

Article

Bodily Violence and Resistance in Wojtek Smarzowski's *Rose* (*Róża*, 2011)



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ABSTRACT

The article argues that Wojtek Smarzowski's film *Rose* (*Róża*, Poland, 2011) undermines the dominant bi-gendered logic of screen death and suffering in the Polish films depicting the experience of World War II. In these films, there is a significant absence of images of female suffering and death, which is striking when compared to the abundant images of wounded and dying male bodies, usually represented as a lavish visual spectacle. This unrepresented female death serves as a 'structuring absence' that governs the systematic signifying practices of Polish cinema. Most importantly, it expels the female experience of World War II from the realm of history to the realm of the mythical. This representational regime has been established in the Polish national cinema during the 1950s, especially in Andrzej Wajda's films, and is still proving its longevity. As the author argues, Smarzowski's *Rose* is perhaps the most significant attempt to undermine this gendered cinematic discourse.

Specifically, the essay explores the ways in which Smarzowski's *Rose* departs from previous dominant modes of representation of the World War II experience in Polish cinema, especially its gendered aspect.¹ Firstly, it examines how *Rose* abandons the generic conventions of both war film and historical drama and instead, utilises selected conventions of melodrama to open up the textual space in which to represent the female experience of historical events. Then the author looks more closely at this experience and discusses the film's representation of the suffering female body to argue that it subverts the national narrative of the war experience that privileges male suffering. A close analysis of the relationship between sound and image in the scenes of bodily violence reveals

1 In his monograph on *Rose*, Andrzej Szpulak focuses on the film's continuities with the Polish national discourse. However, he declares that he is only interested in the narrative, claiming that, in his critical approach, the visual qualities of the film are of secondary importance (Szpulak 2016: 31). While accepting such a critical perspective, I will undertake a radically different critical strategy by demonstrating how *Rose* uses various formal, mostly audiovisual, devices to subvert certain elements of the national tradition.

how the film reclaims the female body from the abstract domain of national allegory and returns it to the realm of individual embodied experience. The article concludes that *Rose* presents the female body as resisting the singular ideological inscription, and instead, portrays it as simultaneously submitting to and resisting the gendered violence of war.

A war film is commonly understood to be one that 'deals with warfare, preparations for war or its aftermath, or warfare as a background to or integral part of the action' (Blanford et al. 2001: 258). The stories these films tell most often feature capable and strong male bodies that are crucial for developing the nationalist narratives of (mostly male) heroism. While discussing the body politics of military conflicts and their representation, Karen Randell and Sean Redmond observe that war is 'an interior and interpersonal mechanism that *writes* identities and *scripts* differences' (Randell, Redmond 2008: 1; emphasis in original). In a similar vein, Anna Froula examines how war specifically inscribes identities on individual bodies emphasising the gendered aspect of these operations: 'Warfare's terrain as the site of mythical man-making often doubles as the site of women's actual un-making, as the long, sordid history of rape attest' (Froula 2014: xi). Froula's perspective succinctly reveals that cinematic representations of violence, especially of a sexual nature, against women in war narratives, are inevitably entangled within contradictory ideological agendas. On the one hand, these images and narratives recognise the female suffering that is often silenced in the narratives of male heroism. On the other hand, they also solidify a traditional gender discourse that assigns women a position of passivity and vulnerability. As Dijana Jelača claims in her book *Dislocated Screen Memory: Narrating Trauma in Post-Yugoslav Cinema*:

a critique of patriarchy that is predominantly premised on depicting women as impassive and victimized social actors might run the risk of inadvertently perpetuating the notion that, in war, women are victims and victims only. War stories, typically premised on normative gender assumptions, often run such risks, as their prevalent attention to masculinist violence to which women are subjected has the cumulative effect of re-stabilizing the rigid, binary, and traditional gender roles even when its individual pieces might be geared as a critique of such roles rather than their perpetuation. (Jelača 2016: 60–61)

In the Polish films depicting the World War II experience, this binary gender regime is still present, but is significantly blurred. In the works of the Polish School, such as *A Generation* (*Pokolenie*, Andrzej Wajda, Poland, 1955) or *Kanał* (Andrzej Wajda, Poland, 1957), women are often depicted as heroic characters. However, they are rarely, if ever, presented as dying heroically, which is at odds with their actual historical experience. In 'Invisible Deaths: Polish Cinema's Representation of Women in World War II', an essay published in 2012, I pondered on the possible explanations and implications of the non-represented heroic female death in Polish

war cinema.¹ I noted that this absence was especially striking as it contrasts with the abundant images of male death, usually represented within a lavish visual spectacle. Identifying this unrepresented female death as a 'structuring absence' that governs the systematic signifying practices of Polish cinema, I stated that it 'expel[s] female characters from the realm of historical experience into the realm of the mythic. Their everlasting and indestructible femininity lends itself to symbolic identification with an equally eternal and imperishable idea of motherland' (Ostrowska 2012: 56). This representational regime was established in Polish national cinema during the 1950s, especially in the films of Andrzej Wajda,² and is still proving its staying power.

In the year 2012, when the aforementioned essay 'Invisible Deaths' was published, Wojtek Smarzowski's *Rose* was released, a film that significantly undermines the dominant bi-gendered logic of screen death and suffering in Polish cinema.³ Its action takes place after the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising. After witnessing his wife being raped and killed by the

Nazis, Tadeusz (Marcin Dorociński), the male protagonist, escapes the town and travels to the Masurian Lakes district in the North-East region of Poland. There, he finds the eponymous Rose (Agata Kulesza), the wife of a German soldier whose death he witnessed. He visits the woman to give to her some memorabilia that belonged to her late husband. Initially distrustful, she eventually invites Tadeusz to her house. Soon, he finds out that while liberating the region, Soviet soldiers had raped Rose regularly. In addition, as a member of the Masurian ethnic minority, she is now also being subjected to hostility from her Polish neighbours, who call her 'a Russian whore'. Although Tadeusz is unable to completely protect and save the woman, he attempts to safeguard her and bring some comfort to her suffering body. After Rose dies from cancer that developed after the miscarriage of her post-rape pregnancy, he fulfils her dying wish and marries her daughter, Jadwiga (Malwina Buss). The arranged marriage is the only way to keep the farm that would otherwise have been confiscated by the new Communist authorities who are actively engaged in ethnic cleansing. Soon after Rose's death, Tadeusz refuses to collaborate with the new regime and is consequently imprisoned for several years. After his release, he returns to the village to take care of Jadwiga and the farm. However, he finds that a repatriated family from the Eastern Borderline (Kresy) region has taken possession of the property. He makes no attempt to reclaim it and both he and Jadwiga leave the farm. Their uncertain future is signified by the final image of the two figures vanishing into a desolate landscape.

In this essay, I will examine the ways in which Smarzowski's *Rose* departs from the previous dominant modes of representation of the World War II experience in Polish cinema, and especially its gendered aspect. Firstly, I will examine how *Rose* abandons the generic conventions of both war film and historical drama, and instead, utilises selected conventions of melodrama in order to open up textual space in which to represent the female experience of historical

- 1 As I indicate in the article, the narratives of numerous Polish films depicting World War II, among others Wajda's *A Generation* and *Kanał* imply the deaths of female characters, yet this is never visualised on screen. For example, there is no doubt that Dorota (Urszula Modrzyńska) and Stokrotka (Teresa Iżewska) die, yet the films' representational regime leaves it off-screen, whereas Jasio Krone's (Tadeusz Janczar) death is presented as a lavish visual spectacle. Most symptomatically, when Halinka's (Teresa Berezowska) suicidal death occurs in *Kanał*, the screen turns black for a while – thus, the 'invisibility' of female death becomes almost literal. For a more detailed discussion see Ostrowska 2012.
- 2 In her essay discussing the oeuvre of Wojtek Smarzowski, Izabela Kalinowska also extensively examines his relationship with Andrzej Wajda's films; she concludes that Smarzowski is just as implicated in Polishness as Wajda (Kalinowska 2016: 118). Many other Polish critics, as well as Andrzej Szpulak (2016), offer a similar perspective. For a detailed presentation of critical reception of *Rose*, see Szpulak 2016: 130–142.
- 3 For a detailed discussion of Smarzowski's authorship and his engagement with Polish history, see Kalinowska 2016 and Szpulak 2016. Both authors claim that the director's work needs to be placed within Polish culture and its romantic tradition, however they do not engage in its gender aspect, which is my focus here.

events.⁴ Thereafter, I will look more closely at this experience and discuss the film's representation of the suffering female body to argue that it subverts the national narrative of the war experience that privileges male suffering.⁵ Through close analysis of the relationship between sound and image in the scenes of bodily violence, I will show how the film reclaims the female body from the abstract domain of national allegory and returns it to the realm of individual embodied experience.⁶

MELODRAMATIC RUPTURES AND DISPLACEMENTS

In his seminal book, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Peter Brooks explains that the mode of melodrama emerged after the French Revolution in response to 'a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life is of immediate, daily, political concern' (Brooks 1976: 15). This emerging artistic form proved capable to contain all the social and cultural changes by means of reconnecting with past ethical systems and rules.

The end of World War II in Poland constituted a radical moment of rupture with history, and as such, separated both individuals and collectives from the pre-war reality with its attendant ethical codes and principles. Along with the implementation of the Yalta Agreement dividing Europe into the West and the East, the pre-war borders of the Polish state were changed and, consequently, the concept of the Polish nation had to be re-defined as well. As Matilda Mroz reports in her discussion of *Rose*, after World War II '[t]he policy of the newly-established Polish government was to create an ethnically homogenous Polish nation out of this heterogeneous, multi-ethnic territory [Masurian Lake district], and to expel the "others" and "foreigners" beyond its frontiers' (Mroz 2016: 61). *Rose* depicts these geopolitical changes by focusing on the enforced migratory movements that were violently executed by the new Communist authorities. The Masurian ethnic minority was the main victim of these policies due to its hybrid ethnic and cultural identity. They were Polish settlers who were strongly influenced by the East Prussians, and consequently, they spoke German and converted to Lutheranism, which separated them from the Polish majority of Roman Catholics. As *Rose* shows, after World War II, the Masurians were threatened with the confiscation of their properties, in order to force them to leave the land and relocate to Germany. The efforts of the Communist authorities to remove this 'suspicious ethnic' element was supported by the ethnic Poles who were eager to take over the Masurians' farms and lands. The repatriates from the Eastern Borderlands of Poland, the region that was now incorporated into the Soviet Union, hoped to find 'abandoned properties' to compensate for the houses and farms they had lost. *Rose* features a family of such repatriates. On the one hand, they are kind-hearted people who empathise with *Rose's* fate. On the other, when she dies, they unscrupulously occupy her farm despite it legally being part of her daughter's inheritance. At the end of the film, after being released from prison,

- 4 Szpulak also identifies the film as being, among other genres, a melodrama. However, he uses the term in a rather reductionist fashion, defining it as a sentimentalist and simplified account of romantic love (Szpulak 2016: 51).
- 5 Szpulak's discussion of this issue may seem rather symptomatic. He writes: 'The scenes of rape directly represent female suffering, however more importantly they portray psychological suffering of the helpless witness, the male.' He continues this line of argument, ultimately claiming that the male protagonist, Tadeusz, is established as the narrative focus of the film. He even suggests that the film's title *Rose* is somehow misleading (Szpulak 2016: 42; see also Dunin et al. 2015). The critic's interpretation demonstrates how deeply Polish culture has internalised (and naturalised) the national discourse of male suffering. Thus, my analysis does not only offer a critical reading of Smarzewski's film, but also certain strategies employed by Polish film criticism. One of these strategies is a distrust towards feminist approach. Although this negative stance seems to be losing its erstwhile prominence, it is still present as exemplified by Szpulak's book (Szpulak 2016: 74–75).
- 6 Agnieszka Morstin claims that the female protagonist is first a victim and only then a woman (Morstin 2012: 206). In my opinion the gender factor is of paramount importance as the film presents women as victims of sexual violence.

Tadeusz returns to the farm, but does not attempt to reclaim it from the family. He and Jadwiga simply leave. Mroz succinctly points out:

Róża does not ... end on an unambiguous vision of a newly homogenised country; instead, Tadeusz and Jadwiga are seen walking away from the old home-
stead, arm in arm, across fields, determinedly but without clear direction and without any indication of a newly established and settled 'home'. The film ends in movement rather than with newly established borders. (Mroz 2016: 67)

Similarly, Izabela Kalinowska remarks that Tadeusz is 'an exile in his own land' (Kalinowska 2016: 128) and Jadwiga joins him in his figurative and literal homelessness. Mroz attributes this inability to recover or establish a new home to the Soviet authorities, which in *Rose*, are presented as the sole and ubiquitous source of evil. She claims that Smarzowski's film articulates the dominant Polish cinematic approach to history that identifies the Polish nation solely as a victim of the war. She writes, 'in *Róża*, it is Soviet authority and colonial power that is demonized' (Mroz 2016: 63; see also Dunin et al. 2015, Szpulak 2016: 157). Indeed, the Soviets are presented as an embodiment of evil, however the Poles are not presented only as victims. The director does not include any scenes of direct Polish violence towards the Masurian ethnic minority, but he does not shy away from depicting their hostility and cold indifference to them. Most importantly, the portrayal of the repatriates from the Eastern Borderline as a population that was expelled from their own homes, and consequently, expelled others from theirs, reveals a moral ambiguity related to the actions of all participants in the forced post-war migratory movements. This negative, or at least ambivalent, picture of the Eastern repatriates challenges

one of the most persistent myths of post-war Poland regarding the Eastern Borderlines and the Poles inhabiting these lands. For decades, they were consistently portrayed as kind-hearted people who spoke a sweetly accented Polish language and were expelled from the national 'paradise lost' of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. In contrast, Smarzowski's film depicts them as petty-minded greedy people who live their lives according to strict patriarchal norms that make a 'dishonoured woman' of any female victim of a wartime rape. Arguably, *Rose* subtly, yet persistently, challenges the national narrative of the war experience along with various positionalities ascribed to it.

The narrative of *Rose* is centred on the theme of displacement in the most general sense. While explaining the political and historical contexts of Smarzowski's film, Mroz emphasises that the people migrating to the Masurian Lakes were unable to integrate into any community, and therefore, remained, for much of the time, a group temporarily inhabiting the land. As she notes, '[a] sense of displacement rather than settlement was thus pervasive, of fracture rather than homogeneity' (Mroz 2016: 62–63). Thus, first and foremost, she assigns the notion of displacement to the geopolitical outcome of World War II. It could be argued that this geopolitical displacement also caused a displacement of the pre-war ethical norms that regulated life in pre-1939 multi-ethnic Poland. The film ponders the moral ambiguity inherent in the experience of an individual exile, tacitly implying that it does not necessarily result in the passive, yet noble, acceptance of homelessness. For the repatriates, as Smarzowski shows them, are eager to build new homes no matter the moral consequences.

The geopolitical displacement in *Rose* is juxtaposed with a less tangible bodily displacement, which could be even more damaging in terms of its effects. Both the film's violent imagery and narrative content demonstrate how a wartime rape expels women from their own bodies. More generally, the film explores how

abrupt historical change is inscribed on the female body, leaving a wound that cannot be healed. *Rose* employs a melodramatic mode of representation to restage the brutal end of the pre-war multi-ethnic Poland and the beginning of the nationalistic Communist state. Melodrama, as 'an intense emotional and ethical drama based on the Manichaeistic struggle between good and evil' (Brooks 1976: 12–13), proves capable of containing the rapid and often inexplicable changes of erstwhile social hierarchies and systems of values. In *Rose*, the melodramatic affect serves to work through the female traumas rather than the national traumas of World War II and its aftermath.

SUFFERING AND MELODRAMATIC JUSTICE

In her reconsideration of the genre of melodrama, Linda Williams claimed that the melodramatic mode of representation had permeated various genres of popular Hollywood cinema. For this mode of cinema invariably privileges the figure of an innocent victim whose suffering is meant to affect the viewer and to produce, ultimately, the effect of pathos (Williams 1998). According to Augustín Zarzosa, suffering is the most recognisable element of a melodramatic universe. Taking some inspiration from Brooks, he rejects the former's claim that in melodrama 'suffering becomes a means – a mechanism – to prove the existence of virtue and evil' (Zarzosa 2013: 17). Instead, he argues that

the duo of virtue and evil is simply one of the mechanisms through which melodrama redistributes the visibility of suffering. Melodrama shifts the sense of virtue and evil to determine whose suffering is rendered visible or legitimate, and whose is rendered invisible or abstract. (Zarzosa 2013: 17)

In other words, if cinema makes one's suffering visible it defines the person as a

victim of evil forces and this classification provides a basis for moral judgement.

The visibility of suffering in melodrama can be seen as contributing to what Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey call a 'testimonial culture' in which the wound serves as a sign of identity (Ahmed, Stacey 2001). As Ahmed explains, testimonial culture is 'the culture of compensation, where all forms of injury are assumed to involve relations of innocence and guilt, and where it is assumed that responsibility for all injuries can be attributed to an individual or collective' (Ahmed 2004: 32). Due to its historical experience, Polish culture has developed as a 'testimonial culture', which is notably manifest in its Romantic paradigm in which the national (male) subject establishes its identity through wounds and suffering (see Caes 2003, Ostrowska 2016). Suffering from historical traumas (of partitions, wars, the Communist regime) that are inscribed on his body, the Polish national (male) subject, 'become[s] invested in the wound, such that the wound comes to stand for identity itself' (Ahmed 2004: 32). Polish post-war cinema has significantly contributed to the formation of such a subject through foregrounding the wounded and suffering male body. In *Rose*, Smarzowski reverses the logic of this representation by foregrounding a suffering and wounded female body of someone who belongs to the Masurian ethnic minority. Thus, the film renegotiates the limits of the Polish 'testimonial culture' in an attempt to include the various ethnic and religious minorities. Arguably, using the convention of melodrama with its distribution of visible suffering, Smarzowski's film opens up a textual space for subaltern subjects that have previously been excluded from the dominant national narratives.⁷ Instead of the national scenarios of

7 Izabela Kalinowska recognises Smarzowski's engagement with the ethnic conflicts within Polish community, which he sees as everything but not a homogeneous entity: 'Smarzowski, who hails from the once multi-ethnic Eastern Poland, is very attuned to the potential for violence that exists in neighbourly relations. He is also cognizant of the long-term traumatizing effects of historical events that turn ethnic and religious communities against each other' (Kalinowska 2016: 121).

heroism and images of wounds inflicted upon embattled male bodies, *Rose* presents female wounds and pain.

EMBODIED (FEMALE) SUFFERING AND THE DISEMBODIED (MALE) GAZE

Rose signals its departure from the dominant binary logic of war discourse with its opening credits sequence. The film begins with a prologue inserted into the opening credits. The first shot is a medium close-up of Tadeusz in his military uniform, lying on dusty ground surrounded by ruins. He is semi-conscious and his face is covered with blood. The hand-held camera is moving only slightly, without the conventional shakiness used to produce the effect of semi-documentary footage. It never occupies a perceptually privileged position, as if mimicking the immobility and lack of narrative agency of the male character. He is looking off-screen. **(Figure 1)** After a while, the film cuts to a long shot of two German soldiers raping a woman. When it cuts back to Tadeusz, there is a subtle, yet noticeable eye-line mismatch and, thus, the shot of the woman being raped cannot be identified as his POV shot. The camera takes up a position that is very close to the male character, yet it does not identify with his gaze. This sequence of shots produces an effect that I would call 'disembodied intimacy' in that the camera stays very close to the character's body, yet its point of view indicates a distance from it. This initial subtle form of discontinuous editing, along with the lack of a conventional establishing shot, prevents the emergence of a consistent narrative space with clearly inscribed gender positions.

Furthermore, the prologue also manipulates the image-sound relationship to block the effect of conventional seamless realism.⁸ Throughout the sequence,

there is a noticeable manipulation of the standard sound hierarchy. Although the soundtrack includes some realistic sounds, these are mixed with non-diegetic sound effects and music that together produce a near-cacophonous effect. Mikołaj Trzaska's score, which is heard during the prologue, is not the typical symphonic music used to build up dramatic effect; rather, it is a sequence of dull sounds that do not produce any identifiable harmonic structure. Katarzyna Dzida-Hamela, the sound director of *Rose*, aptly notes that Trzaska's score has a 'specific timbre, non-classical form and it expresses "states" rather than action.' Further she comments: 'The scenes of cruelty, rapes, and violence are filled up with unexpected "blows" of sound and the cascades of the "off-musical" sounds of a saxophone' (Dzida-Hamela 2015: 15). While explaining the general concept of the sound she conceived for *Rose*, Dzida-Hamela indicates that she was mostly inspired by Smarzowski's non-classical modes of both narration and editing. She further explains that, in *Rose*, fragments of the same or similar shots are linked together without using inserts or a shot/reverse shot sequence as is prescribed by the continuity editing system. Furthermore, she says that Smarzowski eliminated multiple frames from a single shot that produced the effect of a jump cut. In general, the visual information is condensed and limited to a minimum in order to intensify cinematic time (Dzida-Hamela 2015: 15). To parallel this discontinuous editing pattern, Dzida-Hamela decided to use similarly discontinuous sound, and to create 'parallel sound collisions' (Dzida-Hamela 2015: 15). The prologue introduces such contrapuntal sound that establishes a kind of formal matrix that is employed throughout the film.

Arguably, the use of non-transparent cinematic codes in the prologue of *Rose* moves it away from the generic conventions of a standard war film or realistic historical drama. The brutal imagery that is not embedded within the coherent narrative appears to be a pure display of violence

8 I am using the term 'seamless realism' as it is commonly used in film studies. In *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*, Susan Hayward distinguishes two types of film realism: 'First, seamless realism, whose ideological function is to disguise the illusion of realism. [...] Nothing in the camera-work, the use of lighting, colour, sound or editing draws attention to the illusionistic nature of the reality effect' (Hayward 2004: 311–312).

against women. Due to the prominence of sound as an affective equivalent and containment of the events,⁹ the limits of the visual representation of suffering are foregrounded and probed. The occasional privileging of sound over image in the opening scene reinvents the original form of theatrical melodrama in which music was used to express emotions. The lack of dialogue, and difficulty of identifying sounds of atonal music, aesthetically estranges the scene of rape, blocking the effect of seamless realism. Consequently, the scene prevents the presentation of the raped woman through the prism of what Sarah Hagelin identifies as 'sentimental vulnerability', which makes women 'especially vulnerable to pain and injury, and reads pain and injury as debilitating to the female subject' (Hagelin 2013: 3).

The non-transparent cinematic codes of the prologue suggest that a wartime rape is an event that cannot be contained within the standard modes of cinematic representation and language communication. As Elaine Scarry notes, '[p]hysical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned' (Scarry 1985: 4). Following Scarry's line of argument, Sara Ahmed argues that an abundance of cultural images evoking bodily pain testify to its unrepresentability (Ahmed 2004: 22). *Rose* explores the possibility of overcoming these limitations through the non-standard use of sound, but also by means of employing devices typical of extreme cinema.

According to William Brown, extreme cinema consists 'of graphic depictions of sex, violence, and sexual violence' (Brown 2013: 27). He emphasises that, in this type of cinema, it is not only the specific image content, but also distinct formal organisation of this content: '...while scenes of explicit sexual violence do make us question the veridical nature or otherwise of the

image, it is the mediated nature of what we are seeing that helps bring us toward an ethical engagement with the image' (Brown 2013: 28). In his discussion of extreme cinema, Scott Mackenzie also emphasises the importance of its ethical aspect. He traces the genealogy of this tendency in the recent cinema that first emerged in France during the 1990s as *cinéma brut* to Bertolt Brecht's theory of alienation and Antonin Artaud's concept of 'Theatre of Cruelty' (Mackenzie 2010: 163). In the case of the latter, the theatrical spectacle was meant to produce an effect of spectatorial shock leading to moral recognition. 'In the context of *cinéma brut*, this shock is related to the production of violence against women and its at times problematic and complex relationship to the representation of sexuality' (Mackenzie 2010: 163).

Although Smarzowski has never declared an affinity with extreme cinema, *Rose* as well as his other films, share some characteristics with *cinéma brut*,¹⁰ which is especially manifest in the rape scenes. However, unlike the French films, Smarzowski does not use long takes to present these acts of violence against women. Instead of this realism-enhancing camera work, he employs discontinuous editing that is aimed at spectatorial shock. The first scene of *Rose's* rape is presented from Tadeusz's perspective. While working in the field, he sees a Soviet motorbike

9 In her article, Morstin also emphasises the significance of the emotional aspect of the opening scene (Morstin 2012: 204).

10 In her essay, Kalinowska emphasises the extreme forms of bodily violence present in Smarzowski's film. She provides a detailed description of this transgressive imagery used in *The Wedding* (Wesele, Wojtek Smarzowski, Poland, 2004): 'While the wedding guests imbibe gallons of vodka, bodily fluids spill out: the mobster shoots Wojnar's finger, the cameraman – the bride's former lover – is beaten to a pulp, some guests engage in sexual acts, while others, afflicted with diarrhea, line up to use the filthy bathroom. This revolting orgy of abjection threatens to obliterate the boundaries that mark out what we habitually refer to as civilized human behavior, and thereby to undermine the existing social order' (Kalinowska 2016: 122–123). As she argues these images are always aimed at producing a spectatorial shock that will resonate with the viewers' ethical system. Likewise, Szpulak also recognises the significance of the excessive representation of violence in *Rose*, claiming that it originates in 'black romanticism' as represented by E. T. A. Hoffman or Edgar Allan Poe and its Polish variant as represented by Antoni Malczewski and Seweryn Goszczyński (Szpulak 2016: 101–102).



Wojtek Smarzowski, *Rose (Róża)*, Poland, 2011).

FIGURE 1. The first shot of Tadeusz (Marcin Dorociński).

FIGURE 2. The mass rape of Masurian women by Soviet soldiers.

approaching the house. When he starts running towards it, Smarzowski utilises the aforementioned discontinuity editing method (see Dzida-Hamela 2015: 15). In the scene's first shot, the camera is located behind Tadeusz as he looks at the bike. Instead of cutting to a close-up of him, and following with a standard reaction shot, he is shown as frantically leaving the frame. Then there are two brief shots that produce an illusion of continuous movement, yet upon closer inspection, it is clear that multiple frames have been removed in the process of editing, which breaks his movement through space into incompatible fragments. This sequence of discontinuous images becomes relatively stabilised when Tadeusz enters the house and sees a Soviet soldier mounting Rose's body. However, the handheld camera maintains its instability, and as the scene ends, the image of Rose is reflected in a broken mirror, which reinforces the initial effect of the fragmentation produced by editing. The soundtrack, as described above by Dzida-Hamela, produces the effect of a loud clangour colliding with the woman's scream.

Similarly, in the scene depicting the collective rape of the Masurian women by Soviet soldiers, Smarzowski employs a montage of disconnected images accompanied by cacophonous music over the muffled diegetic screams of the women and male laughter. The scene is introduced later as Rose's flashback, yet she is unable to present it in a narratively coherent way. She can only say: 'When the Russians came ... They would all the time' and then raises hands to her face as if trying to cover her eyes. The following chaotic juxtaposition of long shots and close-ups contrasts with a somehow unnaturally well-ordered placement of female figures within the frame space. The women are lying in an even row and the bodies of the rapist soldiers move rhythmically, almost in unison. In addition, all the men are making the same gesture, covering the women's mouths with their hands to stop them from screaming. **(Figure 2)** The constantly changing camera angle and distance alternate between the

subjective and objective narration. In the initial close-up shot, Rose looks off-screen and the next shot reveals that she is looking at the window of a nearby building. Behind it we can see a blurred silhouette, which later turns out to be her daughter Jadwiga. Then, there is another cut, and the girl's subjective high angle long shot reveals the actual scale of the sexual violence being perpetrated.¹¹ As there is barely any narrative context for the scene, the rapid change of camera distance between close-ups and long shots swiftly shifts the spectatorial positioning from emotional engagement to detachment.

Although, in the rape scene, Rose along with other women experiences violence and pain, her sharp gaze directed at the space where her daughter is hiding manifests her ability to distance herself from the situation, and even, to seemingly control it. With her silent gaze, she seems to be saying to her child 'stay there, you are safe there'. The commanding gaze she maintains during the rape scene prevents the viewers from feeling pity for her character; instead they are most likely to respond with shock and rage. Thus, Rose represents what Hagelin calls a 'resistant vulnerability' which 'suggests that we alter our basic assumption that a suffering body is vulnerable and needs our pity and protection' (Hagelin 2013: 4). This scene, and many others that present suffering bodies, put the viewers' cultural sensibilities on trial, specifically their 'fear [of] divorcing pity from pain' (Hagelin 2013: 4).

Another rape attack upon Rose happens after she has been diagnosed with cancer. It is preceded by a scene depicting the prolonged pain that the illness is causing. Once again, Tadeusz is not at home when the Soviet soldiers invade it. Upon

11 Justyna Jaworska also recognises the importance of the rape scene being presented through the female, rather than male gaze (Jaworska 2012: 65, n. 2). In contrast, in their discussion of the film, three Polish feminist critics identify the rape scenes as 'pornographic'. In their discussion of *Rose*, which is almost exclusively limited to the analysis of the narrative content, they conclude that Smarzowski's film fails to convey female subjectivity and it privileges the male protagonist (Dunin et al. 2015).

his arrival he sees Rose being assaulted. Tadeusz's inability to protect a woman – first his wife and then Rose – demonstrates that wartime rape involves both gender and ethnic/national oppression. The authors of an introduction to an anthology *Rape in Wartime* comment on this double subordination:

Wartime rape ... produces a relationship of inequality between two kinds of men: those who assert their physical and societal virility by committing the assault and those for whom this same act represents a symbolic castration owing to their inability to protect their wives, sisters or mothers. (Branche et al. 2012: 4)

Although the film is focused on the female body in pain, the suffering male body is also significantly foregrounded. When Tadeusz gets hurt during one of the Soviet attacks on the farm, Rose gently tends his wounds, almost mimicking his earlier affective gestures in caring for her body. Moreover, later in the film, when the Communist authorities arrest him, there is a prolonged sequence of his torture. In the film's epilogue, when Tadeusz returns to the farm to take care of Rose's daughter, he is hardly recognisable. He is bald, with a long grey beard and his disfigured nose protrudes from his face, signifying his abused body. His clothing, especially the scarf that covers his head, his shapeless trousers and jacket, ultimately prevent his body from signifying masculine virility. **(Figure 3)** Although his body most probably did not suffer sexual violence, it was nevertheless abused and this visibly affects its sexual attractiveness and potential. Unlike his cinematic predecessors, he does not die a heroic death. To a certain extent, both the female and male protagonists of Smarzowski's film are displaced from their sexual bodies. Both bodies are 'caught up in the symbolic signification of terror and ruination' (Gusain 2008: 36).

Smarzowski's *Rose* does not perpetuate the binary gender logic in the war discourse as described by Froula. The film offers neither a mythical man-making narrative nor an actual process of women's un-making through the act of sexual violence. The opposite rather occurs in that the male protagonist does not represent any narrative agency supporting the normative notion of masculinity. While his body is also subjected to violence, it is not elevated through heroic death. Thus, the film presents the un-making process of both female and male bodies. In consequence, both their violated bodies represent the previously mentioned 'resistant vulnerability' that 'proves that vulnerability needn't be gendered female' and 'abused women ... don't want our pity' (Hagelin 2013: 4). Moreover, Rose and Tadeusz reclaim their violated bodies in their erotic relationship. Rose's suffering body again becomes, even if very briefly, a source of erotic pleasure.

THE BIKE, THE BOAT, AND THE KNIFE – THE RE-MAKING OF THE FEMALE BODY

The brief episode of Rose riding her bicycle together with her daughter is preceded by a scene depicting the first visit of the Eastern repatriates. They come to introduce themselves as new neighbours, bringing a bottle of homemade alcohol and some food. Tadeusz pours the vodka into the glasses performing the traditional role of a male host. In contrast, Rose does not behave in the way usually expected of a hostess. Instead of serving food to the guests, she sits with them at the table and smiles. **(Figure 4)** At some point Tadeusz sits next to Rose and embraces her tightly. She does not protest, just rests her head on his shoulder and their bodies become more closely entwined, a fact that is noticed by their guests. The woman (Kinga Preis) says to her husband (Jacek Braciak): 'Look, Władek. Like two turtledoves...' to which he responds 'Well ... like us once' and starts tickling his wife to her apparent delight. This is followed by a brief episode in which Tadeusz shares some potatoes with Władek, which symbolises



Wojtek Smarzowski, *Rose* (*Róża*, Poland, 2011).

FIGURE 3. Tadeusz's emasculated body.

FIGURE 4. The first visit of the Eastern repatriates.

the establishment of a neighbourly bond and solidarity.

In the next episode Tadeusz goes fishing. On his way home, non-diegetic music with a slow female vocal begins to play. As he approaches the house, the camera starts circling his body. In the next shot, we see Rose and her daughter sharing a bike. The ride is evidently as awkward as it is enjoyable for both of them. Their constant struggle to maintain their balance looks exhilarating rather than frightening. Tadeusz attempts to join in and share their joy. First, he takes the handlebars and drags the bicycle forward. Then we see him cycling, with Rose sitting on the frame and her daughter on the baggage rack. Apparently, three persons on one bike are too many, and after a while, only Rose and her daughter are riding, with Tadeusz walking awkwardly next to them. His stork-like steps produce a rather funny spectacle of a man, who only a short while ago, was acting as both a responsible provider and protector of his family. **(Figure 5)** Importantly, the scene does not transform into a moment of erotically charged intimacy for the couple. It ends as it started with Rose and her daughter enjoying their biking adventure. Here, the women are organising entertainment for themselves. Their joy demonstrates that they are experiencing their bike ride almost like the first women who used these 'machines' – 'delighting in the sense of mobility and freedom' (Wosk 2001: 89). Indeed, the bike in this episode appears to be a 'freedom machine' as dubbed by the historian Robert A. Smith (quoted in Penn 2010: 6). Importantly, the bike episode uses fast and dynamic editing just like the earlier rape scenes did. Employing the same cinematic devices to depict both bodily suffering and bodily pleasure establishes the female body as the site of both experiences and, thus marks the film's resistance to transformation into a national allegory founded exclusively on the innocent, but violated, female body.

In two short, but important, episodes that occur soon thereafter a style that differs radically from the bicycle scene is

used. In the first, Rose is tending to the wounds and bruises Tadeusz has received from the Soviet soldiers whom he encountered on his way home. In a long static shot, she is standing over him carefully cleaning and disinfecting his face and body. Arguably, she is behaving in exactly the same way as he did earlier when he was taking care of her body while it was in pain. Thus, both male and female bodies are presented as first being 'un-made' by the enemies and then being 're-made' by careful gestures of care and love. This bodily symmetry and balance are also mirrored in the following episode of erotic nocturnal intimacy. Rose and Tadeusz are in bed, and again, there is a long take of their close-up that is maintained throughout the entire episode. They occupy the same amount of screen space and the low-key available lighting renders their faces barely visible, which curtails the voyeuristic pleasure of the viewer. Rose initiates the intimacy. However, she suddenly stops and moves away from Tadeusz as if she was unable to overcome her trauma. He passively accepts this and does not try to get closer to her. Despite the fact that this bodily intimacy does not lead to sexual fulfilment, Rose's erotic initiative can be seen as another attempt to 're-make' her raped and violated body.¹² Arguably, she is trying to re-attain her bodily agency.

However, Rose's attempts to regain control of her body are in vain. Before long, she is diagnosed with cancer of the uterus and her body is suffering again. Again, Tadeusz tends to her body trying to lessen the pain with analgesic injections. These provide only temporary relief to Rose's suffering body, and the pain returns more intensely and severely. Importantly, she uses the rare intervals between the bouts of pain to experience bodily pleasure in the same way she most likely did before the war. After one of these frequent painful nights, she wakes Tadeusz early in the

12 Szpulak also discusses Rose's narrative agency, however he does not examine its bodily manifestation (Szpulak 2016: 39–40).

morning and asks him to follow her. Together with her daughter, they take him on a fishing expedition. Rose is rowing, her daughter is steering the boat, and Tadeusz is sitting, enjoying the journey. When the boat stops, Rose's daughter Jadwiga is fishing. Both women are capable of using their bodies to perform work that is traditionally associated with masculinity. They are able to move freely across space from one place to another, and they are capable of acquiring food for themselves. In a sense, they are self-sufficient. They decide to take Tadeusz on this trip not to get help from him, but to share this joyous moment with him. Like the earlier scene of the bike ride, this is also accompanied by muted diegetic sound, repeating the musical motif used previously, which is peaceful, yet due to the low pitch sound, also somewhat disconcerting.

The most radical and significant attempt at exercising female bodily agency occurs in the scene of the last rape. As was often the case in earlier scenes, Tadeusz returns home from town too late to prevent the Soviet soldiers from violating Rose's home. This time it is not only Rose who is an object of sexual violence, but also Amelia, the repatriate from the East, who after their new house was incinerated by the Soviets, is staying with her family at the home of hospitable neighbours. When the Soviet soldiers arrive, Wlodek is unable to protect the women and both are raped. After returning home, Tadeusz drags the attacker away from Rose, yet he cannot subdue him. Suddenly, Rose appears armed with a knife and enters the fray attempting to help Tadeusz. Although she is sick and weak, for the first time, she does not passively accept the violence, but decides to fight back. The Soviet soldier violently pushes her away and is just about to hit Tadeusz with an axe when he is felled by a gunshot that comes from off-screen. The next shot shows Jadwiga, gun in hand. The image reverses the one from Rose's flashback, when her daughter, hiding behind the curtain, observed her mother being raped along with several other women through a window.

Now she asserts herself, fights back and succeeds.¹³ (**Figure 6**)

Soon Rose's health deteriorates. On her deathbed, with the pastor as her witness, she asks Jadwiga to marry Tadeusz. After the girl silently nods in acceptance of her mother's wish, Rose asks Tadeusz whether he also accepts her plan. He also silently nods to express his consent. After she dies, the pastor returns to perform a funeral ritual in German, despite his earlier declaration that he would be performing all prayers in Polish, as requested by the new Communist authorities. Along with Tadeusz, Jadwiga, the pastor, and an older Masurian couple also attend Rose's funeral. Their participation in Rose's funeral is ambiguous. On the one hand, while she was alive, she was somewhat detached from her community, and on the other hand, she is mourned by its members, which surely confirms her attachment to it. Thus, the mourning ritual can be seen as an act that recognises her Masurian identity that was questioned by both her Polish neighbours, who saw her as German, and by the Soviet violators who, with their massive acts of rape, transformed her into a generic female body capable of providing them with instant gratification of their sexual drive. An extreme long shot of her funeral procession moving through a desolate winter field marks her final and ultimate decision to stay in the land from which she was to be expelled by the new Communist authorities. Unlike most of the female allegories of motherland, Rose's body serves, not as a site of inscription for hegemonic national narrative, but rather as an embodiment of the counterhegemonic historical experience of the marginalised subjects marked with both gender and ethnic difference. If the new Communist authorities wanted to unmake Rose's Masurian identity, her funeral, as planned by her, is a post-mortem act of its re-making. Importantly, in Rose's character no single aspect of her identity, be it national, gender, class, religious or ethnic,

13 See Szpulak's comments on the scene as demonstrating female narrative agency (Szpulak 2016: 151).



Wojtek Smarzowski, *Rose* (*Róża*, Poland, 2011).

FIGURE 5. Two women and a bike.

FIGURE 6. Rose's daughter, Jadwiga (Malwina Buss), fights back.

dominates over the others. Her character is presented as a constantly changing constellation of various identities that do not always come to terms with one another, but instead produce various ruptures and tensions.

CONCLUSION

As Matthew Evangelista notes in his book *Gender, Nationalism, and War: Conflict on the Movie Screen*, 'Women serve as "boundary makers" between different national, ethnic, and religious communities, and thus might be expected to play an important role when such communities come into violent conflict' (Evangelista 2011: 1). However, in Smarzowski's film, Rose problematises these differences rather than reinforcing them. As she represents the German-speaking Masurian ethnic minority practicing a Protestant religion, she cannot be embedded into any singular nationalistic discourse. Arguably, her identity might be located somewhere between Polish, German and Masurian. Therefore, the repeated acts of rape upon her body cannot be allegorised as the 'rape of the motherland'.¹⁴ Instead, these are acts of male violence against an individual female body as they occur in a specific historical situation. In that sense, the character of Rose resists her body being appropriated by the national discourse and its collective post-traumatic narratives. Instead it 'reside[s] on a spectrum between relative fixity and radical flux' (Richardson 2016: 34–35). As Michael Richardson explains, this bodily potential for change and transition seems to be where 'bodies are most intensely realized. Such change is not necessarily concerned with transformation of form, but rather with an openness to potential that generates and activates the body's relations to the world' (Richardson 2016: 35). Using the radically contrasting aesthetic conventions of

melodrama and extreme cinema, *Rose* presents the female body as resisting a singular ideological inscription, instead portraying it as submitting to the gendered violence of war, and simultaneously, resisting it. Although Smarzowski's *Rose* is 'exposing human bodies to violence as a hermeneutic structure for configuring contemporary stories and history', like many other recent films (De Pascalis 2016: 366), it still offers affective structures that map out the emotional topographies of war.

14 In her article 'War Spectacles of Rape', Patrycja Cembrzyńska claims that '[p]olitical instrumentalisation of rape, transforming a raped woman into a national cause, is an appropriation of the rape victims' (Cembrzyńska 2014: 139). Rose's hybrid identity prevents such appropriation.

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