

ANDRZEJ WAJDA'S MAN OF IRON

by Ken Burke

I may as well say it right away - the entire review will reiterate it anyway. There's absolutely no way to separate politics from the film *Man of Iron*, playing the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium this Sunday at eight. And that is exactly why the film is so magnificent.

Man of Iron is a Polish film, made by Andrzej Wajda, that country's greatest filmmaker (also one of the best in the world). Made during the events in the Gdansk shipyards two years ago which saw the rise of *Solidarity*, the film basically follows individuals swept up in the Polish people's struggle for freedom. So much for the barebones facts.

What's important is content and the unique style with which Wajda creates such a powerful film. The film, while it was being shot, was very much influenced by events happening day-to-day with the Polish government and *Solidarity*. Wajda has also used much documentary footage in the film. Along with this footage, Wajda has gone for a distinctly rough, physical style of shooting for all other scenes.

"Wajda has created the film equivalent of the worker's memorials in Gdansk. *Man of Iron* is a film which rolls up its shirtsleeves and gets to work."

The end result is a film that's the equivalent of *Solidarity's* own welded workers' memorials in Gdansk. It looks heat-blasted; held together by its own intensity, it is completely disassociated from a "slick"-looking film. This is a film which rolls up its shirtsleeves and gets down to work.

The film's central story involves the Polish government sending a burnt-out journalist to Gdansk (under threats) to do a frame job on a key *Solidarity* organizer in the shipyards. Winkiel (the journalist), as played by Marian Opiana, suggests the heavy toll years of game-playing can take on a human, especially when the game one plays every day is for one's livelihood and freedom. If not for the sustaining influence of vodka, Winkiel would melt like a bowl's jello in an oven (the film's funniest scene involves him and a bottle of vodka).

The film eventually settles down to focus on the life history of the organizer, whereupon it becomes clear what Wajda had in mind for the film. The framework of Winkiel interviewing several people connected with Tomszyk (the organizer) allows each character to give their section of the story in extended flashbacks. While these flashbacks certainly make the film

less fast-paced, making an action picture was never Wajda's intent.

His intent was to create a film which represents the Polish people. These flashbacks are told by characters ranging across the spectrum of Polish workers. Its straightforward style lends the film the similar feel of an oral history. Along with this, Wajda connects past and present Polish history to suggest that *Solidarity* is the end product of an unstoppable movement.

The life of Tomszyk, and that of his wife Agnieszka, personally pulled me into the larger story of the Polish people. Jerzy Radziwilowicz plays Tomszyk as a different kind of hero, never aware that he might be considered heroic by others. His wife is a hell of a lot more than simply his wife: Agnieszka and Tomszyk could serve as models for humans everywhere in equality of partnership. Their love story is never doted on, or even covered in much detail, making it all the more effective by treating it naturally.

Of course, much writing and publicity devoted to the film has centered around the cameo appearance of Lech Walesa. Although he only acts in the film for about a half a minute, Walesa damn near steals the whole movie with his appearance as best man at Tomszyk and Agnieszka's wedding. Walesa hands a rose to each of the newlyweds, saying he gives the flowers democratically because, "I hope you will be a democratic couple."

Man of Iron, although actually a sequel to an earlier film by Wajda, *Man of Marble*, can definitely stand on its own as a powerful film. After seeing the film, I wondered for a while how well it would stand up to the test of time removing the movie from its current relevance. But as the film shows, the struggle is ongoing.

If Poland became some ethereal utopia tomorrow, the movie would be every bit as powerful because of all the other people in the world still fighting. Several times during the movie I found myself crying, and for various reasons too - rage, bitterness, and joy. It is the voice of Poland speaking. Nothing less.

by Ken Burke

Now that school is nearly out (or your luck, or something in that vein), most students of this university will have more time to spend in the pursuit of entertainment. For a privileged few this means an extended stay in sunny Halifax instead of those costly time-consuming trips to capitalist tourist depots down South. It is for these dedicated souls that this article is being published.

Here, then, without further adieu, is a run-through on films in Halifax during the next month and a half, taking us up 'til mid-May, by which time it might not be snowing anymore. By "films in Halifax" I'm referring to the regular stuff of revival houses, of course. At least our city's two such theatres can provide us with the advance material to make such articles possible. Anyway, most other films in town aren't worth blowing four bucks on now.

Wormwood's Dog and Monkey Cinema

Be that as it may, I'll begin with *Wormwood's Dog and Monkey Cinema*, located conveniently on the second floor of the National Film Board's offices at 1546 Barrington Street. Their series of Spring films starts off about as well as any film series could - with a Marx Brothers double feature on April Fool's Day and April second.

Specifically, *A Night at the Opera*, and *A Day at the Races*. These two films, besides lending their titles to a couple of records lately, were the first films the Marx Brothers did without Zeppo Marx for MGM. The difference between *Night* and *Day* (sorry about that pun) and the Marx's earlier films is that these two movies are longer and sorta make sense sometimes in the plot. The other Marxes, like *Duck Soup*, *Monkey Business* and *Horse Feathers* never bothered with dumb stuff like plot too much.

There's still tons to recommend both films to anyone that either admires the Marx Brothers inspired looniness or has only seen Alan Alda imitating Groucho on M*A*S*H.

The films are blest with some of the best word play of any

Marx adventures, and of course there's the greatest Marx brother Chico. Even five minutes of Chico's mime and silliness is enough to make any movie worthwhile, but *Wormwood's* offers three hours worth. As with all films at *Wormwood's*, it's best to call them first before costly time-consuming trips to capitalist tourist depots down South. It is for these dedicated souls that this article is being published.

Next stop, *Atlantic City*. This superb film by French Director Louis Malle is playing Saturday, April 3rd, and Sunday, April 4th. All I'll say other than what little I've released in this article is that there's a main review of the film lurking about this spread if you're interested.

It has Giancarlo Giannini and Mariangela Melato to recommend it as well, acting in the lead roles. I've always been far more a sucker for Giancarlo Giannini than Wertmuller's films (his eyes say me everytime). *Seven Beauties* has more to recommend itself than simply Giannini's presence, towering (snivelling, really) as it is. The story of survival-at-all-costs is well done with Wertmuller's usual dollop of Italianate excess. Scenes are arranged to make the viewer squirm, and many are at the expense of women as usual.

Michael Anderson's version of the book has actually been more criticised than revered, possibly due to an ending which supposedly strays from that of the novel. I dunno, as I've never seen the film and have only reviews of others to guide me in writing this. Sounds interesting, though, on Thursday, April 8th.

A mere one day later, the first of two semi-obscure Stanley Kubrick films in *Wormwood's* schedule checks in for a three-day run. That film is his 'epic' Roman gladiator slave revolt drama, *Spartacus*. I said "obs-cure" because *Spartacus* and the other film, *Paths of Glory*, aren't well-known by today's Kubrick devotees who've seen *Clockwork Orange* and *2001* a half-dozen times.

Spartacus, a film of three-plus hours, stars Kirk Douglas in the lead role and the inevitable galaxy of stars in supporting parts. Names like Lawrence Olivier, Peter Ustinov, and Charles Laughton were recruited to fill out the togas for this film, speaking the words of screenwriter Dalton Trumbo. Kubrick has been garnering more attention than most documentaries do in the U.S. of A.

The film consists of interviews with five women who were workers in factories during World War Two. Then, women were first given the opportunity to be more than submissive childbearers or laborers in stereotypical "female" roles. After the war all their work was taken away from them, but...

The film also uses government propaganda and "March of Time" newsreels to illustrate its topic. In doing so, it also can be seen as a meditation on pro-

paganda and its effect on us all. The weekend occupied with *Rosie the Riveter* is Saturday, April 24th and Sunday, April 25th.

Next up is the second Kubrick film in the lot, *Paths of Glory*. The film also features Kirk Douglas as its star, with Adolphe Menjou supporting out of favour lately - possibly due to the fact that she's an extremely traditionally sexist filmmaker, of the man-on-top, woman-on-bottom variety. Besides being a socialist allegory, *Swept Away* seems to follow the trend as well.

It tells a story quite similar (superficially) to that of *Gallipoli* and *Breaker Morant* with incompetence (and corruption) in the French Army Command during World War One causing suicidal troop orders and an eventual fixed-trial court-martial of three soldiers. Kubrick bows in with this major film on April 29th and 30th.

Oddly enough, May Day and the following day are devoted to a quite capitalistic event - the *Winners of the 1981 Cannes Advertising Festival*. That's correct, one hundred minutes of the (supposedly) best commercials from all over the world. The 1981 winners are at times interesting, but not nearly as good (funny and artistic) as the 1980 batch were. The Japanese do have a peculiar worship of make-up, I must say, by looking at these ads.

The sole experimental film selection in the Spring series of *Wormwood's* appears on Thursday, May 6th, and Friday, May 7th. The package consists of two films - *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, by R. Bruce Elder, and *Presents*, by Michael Snow - which run (together) at over two hours. Both films are Canadian and have won prizes, as well as stirring up controversy. I do not know enough on the two to say more about them, so I won't.

The 8th and 9th of May bring in another politically oriented film, Costa-Gavras' *The Confession*. Coming from France in 1970, Director Costa-Gavras has crafted a tight thriller (his usual work) around a Communist deputy willingly lying in a trial to convict himself "for the good of the party." It stars Yves Montand, as do several other Costa-Gavras films such as *State of Siege*. He's one of the most professional of political filmmakers, and certainly one of the most entertaining, so this lesser-known film could be worth your time.

A much-neglected director,

Robert Bresson, supplies the lucky May 13th offering, with his 1956 French film, *A Condemned Man Escapes*. It is a story of an escape from a fortress prison under the Nazis. Bresson will likely find something beautifully life-fulfilling within the plot, and transfer it to screen in his economic yet almost ethereal style. Bresson is one of the Cinema's truly individual masters, and this film might be an accurate representation of his talents (howzat for a weird recommendation?).

Mid-May comes along and Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* is scheduled to play Friday to Sunday, May 14th to 16th. The film is supposedly the high point of Fellini's output since *Satyricon*, and is loosely based around Fellini's remembrances of his childhood. One rule I have found to be true is that Fellini, no matter how off-base, or just plain off, is always interesting. *Amarcord* can likely stand on its own, though. I'm looking forward to it.

Dalhousie Film Theatre

However, *Wormwood's* is not the cultural be-all and end-all of Halifax. The city's other repertory theatre Dal's own Dalhousie Film Theatre, has films of its own to offer those desiring movies on a Sunday night. Dal Film Theatre screenings are always Sunday nights at eight o'clock, and the price for students is three dollars even (*Wormwood's* charge is \$2.50). Its location is the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium in the Dal Arts Centre.

After two weeks without any films, the Theatre comes back with a vengeance on April 4th with Andrzej Wajda's most recent film from Poland, *Man of Iron*. The film has recently played in town (at *Wormwood's*), and those who saw it generally weren't disappointed.

Man of Iron is one of those very few films that is so powerful as to deserve recognition as a folk tale. It should, with the director attempting to make everyone aware of his conception of the Polish people's soul. There is a review of the film in this issue of the *Gazette*.

The following week, on Sunday, April 11th, the California-based film, *Serial* shows up.

Directed by Bill Persky, whom I know nothing about, the film has sharply divided opinion along "I hate" and "I love" lines. The director is a virtual newcomer so there's little I can inform you of there - but the film is acted by Martin Mull, Tom Smothers, Sally Kellerman, Tuesday Weld, and others. A comedy, the movie satirizes California life (or lack of it).

The following week, a Dal Film Theatre regular (and favourite) drops in again - Nicholas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is showing on April 18th. Besides the fact that Roeg (*Don't Look Now*, *Bad Timing*) directed the film, its main calling card will continue to be the starring position played by David Bowie in the film.

Perhaps as a flashback to his "Major Tom" days, Bowie portrays a visitor from outer space who becomes corrupted by our lifestyle and such. It was made in 1976, and has garnered attention from people other than Bowie-worshippers, so let that guide your measuring stick.

Dalhousie Film Theatre

The Theatre takes a break after that, but returns on May 2nd with *Stevie*. Many critics (including the *Village Voice's*) have taken this film to heart and so it saw a very limited national release in the States. Made in 1978, this will be the Glenda Jackson vehicle's first Halifax screening. The film follows the life of a British poet, played by Jackson, and her friend, played by Mona Washbourne.

The last offering of Dalhousie's Spring Series is Roman Polanski's tense *Chinatown*. Starring Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway, Polanski found room to give himself one of its most memorable roles - the hood in the "nose" scene. If you don't have any idea of what I'm talking about, suffice it to say that *Chinatown* is a recent film classic which draws on traditions of films in the past without ever seeming parasitic - no mean feat to accomplish these days.

As this is simply a quick run-down of Spring films, I haven't time to do more than tell you to watch out for *Pixote*, *Man of Marble*, *Z. Rock 'n' Roll High School*, *Ticket to Heaven*, *Lilli Marleen*, and others over the summer months.

SPRING FILMS FOR SPRUNG STUDENTS

-Atlantic City, U.S.A.

by Ken Burke

Old dreams die hard, but they still die.

On the verge of "prosperity" because of the recent legalization of gambling, *Atlantic City* has already become an icon of materialism to most of North America. The city has already been used in other films to symbolize the hollowness of the American Dream, most notably in Bob Rafelson's *King of Marvin Gardens*. But where *Marvin Gardens* was bitter and completely cynical, Louis Malle still feels compassion for those fooled into seeking the dream. As a result, *Atlantic City* offers room for human dignity within the lie - a dignity which ultimately lies in rejecting the system.

Every character in the film whom Malle spends time developing represents this dual hope and defeat. His conception of *Atlantic City* is peopled exclusively by immigrants from all over the continent searching for dreams. Significantly, not one character in the film comes from *Atlantic City*. They have all travelled to what they either once believed or now believe to be "the" place to make it - and make it big.

"Atlantic City is an upliftingly downbeat film."

The before-and-after sides of this dream are Lou and Sally, played by Burt Lancaster and Susan Sarandon. Burt Lancaster has always been a quiet actor, and that silence has never seemed so formidably felt as in this film.

As Lou, a small-time hood reduced to playing aged servant and pathetically poignant stud to an abusive gangster's widow, Lancaster personifies the pain of failing at the "dream." To admit he's been cheated would take away what little dignity he can scrape together - so he defends the validity of his old hopes, clinging to a past that never really was.

Lou carries that personal nostalgic voyeurism over into his relationship with Sally. Every evening at suppertime, Lou turns off his lights to look across the way at Sally - his neighbour - who ritually rubs lemon juice over her arms and breasts in front of the window every night. Sally is a younger version of Lou in many ways, except that her innocence is closer to being peeled off.

She's a fighter, having found her way to *Atlantic City* from Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan (I suppose the closest writer John Guare could come to epitomizing Nowhere, North America). Her reason for arriving was training at the casinos to be a "dealer" where she might be able to get a job in Europe working Blackjack tables and

doing hazy romantic things. Susan Sarandon lends real dimension to the part, neatly portraying a besieged yet feisty innocence that only wants to believe in the dream.

Lou's life finally connects with Sally's when her husband unexpectedly pops up, complete with Chrissie, Sally's very pregnant sister (by Dave). Drugs complicate the mess and unhide the mechanisms of fate on the film's main characters.

Atlantic City is many things, not least of all well-acted. While setting, director and lead actors place the film in decidedly un-Canadian territory, it is something of a showcase for Canadian actors in the supporting roles. As Dave, Newfoundlandier Robert Joy is a tremendously appealing evil innocent (innocence being a common denominator in the main five roles).

Hollis McLaren again proves that absolutely no-one has a sixties leftover freak-out victim better than hers in the acting trade. Her performance as Chrissie may come extremely close to repeating the part she had in *Outrageous!*, but who really cares if it still works as well as it does here? Kate Reid is also superb in the role of Gracie, the

ex-moll turned tired and lonely bitch-john to Lou. Also watch out for the cameo of Robert Goulet in the film - it really took guts for him to do it, unless he didn't realise he was parodying himself (which is possible).

The film is also the best use of city-as-metaphor since Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice*. The overwhelming presence in the film is *Atlantic City* - it deserves a special oscar for "best supporting city". What Malle and screenwriter John Guare have captured is not a city in decline, but the destruction of the remnants of one era for the ascension of another. Wrecking balls and bulldozers stalk the city like monsters in a city-lover's nightmare. Memories of old glories now tarnished doesn't show through the future as easily.

Atlantic City is a brilliant mood piece - an upliftingly downbeat film. Malle has shot the film with real beauty, but equal credit should go to Guare, who understands just how close the blade of destiny is to the necks of his characters, and how ignorant they are of that fact. The film is compassionate, but never mawkishly over-sentimental. Like most of Louis Malle's films, it deserves to be seen, and can be, this weekend at *Wormwood's Dog and Monkey Cinema*, 1572 Barrington Street.