

named after her son, and rushes to London to see what her husband has been plotting. The film presents these last few scenes as an awakening to Agnes as she sees that her husband did not move on from the death of their child and is still grieving. He turned his grief into art, with himself playing a father as a ghost, showing he wishes he could trade his life for his sons.

*Hamnet* is historical fiction, and it is expected to be inaccurate because modern films are made for entertainment purposes. The film is based on the theory that Shakespeare wrote the play “Hamlet” as a response to his son’s death. The play follows a young man named Hamlet as he seeks revenge for the deaths of his family members. The story of the play has no similarities to the death or characteristics of his son, and many scholars debunked the idea that the play was written as an expression of grief after losing his son. The Great Plague of London is part of the background of the lives of the Shakespeare family, which is accurate since the final days of the plague are taking place when William first arrived in London. Hamnet most likely died of the plague; however, the film portrays his death as supernatural. The film also refers to Anne Hathaway as Agnes because of a spelling pattern of the seventeenth century. In the film, Agnes has a deep spiritual connection with nature, even being nicknamed a witch’s daughter by the townspeople, yet this is a fictional aspect of her personality added by Maggie O’Farrell and Chloé Zhao. Fans of Shakespeare and historical fiction will enjoy this film.

*Brisa Sirena*

Maciej Pieprzycza, director. *Ołowiane Dzieci* [*Lead Children*]. Orient Film, Netflix, 2026.

Based on true events, the 2026 Netflix limited series *Ołowiane Dzieci* [*Lead Children*] tells the story of Polish pediatrician Jolanta Wadowska-Król (nicknamed Jola). Set in 1970s Szopienice, Poland, Dr. Wadowska-Król uncovers the horrifying cases of lead poisoning in neighborhood children, and the subsequent cover-up by local authorities. Throughout the limited series, Dr. Wadowska-Król battles with the local capitalist and political administrations to bring her findings

to light across six approximately one-hour long episodes. With preparations underway for a visit to Szopienice from Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, the town's prominent economic and political figures have a vested interest in keeping Jola's discovery private.

In the jarring opening scene, a blindfolded Jola is led by kidnapers to an industrial area where she is left with Hubert Niedziela, an officer of the local secret police. Told through flashbacks, *Lead Children* works its way back to this opening scene. Along the way, the audience is transported back into 1970s Communist Poland. As Szopienice prepares for General Secretary Brezhnev's visit, Jola is out for a day at the fair with her family when an attending child falls ill. Jola's suspicions begin to rise, and her attempts at following up on the status of the child are met with resistance from hospital administrators. Resorting to deception to sneak into the hospital, Jola discovers that local hospitals have wards of sick children hidden away. These bedridden children are weak and exhibiting symptoms first thought to be anemia, with the sickest of the children vomiting blood and losing their vision. As the scale of the epidemic begins to dawn on her, Jola realizes the children are becoming ill due to pollution from the smelting plant and appeals to plant administrators, the children's parents, nurses, and other medical staff to join her cause.

Jola's activities put her on the radar of Zdzislaw Grudzień, the operator of the smelting plant, who sends party secret police officer Hubert Niedziela to monitor and sabotage the doctor and her work. Getting close to Jola, Niedziela wiretaps and surveils Jola, while simultaneously inserting himself into her life as an ally to her cause. When Niedziela's tactics fail to stop Jola, party officials resort to preventing her from defending her dissertation for her PhD. Despite these hurdles, Dr. Wadowska-Król perseveres in her advocacy work for the children and eventually brings her findings to light. Coming full circle, the confrontation with Niedziela sets the tone for the remainder of the series, where Jola's fight reaches its crescendo at the smelting plant.

The real Dr. Wadowska-Król passed away in 2023 after a career of child advocacy. Her work, as depicted in the show, led to the acknowledgment of the scale of lead poisoning caused by the pollut-

ants from smelting plants, and the relocation of families living within its vicinity. Dr. Wadowska-Król continued her pediatric work until she retired in 2011, and in 2021, the University of Silesia awarded her with an honorary doctorate in recognition of her work. *Lead Children* offers a view into life in Communist Poland through the lens of a doctor who refused to fall in line with party demands, and the resulting actions taken against her because of it. The tactics of the secret police, through their methods of coercion, sabotage, intimidation, and even violence, provide a glimpse into a specific time and place in world history.

*Lead Children* is an enthralling limited series that captures a micro historical moment in the greater story of Poland and appeals to fans of medical histories, and of period pieces set in the Cold War era. The series brings to life the era's atmosphere of mistrust and subversion. Using the perspective of a young doctor to tell the pitfalls of challenging the system, yet also showing the eventual triumph over it, the narrative transitions between tense confrontations, frantic public clashes, tender familial moments, and cold, frustrating bureaucratic settings to show the audience what it looks like when one stands up to the system. Dr. Wadowska-Król is ultimately successful in spreading her message, but at a tremendous cost to her personal and professional life.

*Henry Truong*