

Document Citation

Title	An 'Iron' in the fire of Poland --
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Source	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Date	1982 Feb 14
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Czlowiek z zelaza (Man of iron), Wajda, Andrzej, 1981

AN 'IRON' IN THE FIRE OF POLAND . . .

By KEVIN THOMAS

Every once in a while a film comes along that was actually made in the midst of great and turbulent events and which serves to define as well as record them.

Such is Andrzej Wajda's *"Man of Iron"* (which opened at the Fine Arts Friday), an electrifying drama filmed against the forging of Solidarity and a work of passionately committed cinema.

But when a picture is as timely and as much-discussed as *"Man of Iron"* has been, expectations of it escalate accordingly. Because *"Man of Iron"* really is a triumph it is all the more important to state right off that it is a sequel, a continuation of Wajda's 1977 *"Man of Marble"* to such an extent that it cannot have full meaning—or even completely make sense—to those who have not seen the earlier film. (A revival of *"Man of Marble"* is in order. Posthaste.) Furthermore, *"Man of Iron"* is so intense, so thick with incident and polemics and so intricately structured that in any event it demands the closest concentration. After all, there's just so much information that can be communicated through even the best of subtitles.

All of these observations, however, are meant as preparation for *"Man of Marble,"* some description of the first film is in order. It tells of a fledgling film maker, Agnieszka (Krystyna Janda), who has decided that for her diploma film she will make a TV documentary on a worker hero of the Stalinist '50s who once was immortalized in a gigantic marble statue that has now disappeared, as has its sub-



Jerzy Radziwilowicz and Krystyna Janda in a scene from "Man of Iron."

ject. She is determined to find out what became of him and why.

The course of her inquiry becomes a comment on the political life of Poland past and present. Just as Agnieszka runs up against government TV bureaucrats who decide she is heading toward overly sensitive political issues, Wajda himself was obliged to modify the ending he intended for his film. However, so accomplished a film maker is Wajda that he turned censorship into part of his commentary and he left us with the tentative hope that Agnieszka (named for Agnieszka Holland, a courageous young documentarian and a Wajda colleague) will be able to complete her film.

For *"Man of Iron"* Wajda and his writer Aleksander Scibor-Rylski again tell their story as an investigation. In the midst of dealing with some women who want to make a public protest over shortages caused by the mounting shipyard strikes, an official named Winkel (Marian Opania) at government TV in War-

saw is abruptly summoned by authorities, who order him to go to Gdansk, pose as a TV reporter and infiltrate the Solidarity negotiations. His specific assignment is to smear one of Lech Walesa's key supporters at the shipyards, a handsome, husky, open-faced young man named Maciek Tomczyk (Jerzy Radziwilowicz), who is in fact the illegitimate son of "the man of marble" himself, Mateusz Birkut, and whom we met near the end of the first film. (Radziwilowicz plays the father and son in both films.)

As before, Wajda delves into the past as he pushes ahead. As *"Man of Iron"* unfolds, Winkel manages to land three major interviews with people close to the father and son. First, there's the son's friend from college days and now a technician at government TV (Boguslaw Linda), then an elderly woman (Irena Byrska), a frail but fiery patriot who is the mother of a Solidarity leader (Wieslawa Kosmalka), and finally

with Agnieszka, now a political prisoner. Thus, in conversations segueing to flashbacks we learn what really did happen to Birkut and what's happened to Agnieszka and Tomczyk—and Poland, itself—since we took leave of them in *"Man of Marble."*

The stinging satirical tone of *"Man of Marble"* has given way to revolutionary fervor in *"Man of Iron."* Wajda has such confidence and experience he can make a TV speech by a political leader serve as exposition and can incorporate every kind of footage—including some long-suppressed material on the brutally abortive uprisings of 1968 and 1970—into a jagged, tumultuous collage. *"Man of Iron"* does not have the rich formalism of *"Man of Marble"* but is sustained by sheer passion. Everyone in its making seems to have been caught up in a joyous, jubilant upheaval rocking Poland to its very foundations.

Lech Walesa appears briefly both within the drama and in newsreels" and Maya Komorowska, the beautiful leading star of the Polish cinema, recites a haunting poem at the beginning of the film.

Edward Klosinski and Janusz Kalicinski's images have that wonderful natural light look to them, and Andrzej Korzynski's score is mainly tense and spare but breaks through exuberantly when the occasion calls for it.

To have seen *"Man of Iron"* (rated PG for its complexity and moments of strife and brutality) last year at Cannes, where it took the grand prize—or even a few months ago is of course not the same thing as seeing it today. What has actually transpired in Poland accelerates the impact of this film. To become immersed in such an exhilarating assertion of fundamental human freedoms—an assertion surely unique in Eastern European cinema—is to experience an overpowering sadness. □