

## SUPERHERO OF THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC ON THE EXAMPLE OF ANDRZEJ KONDRATIUK'S *HYDRO-PUZZLE*

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The mass culture of the Polish People's Republic – film, militia novels and comic books – are filled with heroes characterized by an accumulation of physical and mental capabilities developed to the degree that is simply impossible in real life. They solve extremely complicated cases, they can easily win any fights with their opponents and they always know what to say at any moment. In addition, they are guardians of public order, effectively standing against and fighting evil.

Such a general description shows that Polish superheroes are hardly different from the characters created at the same time (or slightly earlier) by foreign artists, especially American and British ones, who provided the audience with a ton of entertainment, while showing the stories and adventures of superheroes such as Superman, Batman, and James Bond. It is enough, however, to briefly, but thoroughly read *Captain Żbik* (*Kapitan Żbik*), any short story from the *Ewa Calls 07* (*Ewa wzywa 07*) series or to watch a few Polish crime and spy films made in the 1950s and 1960s to note that the time in which these works were created, the political system and the requirements of censorship left a clear mark on them. The recipe for the Polish superhero, as well as the environment in which they worked, had to be special, particularly given that they were supposed to stand in opposition to Western models. But what were the differences? What configuration of 'superheroic' attributes brought the characters closer to the official ideal, and what characteristics made them bad – a personification of evil? Searching for answers to these questions is the main purpose of this article. Its scope will be also determined by such issues as superhero as a modern myth, Manichean division

of the world and the vision of the fight against evil present in the works using the figures of superheroes, as well as the propaganda image of Poland as a socialist paradise and Western Europe and America as a root of all evil.

The analysis of the superhero of the Polish People's Republic will be carried out on the example of As, the protagonist of *Hydro-puzzle* (*Hydrozagadka*), a television film from 1970 directed by Andrzej Kondratiuk – a particularly special protagonist, given that he was based on American superheroes. As, however, apart from imitating and parodying his colleagues from across the ocean, also serves as an excellent representative of the 'Polish superman'. The creators endowed him with many characteristics directly referring to other figures of the native mass culture, including the comic book hero Captain Żbik and Stanisław Kolicki, also known as Hans Kloss, Agent J-23 from the extremely popular *More Than Life at Stake* (*Stawka większa niż życie*) TV series. What is more, As is a living dictionary of well-known propaganda slogans of the 1960s. While the accumulation of such references makes this character heavily exaggerated, and thus grotesque, it also provides so many models according to which the ideal image of an officer, spy and a normal citizen was then shaped, that they would easily be enough for even a dozen or so 'serious' superheroes.

## WEST IS ALWAYS SUSPICIOUS

As is a super citizen presented in a distorting mirror. On the one hand, due to his resemblance to Western superheroes, he is an exceptional figure in Polish cinema; however, on the other hand, he also has all the necessary characteristics of a socialist superhero. Given this excess, the figure of As – unlike Captain Sowa, especially Captain Żbik or Hans Kloss – constantly reminds the viewer that he is only a part of the created world, not a living protagonist, but an ideogram that bears particular significance – 'a mythologised being, a personification of virtue or an entire set of various virtues. As an ideogram, and not a character, he appears with all its conventionality – the excessive number of symbols, which dominate over realism' (Szyłak 1998: 38). This difference may, however, serve to highlight similarities, since parody, like a magnifying glass, improves the clarity of the employed models and makes them easier to identify and discover.

One of the staples of the propaganda in the Polish People's Republic was a clear division of the world into the East and the West, and this division

was not only geographical and political, but also moral. In the comic book series about Captain Żbik, the most dangerous criminals, who participated in the most advanced and most widespread criminal plots, always came from the West, mainly from the Federal Republic of Germany. It was the source of the stream of illegal money flows, thanks to which the mafia or madmen tried to build a network of connections in Poland in order to make it easier for themselves to commit spectacular and profitable crimes:

the client always appears in the background, they never take part in the 'wet work', leaving it – and the associated risks – to Polish criminals. This overriding role of the Germans can be seen as an example of capitalist relations, which are implemented illegally (...) on the foundation of people's democracy. Besides, the payment offered to Poles for carrying out their bidding is clearly 'imperialist' in nature – most often they got payment in US dollars and a passport to escape to the West (Wycinek 2010: 119-120).

Comic books thus taught the readers how they should approach their western neighbours. When a German extends an offer of cooperation to a Polish scientist, and when he refuses, the man orders his murder (*I Call 0-21 [Wzywam 0-21]*), while another, the son of a former SS officer, orders to steal an icon in which he expects to find something even more valuable (*The Mystery of the Icon [Tajemnica ikony]*), and these are only few of the many examples, the reader gets a clear message that West Germany is the root of all evil – but never East Germany, it was always the Federal Republic of Germany – and people should be wary of it, make sure to pursue the perpetrators and eliminate them.

In this case, West Germany is an embodiment of (...) the Third Reich and all the negative values attributed to it. In this case, West Germany continues the fascist foreign policy, which aims at, among others, stealing both material and cultural goods from the Polish state, as well as valuable information and inventions – achievements of Polish engineers (ibid.: 119).

Therefore, an exemplary citizen of the socialist state must always stand in opposition to those, who have been deceived by the charms of the capitalist world – including everything that this world was normally associated with, for example splendour and wealth, excessive (and misunderstood) love of freedom and far-reaching demoralisation. 'Cards, vodka, filthy jokes,

pranks. (...) A mullet and sideburns – this is what identifies the Western culture’ which served as an inspiration to our beatniks, who, according to the officials, were hooligans that we had to deal with by: ‘subjecting them to contempt and scorn, and then chase them away’<sup>1</sup>.

This image of ‘inspirations’ with Western culture is also valid for the characters of *Hydro-puzzle*. The good ones stand up for their values (science, social welfare, health and safety regulations), while the bad ones have connections behind the Iron Curtain and are filled with false ideals of the Western world. ‘I read The Times and the Epoch. I only drink Ballantine’s. I smoke Winstons. I have Wintermans – foreign chocolate-flavoured cigars – for you’, lists Jurek, a womanizer, who also boasts his consumptionist lifestyle. Doctor Plama lives by a similar philosophy. ‘Well, my mother was a manicurist and a pedicurist. He was the only child, spoiled by his father, a banker, who sent him to Heidelberg, where he wasted his talent in casinos and brothels of Western Europe. For example, he bathed circus performers in champagne. A party animal, (...) or... how do you say it today? A playboy!’, said his former classmate, Professor Milczarek.

## GROTESQUE INCARNATION OF SUPERMAN

The opposite of the demonic Dr. Plama and Jurek, who lives for the worldly pleasures, is the impeccable As:

a bachelor who does not drink nor smoke, graduated school with straight A, an amateur athlete, finalist of cross-country races, vaccinated, never suffered from mumps, friendly, punctual, diligent, a great employee who smiled every day, active, physically and mentally fit. Such a multitude of positive traits in one person results in unusual power and energy. That’s why our hero is a true phenomenon! (fragment of the movie’s script quoted after: Łuczak 2004: 53).

It is a model of a socialist citizen who, thanks to the accumulation of carefully selected advantages, possessed superhuman skills. But, as Przemysław Dudziński (2012: 97) points out, ‘one may speculate that As’ superhuman skills are potentially available to everyone, since he is the final

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<sup>1</sup> *Camera Operator Peeped You (Operator was podpatrzył)* (1953), Polska Kronika Filmowa 17/53, WFDiF.

product of the system, which aims at shaping the ideal socialist man, the ultimate stage of the Marxist vision of human history’.

As easily overcomes gravity or pushes a train with attached cars. He also always has a slogan taken straight from a bulletin board or a propaganda text (‘Health and safety regulations are important, especially around trains!’). As a supercitizen, As serves as the personification of the socialist cliché. He lives by the rule that alcohol harms health, and thus he is an embodiment of teetotalism – alcohol is his total opposite, like two sides of the coin, which cannot exist separately (since alcohol could kill him, like kryptonite could kill the Superman). However, there is more to it than just common-sense approach to health and safety regulations. Walczak became As – he received the highest rank among agents – thanks to living perfectly in line with the socialist ideal. He cannot afford to deviate from the rules, because without upholding them constantly, he would go back to being an ordinary designer in one of Warsaw’s offices. Therefore, he remains vigilant in order to be able to do the right thing at any time. He also recommends others to do the same: ‘You were a victim of an evil conspiracy (...) I would advise you to remain vigilant in the future’. However, most importantly, he always stands up for the victim and brings the perpetrators to justice. He never hesitates to risk his life and, in the face of an upcoming catastrophe, he rams Dr. Plama’s underwater headquarters. Of course, he remembers to wear a helmet – the most important element of personal protective equipment, protecting his head.

However, in the early 1970s, when *Hydro-puzzle* premiered on the screens for the first time, ‘the Polish Superman’ played by Józef Nowak was already associated with the hero model before he did or said anything. His face, which is now much less recognisable, was widely known at the time, mainly from socialist realist films such as *Cellulose Souvenir (Pamiątka z celulozy)* and *Under the Phrygian Star (Pod gwiazdą frygijską)* by Jerzy Kawalerowicz. But even in real life, Nowak ‘did not really differ from the model of a perfect citizen parodied in *Hydro-puzzle* – he was a member of the Polish United Workers’ Party and the Voluntary Reserve of the Citizen’s Militia, and he received a Bronze Medal for his services for the defence of the country’ (ibid.: 89). After starring in *Hydro-puzzle*, he expanded his collection of trophies and awards by adding a golden ring won at the Military Song Festival and the Medal of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Polish People’s Republic

awarded for at least fifteen years of professional work and his involvement in social and political activity.

The fact that such a distinguished actor as Nowak played the role of a super-agent was a conscious decision made by the director:

*Hydro-puzzle* was supposed to be primarily a parody of socialist realist cinema, the more ridiculous and absurd that it was equally a skilful pastiche of American superhero comic books. (...) In both there could be no compassion to the ‘bad guys’, and it was strictly forbidden to present ‘police officers, judges, government officials in any way that could undermine respect for the authorities’ (ibid. 51).

Apart from the fact that strongly connected the Polish superhero with Polish reality, his image is a product imported from the USA, or rather a deliberately incompetent copy of the American model.

On a daily basis, As lives a double life as Walczak, a modest designer working in one of Warsaw’s urban design offices. In the Polish People’s Republic, at that time it was a profession much more respected than journalism, which was Clark Kent’s job when he did not have anything to do as Superman.

It is also here that the film clearly parodies the contemporary reality. At the beginning of the 1970s, members of the workers’ and peasants’ alliance were no longer role models and propaganda heroes – that role was taken over by mid-level intelligent office workers, people such as Walczak and engineer Karwowski – the protagonist of the *Forty-Years-Old Man* (*Czterdziestolatek*) TV series, which serves as probably the best reflection of the atmosphere of that decade (ibid.: 88-89).

However, journalists, who enjoyed great popularity and trust in the USA, were pretty much meaningless at that time in Warsaw. Miss Jola’s proposal to write to a newspaper about the mysterious disappearance of water (“They’ll get it done”), was met with a swift response from one of her colleagues: ‘It won’t do anything, (...) that’s something that As should deal with’.

Apart from different professions, the situation of both heroes is almost identical, both in personal life and while ‘on duty’. Both of them, without their costumes, but wearing glasses with thick frames, are lost among the thousands of citizens, who are similar to them. In addition, they are

both in similar romantic relationships. One also cannot help but notice a visual similarity – as superheroes, both of them wear tight costumes with an emblem on their chest and cloak, a belt and high boots. However, the logo worn by As looks like it was cut out by a hardly ambitious student during Arts and Crafts classes. Similarly, the cloak ‘is short, reaching only to his waist, hanging there grotesquely, rather than flying majestically as a flag surrogate’ (ibid.: 88).

But he also has something that Superman does not have. The Polish superhero was additionally equipped with a bag, identical to that used by the communist police force. This gadget, worn on a strap that was slightly too long, constantly bumps on hero’s knees, which on the one hand makes him even more of a caricature, but on the other hand, it also makes him more similar to the militia, reminding people of the values parodied by the depicted character.

The grotesque nature of the character is complemented by ostentatiously ineffective scenes in which As uses his superpowers – for example, a jump from a high place played backwards or a moment of landing shown on the screen, which is supposed to suggest that As was in the air just a second before.

Instead of convincing with their realism, these scenes show incompetence, which, combined with the costume and the hero’s lines, carry additional meanings. As Dudziński wrote: ‘The director has simply included technical deficiencies in the film’s burlesque discourse’ (ibid.: 88).

## POLISH METROPOLIS

In *Hydro-puzzle*, the fictitious city of American Superman is replaced by super-modern Warsaw, shown ‘as a civilization of development, progress and the peak of innovation’ (Rakowski 2010: 188). The very first panoramic shot shows that the film takes place in a very busy metropolis with wide streets and towering skyscrapers. The latter also serve as a background for dialogue scenes. The protagonists spend their time in large offices, where they are protected from the sun by blinds, or sit outside, under umbrellas, where they cool down eating ice cream. As Tomasz Rakowski noted: ‘Their life is a kind of *high-life* of the Polish People’s Republic, taking place at tables outside’ (ibid.: 188).

From the very first seconds of the film this majesty is accompanied by an ironic tone, already signalled at the beginning by the film's soundtrack – the creators used the post-war song *Warsaw Day* (*Warszawski dzień*), published just fifteen years earlier by the State Song and Dance Ensemble to praise the residents of Warsaw devoting themselves to the reconstruction of the capital. 'This is one of the first signs showing that the satirical discourse of *Hydro-puzzle* would refer to two different periods in the history of the Polish People's Republic – the socialist realism, which was still fresh in the collective memory, as well as the contemporary times – the beginning of Gierek's »second Poland«' (Dudziński 2012: 88).

The institute – an enormous, glazed building full of nooks and crannies and long halls – was the gem of this ultra-modern world. Its employees, who were supposed to get Walczak, and who – interestingly enough – resembled secret service agents, rather than scientists, drive around in a Citroen DS, a technological wonder at the time, a symbol of luxury and innovation. They are dressed in black suits, and one of them, the most active one, wears tinted glasses. Apart from the dangerous ambiguity of these three 'colleagues', as Professor Milczarek describes them:

The atmosphere at the laboratory (...) fills everybody with enthusiasm. There, one can see scientists working incessantly on the 'water process', constantly pipetting, titrating, looking at flasks containing watery substances. This image shows the city as a well-oiled machine and it is, of course, a typical image of fulfilled socialism (...) (Rakowski 2010: 188).

However, the machine does not work properly. Several housing estates are running out of water, especially their upper floors. In the Polish People's Republic similar difficulties were not a surreal nightmare, they were rather an inseparable element of living in the city, which – as Rakowski notes – resulted from building housing estates with 'complexes of horrible blocks of flats' on the outskirts of cities at that time, but close to large industrial centres:

Heavy industry – steelworks, rolling mills, blast furnaces and industrial complexes – needed enormous amounts of water (!) to function on a daily basis. They used it during steel smelting process, as well as for cooling the red-hot slags and elements, taking up all its reserves, including drinking water,



as well as exhausting flood reservoirs. (...) [I]n a block of flats, water could be gone at any time – it was well-known at the time. It just disappeared 'somewhere' and then all hell was unleashed (ibid.: 191).

But in the ultra-modern Warsaw presented in *Hydro-puzzle*, in this perfectly constructed machine where people lived, worked and enjoyed their free time, such an occurrence did not result from any ill-considered decisions or deficiencies. The naive residents of the city, trying to come up with a reason, are lost – they think that the plumbers are to blame or that the pumps, filters or pressure stations do not work as intended.

Meanwhile, the lack of water in taps is the result of an imperialist conspiracy of the Maharaja of Kawur, who allied with Dr. Plama, which means that the authorities are not responsible in any way for the situation. Back in the day, this was also a normal occurrence. If not the foreign enemies of the Polish People's Republic, the so-called 'objective difficulties' were the cause of blackouts in the winter, lack of meat in stores, missed train and tram timetables, as well as keys not matching their respective locks in newly built cooperative flats (Łuczak 2014: 56).

'The root of all evil needs to be found at source, doing it any other way would be absurd', notes Professor Milczarek. Even an electron brain could not deal with this task and after entering the data it 'spat out a big question mark'. Only a super-agent could deal with such mystery. 'Thus, As appears to be the guardian of the development and power of technology, which in the modern myth still threaten to get out of control or fall into the hands of a bad demiurge' (ibid.: 188).

## THE STRUGGLE OF GOOD AND EVIL

In the simple, clearly divided world of *Hydro-puzzle*, the demonic Dr. Plama – a brilliant criminal, who is depraved by his western lifestyle, who will do any evil deed, provided that it is sophisticated enough – is the opponent of the super-agent, who works for the benefit of all the people. Admittedly, Plama agrees to stab the sailor (because he did not like talkative people), and even organises a dance party at a fire station, during which Liliput was supposed to get rid of him. However, when the Maharaja proposes to decapitate or poison As, the doctor firmly refuses: 'Forgive me, my lord, but these are primitive methods, they do not stand the test of time'.

The prince receives a similar answer when he asked whether Plama would kill Liliput: 'I am a business man and I don't like wet work'.

Plama, like an impassive and romantic dandy, in the face of deadly danger admires the circumstances in which the final clash with the super-agent is to take place: 'The drama will take place among the wild elements. I like it. Outstanding synchronisation'. 'You are a devil', said the Maharaja. 'An aesthete, first and foremost' Plama quipped in response. It is precisely this disturbing sense of beauty and drama, devoid of any ethical foundation at the same time, that makes him notice that 'the murder in the fire station has no spectacular qualities'.

Entertainment, next to wealth, is one of the basic values most appreciated and sought after by both the doctor and the Maharaja. This serves as a complete reversal of As' code of conduct – the hero values 'good of the people and public peace', while not being interested in profit at all. He is therefore incorruptible, as Dr. Plama informs the Maharaja. 'Is that Batman?' the prince asked. 'Worse, if we go by the international nomenclature, it's the Superman. He is very dangerous' he hears in response.

The difference between these characters is very telling. Batman is an ordinary man using various inventions, while Superman has superhuman powers. In this case, however, this is not the most important thing. Batman's motives are personal, he is a vigilante who pursues murderers who killed his parents, and he brings criminals to justice along the way. On the other hand, Superman:

is more noble than him. (...) His foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Kent, instilled in him great respect for the traditional American values of work, family, law and order. He fights to make all these important principles a reality in the giant American model city of Metropolis, using all his supernatural abilities. A similar system of values – but proper to the exemplary citizen of the socialist state, who observes all regulations, even health and safety at work – is characteristic of As, who drinks only orange soda and considers alcohol to be the greatest poison of all (ibid.: 52).

Both Superman and As uphold public order, which is their only interest. Each of them is 'beautiful, modest and helpful; their lives are dedicated to fighting the forces of evil, and the police have tireless allies in them' (Eco 1995: 17). However, ordinary criminals are not enough for the superhero

to use his abilities to the full extent. Dr. Plama, an unscrupulous genius, turns out to be a worthy opponent in a duel with As. His broad knowledge and genius are evidenced primarily by the plan to evaporate all water on a global scale. Plama intends to bring a lake to the boil and transport the vaporised water to the desert country of Kawur using a nuclear stack. He is so crafty that he takes advantage of the advice of the weather forecaster Wicherek, who – having no idea about the whole plot (and therefore not asking for any money in return) – unwittingly takes part in the machinations of the bad guy. ‘The clouds that have flown over your country must be liquefied. For this purpose, we may install a network of tethered balloons in the desert. Each balloon will carry a refrigerator. Cooling clouds down will cause them to release rain’, Plama explained to the Maharaja who financed the whole operation. When the prince wanted to know the details, Plama gave him a school textbook: *Seventh Grade Physics*. The plan is so simple, yet brilliant! What a mind. The next Pascal and Machiavelli. You are a genius!’ the Maharaja explained in a surge of enthusiasm and signs the contract, forgoing an in-depth analysis of the documents.

But it is not only the partner in crime who learns about the genius of the charismatic Doctor Plama. Professor Milczarek also admits that Plama is an extremely dangerous adversary. Talking about his student days, he admonishes his wild lifestyle and then states: ‘However, he graduated with honours. He’s absolutely intelligent. Well, I was young at the time, he fascinated me, I envied him, and today I’m pursuing a criminal’, said the professor, thus giving the viewers a parable. It clearly shows that the Western lifestyle is a simple way to commit various transgressions, or even a crime. On the other hand, working diligently and submitting to the right idea is a way to a real scientific career (and not only, because Professor Milczarek’s story is universal in its nature) and, ultimately, a triumph over the false hero, who lives pompously, but meets a sad demise. ‘These two life stories have a colossal educational value, especially for youth’, As concluded.

## GOOD ALWAYS WINS

Professor Milczarek’s reflections lead to the discovery that Dr. Plama is not only a bad guy, who needs to be eliminated to once and for all restore order in the temporarily disrupted socialist paradise: ‘By the way, this Plama

implemented my idea, only the other way around. This is very interesting from a metaphysical point of view. The positive charge attracts the negative one. The negative has its own positive. Black and white. Good against evil'. As Maciej Łuczak (2004: 55) noted:

Good and evil are, to put it in a language of philosophical discourse, ontological categories. When As – the brilliant, invincible embodiment of all the virtues – will have no more opponents, he will once again become Jan Walczak, an ordinary designer. Young people will not have positive and negative heroes, they will lose their moral compasses, and without axiological hints, the whole world will plunge into total chaos.

Therefore, Dr. Plama as the personification of all evil can – even must – be defeated, but only within the framework of a given story. His plan threatened a perfectly functioning city – such things happen even in the best of the worlds. However, the order was restored, because the crisis, since it had already occurred, had to be resolved sooner or later, after a good amount of antics and adventures, of course. Ultimately, the good has won – according to the principle of constructing a consolation novel, described by Umberto Eco:

The crisis cannot be revealed if no solution is proposed promptly, one may not arouse the reader's indignation at the sight of social scourges, if the intervention of a healing factor is not provoked soon after, and if the confused recipient is not avenged, along with the victims. In such a case, the novel becomes a gratification machine, since gratification must occur before the end of the novel and can never be left up to the reader, like deeply 'revolutionary' problem novels do (Eco 2008: 21-22).

Doctor and Maharaja were ultimately defeated, but they do not intend to undergo re-education and become good people like Liliput and the sailor. It is important that As, the invincible guardian of order and peace, remains alert and always ready to fight evil that suddenly pops up, especially since he never has time to rest. Dr. Plama and Maharaja, the bad guys of *Hydro-puzzle*, are perfectly aware of this constant clash of opposing elements, as well as the obligatory triumph of good. After the explosion that occurred when As collided with the underwater bunker, both criminals barely lived.

‘This time it didn’t work, but maybe next time...?’, Plama asked. ‘It will not work either’, said the Maharaja, laughing.

This exchange precludes any doubts – the characters are only symbols, elements of a mythical story about the eternal fight between good and evil. The viewer – just like comic book reader, described by Jerzy Szyłak (1998: 40) – has:

the opportunity to touch the world of miracle – marked with quotation marks, presented in a distanced way, but presented in a situation where the real myth only evokes a shrug. The high culture, dominated by existential pessimism, the sense of the absurdity of life and the world, is opposed by the comic book [or film, in this case – T.K.], which shows image in which the world made sense, although naive, but naive in a conscious and exaggerated way, which made it possible both to distance oneself from such a vision, and to find an alibi for being interested in similar stories.

In the case of *Hydro-puzzle*, the exaggeration mentioned by Szyłak was doubled by the filmmakers. At the surface level, this is suggested by a simplified, superhero convention, in which there is no room for complex personalities and morally ambiguous situations. At the deeper level, this simple world is additionally exaggerated, because the myth of Superman was changed by satire and grotesque, which was as much directed against the communist model of a hero, as against the superhero convention taken over from the West.

## CONCLUSIONS

As the above analysis shows, the Polish (socialist) hero has a different consciousness and values than his American counterpart, but they can both deal just as fine with any situation, whether it is by using strength and craftiness, or brilliant intelligence. The socialist hero also serves as the guardian of peace and public order. But by embodying the official ideal of a citizen of one of the countries of the Soviet bloc, such a hero gains some special features distinguishing him from his counterparts from beyond the Iron Curtain. This is necessary because said hero is tasked with defending a system that, according to censorship officers and propaganda, stands in opposition to Western chaos, evil, corruption and consumerist lifestyle. In such a world, money, comfort, luxury goods and trips abroad (with

the exception of trips to socialist countries) are always suspicious, and it is rather a criminal, a thief or a spy who will benefit from such pleasures, while a super citizen, modest and always conscious of all temptations that can only bring him to ruin, will remain alert and insensitive to the whispers of false imperialist ideals.

The Polish superhero will never stoop so low and become a vigilante with personal motives like Batman, he will never seek justice to take revenge on his oppressors, because that would mean that he is not a superhero. He will also never care about his salary, because he will find the energy to work in work itself, as well as in the sense of a well-fulfilled duty.

The superhero of the Polish People's Republic remains a special phenomenon, especially given the backdrop of Western mass culture of the second half of the 20th century. These days, such character is almost exotic, particularly from the point of view of the young audience – a character closely connected with the system that collapsed in 1989 and the accompanying ideology. He is, therefore, first of all a symbol of his era, but he still remains a 'living' hero, constantly rediscovered anew by audiences, who only use different accents when decoding meanings.

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## Filmography

*Operator was podpatrzył* (1953), Polska Kronika Filmowa, 17/53, WFDiF.

## Summary

In my essay I try to depict the superheroes from Polish People's Republic and how they served as embodiments of the ideal vision of a proper citizen, as advocated by the communist authorities. I also trace the differences between them and their Western counterparts, such as Superman or Batman, based on the example of Andrzej Kondratiuk's *Hydro-puzzle*. First of all, the social order they upheld and tried to maintain was presented by propaganda as a total antithesis of the Western world – consumptionist, filled with depravation – the root of all imaginable evil. In spite of that, *Hydro-puzzle* was not only a grotesque parody of American superhero films but also a mocking critique of the communist reality.

**Keywords:** *Hydro-puzzle*, superhero, propaganda, Polish People's Republic, grotesque