

Amazing Year 2023: Recent Remakes of Polish Film Classics and their Reception

Anna Gutowska, Department of Humanities, University of Kielce, Poland

Abstract

The year 2023 brought a new phenomenon to Poland's fairly conservative film landscape. This phenomenon was the appearance of three major remakes of popular Communist-era films, which in themselves were adaptations of earlier 20th century novels.

The 2023 remakes were (1) *Forgotten Love* (distributed by Netflix) a melodrama set in 1920s, and a remake of a cult classic released in 1981, (2) an animated film *Peasants*, helmed by DK Welchman and Hugh Welchman, a second adaptation of a canonical novel by Władysław Reymont, following a widely successful Communist-era blockbuster of 1971, and finally (3) *Kleks Academy*, a children's film set in a school for aspiring magicians, which was a loose adaptation of a hugely popular book by Jan Brzechwa and followed in the footsteps of a 1983 film adaptation, which was a great hit in the whole of Eastern Bloc in 1980s, spawning three sequels.

As opposed to larger national film industries in which repeated adaptations of the same canonical novels, as well as various forms of remakes, reboots and appropriations are normalized, such as the US or the UK, the advent of the three repeated adaptations in 2023 met with confusion and resistance from many critics and audience-members in Poland. The remakes were called "unnecessary" and "presumptuous", with large sections of reviews devoted to comparative analyses of the earlier and newer adaptations. However, the huge box office success of all three films led to a gradual change of tone of both critics and audiences, who came to grudgingly accept the right of filmmakers to make repeated adaptations of the same material.

My paper will look at the reception of the three films, looking at the tenor of the professional reviews and on the audience opinions voiced on social media and on the Polish film review aggregator website called Filmweb, analyzing the gradual change of tone. My contention is that the lively debate surrounding the three films would not have been possible outside of the digital context. The sense of connectedness, equality and immediacy brought by

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the social media contributed to the vibrant public conversation around the issues of repeated adaptation, appropriation and fidelity. The case study will hopefully be instrumental in illuminating the broader picture of the change in film reception and media consumption brought by the advent of social media.

Keywords

Forgotten Love, Peasants, Kleks Academy, remake, film adaptation, social media

Bio

Anna Gutowska works as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities at the Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce, Poland, and as Head of Development at the WFDiF Feature and Documentary Film Studios in Warsaw. In the years 2017-2019 she held a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship at the Linnaeus University Centre of Intermedial and Multimodal Studies in Växjö, Sweden. She has published on screen adaptations of Jane Austen's novels, neo-Victorian film and television, and biographical screen products portraying nineteenth-century subjects. Her recent publications include a chapter about authenticity and anachronism in HBO's series *The Great*, published in an edited volume *Truth Claims Across Media* (Palgrave, 2023) and an article on Emily Dickinson biopics co-authored with Dr Barbara Braid, published in *Neo-Victorian Studies* (Special Issue on Biofiction, 2023).

ORCID-ID/Websites

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8244-0648>

Academia.edu: <https://ujk.academia.edu/AnnaGutowska>