive potential and originality of this film but also how it depicts the last decade of communism in Poland. The reality created by Smoczyńska rejects politics both on the individual and global scale, and instead focuses purely on the entertaining aspects of the disco/punk era. At first glance, *The Lure* does not provide historical commentary on the changes occurring back then in Eastern and Central Europe. However, this avoidance to address the issue directly proves to be significant. Through the choice of the protagonists, Smoczyńska problematizes the theme of transition in a very unusual, thought-provoking way. The director discusses various layers of the sisters' unstable identities through which one can also observe the uncertainty of the glorious and dreadful 1980s.

The role of Golden and Silver in the story is shaped by collective memory and mythical tales. At the same time, however, as modern performers, they need to adjust to the rules of the industry. These two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. According to Greek mythology, sirens—beings with a female torso and initially bird then fishlike lower body—used to seduce sailors with their sublime voices to shipwreck on the nearest rocks (Phillpotts 34). Likewise in *The Lure*, the sisters sing their way out of the waters to the nightclub, where they demonstrate their skills in a variety of music genres. The price too, as in the myth, is death and destruction for everyone who hears the siren call: Mietek, the bass player, ends up with his throat ripped out, the marriage of the vocalist Krysia and the drummer falls apart. In a way, this hypnotizing and deadly aspect of singing links the mermaids not only with ancient but with Christian tradition as well, more specifically with

Augustine's concept of "sinning by the ear" (Dolar 20). The fall is not only an individual fate but it's equally inscribed within the mythical structure. The seductive voices of Golden and Silver try to conceal the dark side of the music business which, despite the humor entailed in the story, is as monstrous as the incisors of the mermaids and, most of the time, creates its victims out of young women. From this perspective, the scene where the girls wear playboy bunny ears and fishnets over their tails for a German photographer can be seen as a gloomy echo of the human trafficking occurring for decades on the Western border of Central Europe.

Another significant aspect of the sisters' status is that of hybrids: without water, they immediately change into ordinary young females but deprived of its access, they dry out and ultimately lose consciousness. To maintain their dual character, they need to constantly balance on the verge of being human and non-human, in the process of becoming women/monsters. This quality of mermaids is again right away capitalized upon by the club management. During one of the performances, Golden and Silver submerge in a see-through container set up in the middle of the stage and their legs change into fishtails. The popularity of the human/non-human duo reveals the night club as a space where transgressions are not only acceptable but are also welcome. However, their ancestor Triton, a leader of a punk rock band in communist Poland, warns that this liminal identity is impossible to sustain. "We are not humans, we are on vacation," he tells the girls. Gradually, the beastly nature of the sisters starts to come out. It is foreshadowed by Golden's moving solo performance with the refrain: "It has been a long time since I was so lonely, in the evenings I become more and more hungry." As the plot moves forward, the sisters attack random strangers and, in a meaningful gesture, devour their hearts. Simultaneously, the sisters are progressively transitioning from childhood into adulthood, experiencing all the symptoms of teenage angst: rebellion, mood swings, first love. Golden and Silver smoke for the first time, pick up guys in a bar, and the latter eventually starts an affair with the bass player, Mietek, whose fascination with her voice becomes a catalyst not only for her transition from a girl into a woman, but also starts an unexpected chain of events. At one point, Krysia, the lead singer of the band, has a dream in which she changes into a mermaid as well breast-feeding two siren girls. This vision signifies the vocalist embracing the role of a substitute mother, which means she loses some of her identity to her children and acquires some of their monstrosity. Her breasts, according to psychoanalytic tradition (Freud 43), are also an obvious sign of both nutrition and pleasure for which both girls are increasingly hungry. During a heated argument, Silver revolts against their make-shift family and asks why they are not getting



paid for their work at the nightclub. Sensing their deadly potential, Krysia would rather view them as kids and disregards their concerns. However, as this order is not able to be maintained, the band members finally get rid of the mermaids as problematic, uncertain subjects and put them back in the river unconscious.

Everything changes upon their return and the sisters, lingering between myth and modernity, humanity and non-humanity, and childhood and adulthood, abandon the idea of sustaining the moment of metamorphosis to let it come to completion. As a result, Silver decides to undergo a surgery to permanently become a human woman while Golden embraces her identity as a mythical monster. However, Agnieszka Smoczyńska leaves a lot of room for ambiguity: in the end the rejection of monstrosity within leads to annihilation—Silver turns into seafoam fulfilling the prophecy—and, as it turns out, there is a lot of human love, loyalty, and sisterhood within the monster—drawn by these emotions, Golden symbolically takes revenge on the humankind for the death of her sister. With this gesture, the director blurs the rigid binary oppositions of what is human and what is non-human and, consequently, the hierarchies imposed by anthropocentric ways of thinking too gets dismantled. Moreover, in the context of Poland's political situation in the 1980s, what *The Lure* also seems to indirectly imply is that change, prolonged as it may be, eventually leads to a total reframing of reality. Mermaids and their uncertain ontological status reflect the turbulent time of the decay of communism: martial law (13 December 1981 between 22 July 1983), the rise of the Solidarity movement, on-going strikes, shortages of goods, mass political emigration, round table agreement between the government and the opposition (between 6 February and 5 April 1989), first semi-free elections, and mass inflation. Similarly, just like the clash of the human and non-human subjects in *The Lure* resulted in death (Silver), or rejection of the human world (Golden), the political shift had also negative impact on society.<sup>7</sup> In this way, the Polish collective anxieties of political transition are embodied in the liminal figure of a mermaid.

### **Snow White, Seven Dwarfs, and a Werewolf: Beyond Dehumanization**

Another recent horror production from Poland set in transitional times is Adrian Panek's 2018 *Werewolf*. The story begins with the liberation of the Gross Rosen concentration camp in February 1945 with

---

<sup>7</sup>Some of the societal problems of new democracies were: growing unemployment, class inequality (Kelley and Zagorski 319–364), depression (Bobak, et al. 359–365), and the crisis of the elites. However, sociologist Piotr Sztompka claims that most of these problems originate in Polish societies' lack of trust in its authorities (Sztompka 37–62).

a group of kids who end up in an improvised orphanage located in a deserted German estate in the Table Mountains, Lower Silesia. Left with only two days of food supplies, supervised by one adult caregiver, surrounded by dispersed troops of the Werewolf unit, and uncertain of the Soviet soldiers' intentions, the children fight for survival against all odds. Soon the orphanage is under siege from yet another enemy: a feral pack of abandoned German shepherds. Especially significant to the new Polish cinematography, due to the focus on a long-neglected moment in Polish history, *Werewolf* very successfully combines jump scares, gore, and psychological thriller with a combination of narrative we already saw in *The Lure*: myth, children's stories, and fairy tales. Similarly postmodern in ambiance, the film alludes to literary canon with *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, and the classics: *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White and Seven Dwarfs*, and *Little Red Riding Hood*.

Contrary to Brothers Grimm's story, there is no grandma (she must have died in Auschwitz) at the end of the space of adventure and transition (the forest), and the Big Bad Wolf morphs into a herd signifying the dispersion and multiplication of danger. The structure of the horde reminds of Deleuze's and Guattari's insights on the demonic animal: "a pack or affect of animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population, a tale..." (241). Deleuze and Guattari also emphasize that the key to understanding the concept is to grasp the ability of a demonic animal to transform. Why would it be the status of the supposedly domesticated German shepherds then? In the movie, their sudden appearance is foreshadowed by the Soviet soldier who sends the kids off on their journey but cautions them against a werewolf instead of the dogs. Even though he keeps the actual Nazi military forces in mind, the alert gives a clear message: children will be dealing with beings whose provenance is uncertain, since the werewolf is both a human and a non-human subject. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, the demonic animal's liminal, transgressive, and collective character is not all of its most crucial traits. Equally important is its connection to the forces of evil, which serve as a vessel linking the pack with a given community, or enabling human to animal transitions. Referring to the models established by the Inquisition, the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus* mention that the metamorphosis may occur via two different means: the imaginary vision and the spell. "In the first, the subject believes him- or herself to be transformed into an animal, pig, ox, or a wolf, and the observers believe it too; [...] In the second, the Devil "assumes" the real animal bodies, even transporting the accidents and affects befalling them to other bodies" (Deleuze and Guattari 252–253). This vision of the Devil that serves as a transporter of human emotions, values, and ideologies onto a non-human subject, would certainly work within the framework of Panek's *Werewolf*. In this case, the stray dogs

function undoubtedly as the extension of the German perpetrators and as symbols of the systematized murderous machine that persists after the order have been annulled. Incarnated in the pack, the abstract system degenerates into the animalistic but keeps haunting the survivors sustaining the binary oppositions imposed by the Nazi ideology: the division between the race of the masters and the race of the slaves, the civilized and the barbarians, those who are the epitome of humans and the dehumanized others, the hunters and their prey.

The idea of the devilish intervention into human matters, which enables the genocide to perpetuate, proves to be seriously problematic. Through the use of the magical transmitter, the question of blame becomes suspended and the division between victims and perpetrators more nuanced. Who is to be condemned for the atrocities of World War II, if the suffering inflicted is part of a divine plan (which also conveniently encompasses the Devil)? A similar concern, namely the danger of belittling concrete pain and making it abstract, could be raised in connection to the other intriguing link between the Devil and organized oppressive totalitarian system: Aleksander Wat's concept of the Devil in history. In an oral diary, *My Century* published in 1977, where Polish futurist poet and prose writer answers the questions of another literate, future Nobel Prize in Literature Czesław Miłosz, Wat confesses that for him experiencing history from the perspective of a Pole of Jewish descent is closely intertwined with a religious experience. The image of a laughing Devil came to Wat when he was a prisoner in one of the Soviet prisons during World War II (Wat 291), and the poet associates it with literal and metaphorical imprisonment a subject experiences in a totalitarian system (Venclova 270–272). Wat bitterly accuses the Western world of selling out Poland to the Soviets, finds communism as one of the manifestations of the Devil in history, and considers native writers who saw the allure of this system as committing “fundamental treason, not against Poland, but treason against some principle of good” (Wat 226). In *Werewolf*, the pack of feral dogs and their persistent presence even after the end of the war serves as a device enabling one totalitarian system to merge into another. From this perspective, stray German shepherds would embody a set of basic Polish collective anxieties: the fear of dependence, subjugation, and loss of identity.

The devilish interference in human affairs, as convenient as it may seem, does not offer any long-term consolation, and will not aid in working through the shared trauma of war. A surprising lifeline and the way out of “elevation of the holocaust into an untouchable transcendent Evil” comes from a seemingly unexpected source (Žižek “Radical Evil”). Slavoj Žižek implies that atrocities inflicted by the Nazis on,

among others, Jewish, Polish, Roma, and gay population of Europe do not incarnate the Lacanian Radical Evil.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the Slovenian philosopher follows Hannah Arendt's notion of the banality of evil:<sup>9</sup>

[...] the unbearable horror of Auschwitz resides in the fact that its perpetrators were NOT Byronesque figures who asserted, like Milton's Satan, "Let Evil be my Good!" - the true cause for alarm resides in the unbridgeable GAP between the horror of what went on and the "human, all too human" character of its perpetrators. (Žižek "Radical Evil")

In fact, the distinction between a man (or a child) and the animal in *Werewolf* is disrupted from the start. Initially, the kids also function as a herd marking the dehumanizing effect of the war machine. Due to the concentration camp numbers tattooed on their arms, the children are deprived of their individualities and can be viewed as a collective, nameless group. Later on, most of them are addressed through their most significant physical feature: Redhead, Black, Thin, Tiny, Big. The level of their zoomorphism is visible in the scene when the hungry kids devour the only available nutrition: canned dog food. To break this set of behaviors the caregiver, Jadwiga, and the oldest girl, Hanka, force the kids to use knives and forks when eating the leftover potatoes. Their attempts prove to be successful and, as the plot moves forward, the audience is able to distinguish the youngsters through their individual characteristics: a sense of humor, values, intelligence. What is also crucial is that eventually only kids and dogs survive, marking the beginning of a new chapter in Polish history.

One of the crucial factors that play a role in the process of socialization as well as in overcoming a supposedly hopeless situation is again language. The children use the German command "Nieder!" to try to tame the dogs, and build a bridge of communication between them and the dangerous beasts. This turns out to be effective when another system of signs—clothing—is implemented as a reference. German

---

<sup>8</sup>As Žižek mentions, the problem of Radical Evil was first brought up by Kant in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, and could be defined as an "a priori, not just an empirical, contingent propensity of human nature toward Evil" (Žižek 48). Žižek discusses against viewing Holocaust as a type of a Radical Evil—a notion which can be derived from Lacan's *Kant avec Sade*, where, as the Slovenian philosopher claims, the author equalizes indifference with finding pleasure in violence. He also argues that there is no connection between the death drive (the Freudian version of the Radical Evil), and the XXth century totalitarianisms (Žižek "Radical Evil").

<sup>9</sup>In her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt introduces a famous concept of the banality of evil. Instead of presenting the Nazi perpetrator as a villainous sociopath, the author emphasizes that his motivations were rather mundane: he wasn't driven by racist ideology, but by a desire to perform his job well (Arendt 1964).

shepherds start obeying once the kids take off their prison uniforms. The most interesting example of how language functions in the film manifests itself in Mała, the youngest girl. The trauma of the concentration camp has left her mute, and her refusal to communicate positions her between a human and a non-human subject. This is also why she is the one able to cross over to the animal world. In a moving scene, where she speaks up for the first time she shows compassion to a dog stranded in one of the rooms of the orphanage. "There is no water," she says and passes a bowl filled after the rain to the animal. The gesture of reaching out and petting the dog ends the horror and becomes the ultimate transgression of the impassable human/non-human differences in the language of mercy and compassion. Everyone, human and animal, regardless of culturally imposed hierarchies that are changeable as the times that generated them, deserves water. From this point onward, the horrors of the war, and the echoes coming after, come to completion to make room for a fairytale ending, in which there are no perpetrators left, and both the kids and the dogs are survivors.

### **The Beast of History or a Journey Beyond Regression**

In the essay, "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life," Friedrich Nietzsche paints a picture of humans whose identity is reliant on the past and constructed through history. Contrary to animals, the silent objects of our envy, who always exist in the moment, the mind of a man lingers on yesterday or reaches out to tomorrow: "The beast lives unhistorically," claims the philosopher, "for it 'goes into' the present, like a number, without leaving any curious remainder" (Nietzsche 5). The aim of this essay was to reflect on rather the opposite: the situations in which non-human subjects prove to be of historical significance and relevance in the niche Polish cultural productions: horror movies. Each of the films focused on times of political, ideological, or social changes. *Lokis* centers around the shift in thinking which has its roots in the Romantic paradigm: the birth of nations and nationhood, the emergence of the West/East divisions, the discussion of the status of written and oral texts. *The Return of the She-wolf* shows the evolution of insights on female sexuality in light of the emergence of the suffragist movement and the growing role of women in the public sphere. The background of *Werewolf* is the chaos in the aftermath of World War II and the victory of the Soviets, while *The Lure* is set in the turbulent 1980s when the communist system was on the verge of collapse.

These liminal times produced ambiguous, complex subjectivities, and their beasts also prove to be hybrid and uncertain. A count, who might also be a bear, an aristocrat who metamorphs into a she-wolf, mermaids who sing in a nightclub, and the ghosts of Nazi occupants embodied in the pack of dogs all represent collective fears of transition.

The moments of political transformation or historical unrest are reflected by the metamorphosis of each of the agents, usually from human to inhuman, exposing the problem at the heart of the matter: the anxiety of regression. To change into an animal is to become less than human, it's the rejection of culture in favor of nature and, in this linear view of history, it implies the impossibility of progress. According to this framework, human to animal transgressions signify embracing chaos and lack of structure typical of primeval cultures. Such fears are visibly present in Polish horror movies of the communist era, but they are not put into question or deconstructed. However, the recent productions, though centered around the same issue, do not view these metamorphoses as problematic. Their goal is to demonstrate that in the end the distinction between human and non-human, understood as the difference between good and evil or better and lesser, are just outdated binary oppositions. This is precisely why Silver from *The Lure* would rather change into the seafoam than kill the man she loves and, for that reason, Mała in *Werewolf* in a gesture of compassion waters the thirsty dog. New Polish cinema seems to understand that this is the only way to tame the beast of history.



## Works Cited

- Abrams, S. "The Lure." *Roger Ebert*, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-lure-2017>.
- Agamben, G. *The Open: Man and Animal*. Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Alaimo, S. "Discomforting Creatures: Monstrous Natures in Recent Films." *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, edited by Armbruster and Wallace, University Press of Virginia, 2001, pp. 279–296.
- Arendt, H. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Penguin Publishing Group, 1964.
- Birnbaum, D., and Anders Olsson. *A Weasel Sucks Eggs: An Essay on Melancholy and Cannibalism*. Sternberg Press, 2008.
- Bobak, M., et al. "Depressive Symptoms in Urban Population Samples in Russia, Poland, and the Czech Republic." *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 188, no. 4, 2006, pp. 359–365.
- Deleuze, G. Guattari, F. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Derrida, J. "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2002, pp. 369–418.
- Dolar, M. "The Object Voice." *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, edited by Salecl and Žižek, Duke University, 1996, pp. 7–31.
- Dudziński, R., et al., editors. *Groza w Kulturze Polskiej*. Stowarzyszenie Badaczy Popkultury i Edukacji Popkulturowej Trickster, 2016.
- Dziduszko, J. "Nie bój się, to tylko horror." *Kino*, vol. 44, no. 514, 2010, pp. 22–25.
- Film Polski*, [www.filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?film=22235](http://www.filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?film=22235).
- FilmPolski*, [www.filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?film=126995](http://www.filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?film=126995).
- Fiołek-Lubczyńska, B., et al., editors. *Spotkania z gatunkami filmowymi: Horror*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014.
- Freud, S. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Global Grey, 2018.

- . "The Uncanny." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey, vol. 17, Hogarth Press, 1955, pp. 217–256.
- Fuchs, M. "Looking Through the Beast's Eyes?: The Dialectics of Seeing the Monster and Being Seen by the Monster in Shark Horror Movies." *The Journal of Film and Visual Narration*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2018, pp. 1–15.
- Goddard, M. "Beyond Polish Moral Realism: The Subversive Cinema of Andrzej Żuławski." *Polish Cinema in a Transnational Context*, edited by Mazierska, and Goddard, Boydell & Brewer, 2014, pp. 236–257.
- Gregersdotter, K., et al., editors. *Animal Horror Cinema: Genre, History and Criticism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Gross, N. *Film żydowski w Polsce*. Rabid, 2002.
- Grosz, E. *Becoming Undone. Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*. Duke University Press, 2011.
- Hutnikiewicz, A. *Twórczość literacka Stefana Grabińskiego*. Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1959.
- Janicki, S. *Film polski od A do Z*. Wydawnictwo Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1973.
- Józwiak-Rodan, P. "Polski horror, czyli o filmie grozy słów kilka." *gildia.pl*, [www.literatura.gildia.pl](http://www.literatura.gildia.pl). Accessed 5 April 2020.
- Kelley, J. Zagorski, K. "Economic Change and the Legitimation of Inequality: The Transition from Socialism to the Free Market in Central-East Europe." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, vol. 22, 2004, pp. 319–364.
- Kojève, A. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Edited by Allan Bloom, translated by James H. Nichols Jr., Cornell University Press, 1980.
- Król, A., and P. Pustułka. "Women on strike: mobilizing against reproductive injustice in Poland." *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2018, pp. 366–384.
- Michalek, B. "Jesteśmy inni, dziwni. W stronę uniwersalizmu." *Kino*, no. 3, 1967, pp. 2–7.
- Mizerska, E. *Polish Postcommunist Cinema: From Pavement Level*. Peter Lang AG, 2007.



- Neitzsche, F. *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*. Cosimo Classics New York, 2010.
- Olszewska-Jończyk, M. "Poza granice akceptacji – polski horror filmowy w PRL-u." *Panoptikum*, vol. 8, no. 15, 2009, pp. 173–189.
- Paszyk, B. *Leksykon filmowego horroru*. Instytut Wydawniczy Latarnik, 2011.
- Phillipotts, B. *Mermaids*, Ballantine Boogramms, 1980.
- "Powrót Wilczycy." *Filmweb*, [www.filmweb.pl/film/Powr%C3%B3t%20wilczycy-1990-8832/discussion](http://www.filmweb.pl/film/Powr%C3%B3t%20wilczycy-1990-8832/discussion). Accessed 23 June 2020.
- Skaiff, Sheila. *The Law of Looking Glass: Cinema in Poland 1896-1939*. Ohio University Press, 2008.
- Sontag, S. "Notes on 'Camp.'" *Partisan Review*, vol. 31, no. 4, Fall 1964, pp. 515–530.
- Sztompka, P. "Trust and Emerging Democracy: Lessons from Poland." *International Sociology*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1996, pp. 37–62.
- Venclova, T. *Aleksander Wat: Life and Art of an Iconoclast*. Yale University Press, 1996.
- Wat, A. *My Century: The Oddysey of a Polish Intellectual*. New York Review Books, 2003.
- Žižek, S. "A Hair of the Dog That Bit You." *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, edited by Mark Bracher et al., New York University Press, 1994, pp. 46–73.
- . "Radical Evil as a Freudian Category." *Lacan*, [www.lacan.com/zizlovevigilantes.html](http://www.lacan.com/zizlovevigilantes.html).