The Polish Superheroes Have Arrived!: On the Popularity of Superhero Stories and Adaptations

Emma Oki

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/13678>

DOI: 10.4000/ejas.13678

ISSN: 1991-9336

Publisher

European Association for American Studies

Electronic reference

Emma Oki, "The Polish Superheroes Have Arrived!: On the Popularity of Superhero Stories and Adaptations", *European journal of American studies* [Online], 13-3 | 2018, Online since 07 January 2019, connection on 08 July 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/13678> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.13678>

This text was automatically generated on 8 July 2021.

Creative Commons License

The Polish Superheroes Have Arrived!: On the Popularity of Superhero Stories and Adaptations

Emma Oki

1. Comics and Adaptation

- 1 According to David Roche et al., “Adaptation has... been an integral part of the history of comics” (7). Many comics have been inspired by and adapted into other cultural texts. For example, graphic versions of literary classics abound in the comics medium, as do filmic versions of comics in the medium of film. The existence of adaptations, as Blair Davis writes, “demonstrates our collective desire to experience the same stories and characters in more than just one form” (2). While adaptations may be interesting to readers and audiences for purely entertainment purposes, they are an altogether different affair for scholars of culture, adaptation, and American studies, for they allow scholars not only to examine source texts and adaptations but also to trace social, cultural, and political shifts in specific spatial and temporal frames.
- 2 The popularity of certain types of adaptations may provide insight into the spirit of the times in which they were created. The current success of, for example, film adaptations of superhero comics can be explained easily if the developments of the previous decade are taken into account. Liam Burke, for instance, identifies three main factors that have contributed to the rise of “The Golden Age of Comic Book Filmmaking”:
cultural traumas and the celebration of the hero following real-life events, in particular the 9/11 terrorist attacks; technological advancements, most notably digital film techniques, which allow the source to be recreated more faithfully and efficiently on screen; and finally contemporary filmmaking paradigms that favor content with a preexisting fanbase and an amenability to franchise opportunities.
(23)
- 3 The pervasiveness of superhero narratives has also led to the appearance of local superheroes that do not, as Rayna Denison, Rachel Mizsei-Ward, and Derek Johnston

write, “trace their histories back to US comic books” (3). However, in the case of Maciej and Adam Kmiołek’s *Biały Orzeł* (White Eagle) character, a strong connection to the American superhero genre can be observed. In their series entitled *Polski Superbohater Biały Orzeł* (PSBO), the Kmiołek brothers weave culture-specific elements into the fabric of their stories by making use of their own cultural system and by tapping into the conventions of the American superhero genre. This makes PSBO a Polish superhero comic book series with a decidedly American slant in comparison to earlier superhero-inspired Polish comics.

2. 80 Years of Superhero Comics

- 4 Having made his debut appearance in the first issue of *Action Comics* in June 1938, Superman is the oldest superhero character still popular today. Fighting for truth, justice, and the American way, the Man of Steel is a cultural icon, which, as Ian Gordon writes, he owes to “circumstance and management” (4). During the Great Depression and World War II, Americans were in need of a hero—whether real or fictitious—that would distract them from and give them hope and strength to endure the woes of economic hardship and war. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster’s brainchild proved to be what the public needed and even more. Superman was a man of action and, as Tomasz Żaglewski writes, embodied the spirit of the New Deal era (109). He paved the way for a myriad of other superheroes, many of whom are an integral part of American popular culture, including Batman, the *Detective Comics* character only a year younger than Superman; Wonder Woman, who first appeared on the pages of *All Star Comics* in 1941; Spider-Man, who debuted in *Amazing Fantasy* in 1962; and Iron Man, first featured in *Tales of Suspense* in 1963. According to Alex S. Romagnoli and Gian S. Pagnucci, the superhero genre is successful due to several key factors: “Because they tell of ultimate strength, deep despair, unfathomable longing, and immeasurable bravery, superhero stories have been an enduring form of entertainment reflecting American ideals and celebrating the inherent nobility of man” (1). In their early days, superhero comic books also gained popularity owing to their affordability; costing only a dime apiece, they were cheap and highly entertaining. What also contributed to their growing readership was “the colorful nature of the medium” (Romagnoli and Pagnucci 6–7). Over time, superheroes appeared in other media, including radio, TV, and film, all of which had an influence on the development of the superhero genre. Today, its pervasiveness is unquestionable as superhero characters and their symbols are present across all cultural artifacts, from works of art to independently published zines.
- 5 While superheroes may be viewed as modern gods or demigods due to their mythic powers and abilities, not all of them are of divine origin. With some exceptions (for example, William Moulton Marston’s Wonder Woman), most superhero comic book creators have used science fiction to explain the origins of their characters’ powers instead of referring to classical mythology. In the case of Superman, Siegel and Shuster “explain the source of Superman’s abilities in terms more familiar to science fiction” as opposed to comparing him to the likes of Hermes and Heracles, who possessed incredible speed and strength (Bahlmann 5). This is yet another reason why the Last Son of Krypton and other superheroes are more relatable, universal, and, as a result, more appealing than their ancient antecedents.

- 6 What can also explain the superhero genre's popularity is its stories' distinct structure and cyclical nature. Indebted to Joseph Campbell's classical monomyth, John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett provide the following description of the American monomyth, which, as they argue, "derives from tales of redemptions":

A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisiacal condition; the superhero then fades into obscurity. (6)

- 7 Deviating from the classical departure-trial-return paradigm devised by Campbell, Lawrence and Jewett's five-tiered plot formula is present, to a varying degree, in all superhero comics. Although it may be perceived as cliché, this story convention allows writers to tap into a well-established system that enables them to engage readers and to surprise them in other creative ways.
- 8 In *The Mythology of the Superhero*, Andrew Bahlmann contends that superheroes are enjoying an unprecedented prominence in contemporary popular culture. Indeed, as he writes, "From the time *X-Men* hit screens in 2000, superheroes have become a part of mainstream culture in a way they haven't been for decades" (3). In the 2000s, the financial success of *X-Men* and later *Spider-Man* (2002) encouraged film studios to release big-screen adaptations of superhero comics at a hitherto unprecedented rate and scale. With minor exceptions (*Catwoman* and *Elektra*, for example), the movies' consistent strong box office performance reinvigorated the superhero genre. In the mid and late 2000s, there also appeared several reboots, including those of the Batman and Hulk franchises (2005 and 2008 respectively). Released just over a month earlier than *The Incredible Hulk*, *Iron Man* was the first of twenty films belonging to the Marvel Cinematic Universe as of October 2018. Not surprisingly, its overwhelming popularity translated into more superhero content. In the early 2010s, the DC Extended Universe committed its efforts to the production of a new version of one of its most iconic superhero characters, Superman; when compared to Warner Bros.' earlier attempt in 2006, the 2013 movie *Man of Steel* was a bigger success and was soon followed by four more superhero movies, two of which also featured the character of Superman.
- 9 An additional force that contributed to the superhero genre's longevity and global popularity is globalization as well as adaptation. Listed among America's biggest exports, American popular culture has played an important role in shaping many non-American entertainment industries (Isidore). The flow of not only capital but also culture allowed American superheroes to gain worldwide recognition. It also enabled the superhero genre to flourish in other cultural contexts. For example, many adaptations of American superhero comics exist outside the United States, such as in the center of manga and anime—Japan. In 1966, Batmania swept the country following the success of the campy live-action Batman TV series produced in the US. Wanting to capitalize on the Batman craze, the publisher of *Shōnen King* commissioned Jiro Kuwata to create *Battoman*, a manga series that ran for two years from 1966 to 1967. As a *shōnen* manga, it featured solely male villains, "which can be attributed to the fact that the manga was meant to be like an action movie directed at young Japanese male readers" (Ono 358). Although Kuwata intended to emulate the art style of his American counterparts, he was unable to do so due to the time-consuming nature of such an endeavor: "my intention was to adapt my art style to the American way of drawing Batman. However, as it happened, I couldn't help but revert to my usual art style,

which I regret to some extent. But even trying to stray from my usual form and draw it the American way took me twice as long to do” (344). Decades after its first publication, Kuwata’s Batman manga was introduced to American readers by the author of *Bat-Manga! The Secret History of Batman in Japan*, who admits that he “became aware of the comics through David Mazzucchelli” (Kidd). Kuwata’s Batman was later published in its entirety in three volumes by DC Comics. In his review of the first volume, Steve Raiteri recommends the series not only “for its cross-cultural interest but also to fans wanting some straightforward Batman adventure” (89). More recent manga adaptations of Batman include Kia Asamiya’s *Batman: Child of Dreams* (2000–2001), Yoshinori Natsume’s *Batman: Death Mask* (2008), and Shiori Teshirogi’s *Batman and the Justice League* (2017).

3. The Underpinnings of the Superhero Genre

- 10 Spanning more than eight decades, superhero comics are an established genre; they have their own history and distinguishing characteristics. According to Jess Nevins, the periodization of comics comprises the following ages: “the Golden Age, the Atomic Age, the Silver Age, the Bronze Age, the Modern Age, and the Metamodern Age” (235). What may help demarcate, albeit somewhat arbitrarily at times, the beginning and end of each age is, as Nevins writes, “the *content* of the superhero—the ethos of the character type, their typical personality, [and] their generic outlines,” all of which have undergone changes over the ages (235). In terms of form, as Nevins argues, it is rather “set” as “the superhero no longer evolves,” belonging to one of the following two categories: “the *Übermensch* and the Costumed Avenger” (235). In *To Be A Hero: A Superhero Role Playing Game* (2006), Vincent Venturella offers a more detailed categorization for RPG enthusiasts, one that is based on a character’s origin. For RPG players, a clear-cut division is of paramount importance as it “determines the basic abilities and options open to the character” (Venturella 21). In brief, a superhero may belong to one of the five groups of origin: aliens, altered humans, nexers, peak human performers, and robots (Venturella 21–26). Some examples of the above from the Marvel and DC Comics universes include Superman, Spider-Man, Wolverine, Batman, and Vision.
- 11 Setting aside superhero origin stories, Scott Jeffery offers an interesting reading of superhero stories, viewing them through the prism of the posthuman body, while simultaneously noting that other approaches are possible, especially from the perspective of feminist, queer, ethnic, and disability studies. Jeffery identifies the perfect (for example, Superman), cosmic (for instance, Dr. Strange), and the military-industrial bodies (namely, Iron Man), which may be perceived as being indicative of the times in which they were created: “the Transhumanism of the Golden Age focused on the creation of Perfect Bodies.... As the Silver Age reinvigorated the Superhuman, Transhumanism also became reinvigorated by the Cosmic Body.... By the time of the Dark Ages, the discourse of Transhumanism had also shifted... to the Military-Industrial Body” (Jeffery 234). Indeed, the superhero genre is, as Jeffery writes, a “posthuman body genre” owing to its medium’s visual nature and, most importantly, its genre’s dependence on the corporeal (13).
- 12 In his attempt to provide a generic definition of the superhero, Peter Coogan identifies three elements that are “the core of the genre”: mission, powers, and identity (82). Indeed, all superheroes possess superpowers, which, however, do not necessarily have

to be supernatural. They have enhanced “normal” abilities, including speed and strength, but they also have special ones that give them an advantage in combat, enabling them to, for example, fly and fire power blasts. Superman, for instance, can move at an incredible speed, withstand bullet impacts, and see through walls. Although Batman seemingly does not possess any superpowers, he is, undoubtedly, more agile than the average human thanks to his training, can survive gunshots owing to his bulletproof suit, and can see more thanks to his high-tech gear. Apart from powers, superheroes also need a mission. The former character fights evil and injustice predominantly in Metropolis, while the latter in Gotham City. However, as Coogan argues, they should be selfless in their efforts to do good and justice: “The mission convention is essential to the superhero genre because someone who does not act selflessly to aid others in times of need is not heroic and therefore not a superhero” (77). The final ingredient is identity, which includes the superhero’s costume and codename. Both elements somehow reflect a character’s inner world, functioning as a bridge between their non-superhero and superhero selves: “Superman is a super man who represents the best humanity can hope to achieve; his codename expresses his inner character. The Batman identity was inspired by Bruce Wayne’s encounter with a bat while he was seeking a disguise able to strike terror into the hearts of criminals; his codename embodies his biography” (Coogan 79). Similarly, their costumes serve as a symbol of their character: Superman’s is bright and gives hope, while Batman’s is dark and evokes fear.

13 Romagnoli and Pagnucci additionally provide the following characteristic features that humanize superheroes in an attempt to make their stories more appealing to readers and audiences alike:

1. His/her origins are, in some way, informed by a tragedy.
2. He/she is obsessed with achieving his/her goals.
3. With few exceptions, he/she is a solitary figure.
4. His/her goal is unattainable.
5. He/she has a weakness. (8)

14 Indeed, many superhero characters are survivors: Kal-El survives the destruction of his planet of origin, while young Bruce Wayne witnesses an armed assault that led to his parents’ death. Both do what is within their power to fight evil, lead socially withdrawn lives, constantly contend with villains that want to disrupt the peaceful lives of unsuspecting citizens, and have certain vulnerabilities despite possessing super skills: Superman, for example, is influenced by Kryptonite, whereas Batman often struggles with his inner demons.

15 What is also typical of many superhero stories is that the characters go through the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, both literally and metaphorically. Superman conveniently illustrates the former, while Batman may serve as an example of the latter. Born on Krypton, Superman dies and is reborn on Earth, still eager to defend those in need. Similarly, in order for the Caped Crusader to come into existence, Bruce Wayne has to experience the death of his parents and later his helpless self to be reborn as Batman, the fearless avenger. Spider-Man, on the other hand, is an ordinary teenager whose regular life ends after he gets bitten by a radioactive spider, which grants him enhanced senses, agility, and endurance. However, the process of becoming a superhero, as Phillip Thurtle argues in his TEDx talk, is not just about survival but rather about transformation:

It's not so much that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, it's that what you survive gives you a specific type of power. That's an important difference. The first one concentrates on the notion of strength, the strength to endure disaster. The second one is about transformation and the ability to let your environment transform you. ("What Superheroes Are Made of")

4. A Brief Overview of Polish (Super)heroes

- 16 American superhero comics were not widely available in Poland until the last decade of the 20th century, when TM-Semic started publishing reprints of Marvel and later DC series, including Spider-Man, Punisher, Superman, and Batman comics. Only after the fall of communism was it possible for American superhero series to appear on the Polish market due to the ideals and values that they promoted. By the same token, while Polish artists were familiar with the American superhero genre during the Polish People's Republic period, they did not create their own superhero stories so as to avoid falling into disfavor with the authorities; as a result, Polish superheroes modeled after their classic American counterparts appeared much later than their European equivalents.
- 17 According to Paweł Timofiejuk, comics in Poland were political in their earliest days primarily due to their use as tools of propaganda, understood as "a way to communicate a certain point of view, with the aim of inducing the recipient to accept this viewpoint as their own" (196). Their history can be divided to correspond with their persuasive functions, namely prewar newspaper comic strips, many of which employed negative propaganda in that they achieved their ends through ridicule and criticism of particular nations, ethnicities, and ideologies; communist comic books, which instituted a more positive propaganda strategy than their prewar counterpart; and contemporary graphic stories, which more freely reflect their creators' political leanings (Timofiejuk 180–195). This may help explain why it took so long for Polish superheroes to emerge. Nevertheless, there are early examples of characters that, while not being superheroes, possessed some superhero qualities.
- 18 During the Polish People's Republic era, many comics published officially focused on disseminating good practices and fostering desirable behaviors, the aim of which was to create an environment conducive to the spread of communist ideals. Since American superhero comics were criticized for containing capitalist ideology and celebrating the individual rather than the collective effort, the regime was wary of them but nevertheless recognized their potential for mass appeal (Żaglewski 112–113). In 1957, *Świat Młodych* published Henryk Jerzy Chmielewski's first *Tytus, Romek i A'Tomek* comic. While it was packed with propaganda content, it soon became one of the most popular series among young readers due to its appealing style and humor. For adult readers, there were humor and adventure newspaper strips. On July 10, 1966, *Sierżant Cień* appeared on the pages of *Słowo Ludu*, a Kielce-based newspaper. While the panels do not blend the verbal and the visual, Żaglewski argues that Zbigniew Nosal and Marian Gostyński's work may be perceived as one of the first attempts to create a Polish hero inspired by the works of American superhero comics and their "capitalist heroes." Although the main character, Jan Derenda, does not possess any superpowers, he has a mission to fight the Nazi Germans, which he does with great zeal (Żaglewski 112–113).
- 19 Apart from magazines and newspapers, new characters were introduced in the comic book format, for example, Jan Żbik and Hans Kloss. The former, a Citizens' Militia (CM)

officer, is the protagonist of *Kapitan Żbik* (1967), which was commissioned by Władysław Krupka to bring a more positive image of the CM formation. Not surprisingly, the main character fights crime and, at the same time, promotes socially desirable behavior. According to Żaglewski, the series is an early expression of the Polish version of the American monomyth, and, as Mateusz Szlachtycz suggests, the titular character may be viewed as Batman's counterpart: after all, he owes his speed and strength to technology, as does Batman (Żaglewski 114). Another popular character of the time was Hans Kloss, featured in *Kapitan Kloss* (1971), an adaptation of the popular TV series *Stawka większa niż życie* (1967). As a secret agent, he helps fight Nazi Germany and also reinforces values in line with the agenda of the communist party. Other characters include Maciej Parowski et al.'s Funky Koval, who belongs to a team of space detectives, and Andrzej O. Nowakowski's Doman, the main protagonist of a 1987 fantasy comic book series inspired by Conan the Barbarian. The former, as Jerzy Szyłak writes, owed its popularity to its multiple references to social and political events of the time (139). The latter, despite issues with perspective and the series' unconventional size, garnered critical acclaim for its use of Polish legends (Wojteczek).

- 20 The most obvious reference to American superhero comics was Tadeusz Baranowski's *Orient Men* (1976), which was first published in *Relax* (1976). As a parody of American superhero stories, the series was by no means what mainstream American superhero comics were at the time. It offered entertaining but absurd adventures of the titular character, a well-meaning superhero that could fly but not always succeeded in helping people with their oftentimes mundane issues. His adventures, however, may be read as a reflection as well as a criticism of the absurdities of the times in which Baranowski lived. Decades later, *Orient Men* comics were collected and published by two Polish publishers, namely Egmont in 2002 and Ongrys in 2015. Baranowski's work inspired other creators, for instance, Bartosz and Tomasz Minkiewicz, the authors of *Wilq* (2003). Like its antecedent, *Wilq* parodies the superhero genre but in a more obscene manner. The cover of the first collection is a direct reference to the first issue of *Action Comics*: the titular character is holding a car in the air, and the people around him are running away in terror. Drawn in a simple style, the series contains humorous content and topical issues. However, its most notable feature is its vulgar language. More recent examples of superhero parodies include Maciej and Bogusław Zaręba's *Kops* (2009), which started as an online webcomic series commenting on contemporary superhero comics and movies; Adam Czernatowicz and Rafał Kołsut's *Człowiek bez szyi* (2011), which features the adventures of a superhero that gains incredible strength but loses his neck following an incident at a secret military base; and Łukasza Mazur's *Usta pełne śmierci* (2014), a tribute to Fletcher Hanks's character Fantomah (1940).
- 21 The shift from parody to serious or classic superhero stories took place in 2010 when Rafał Szłapa self-published the first issue of *Bler*. Not only is the titular character incredibly fast, but he also has x-ray vision. He gained his superpowers after undergoing a procedure that saved his life and enhanced his abilities—an all-too-familiar origin story, placing him in the altered human category. Dubbed Cracow's Superman, Bler and his team's mission is to prevent tragedies from ever happening, or so it seems. Thanks to a super-fast laptop, they can read the following day's news, giving them an advantage over the would-be criminals and saving the lives of innocent people. The costume Bler adorns uses the same color scheme as Superman's and Spider-Man's outfits, namely blue and red, which immediately places the character in a specific context, namely that of a superhero and savior of the helpless. A more recent

example of a Polish superhero is Piotr Czarnecki and Łukasz Ciżmowski's *Incognito* (2014), who uses his power of invisibility to fight crime. Another interesting character is Dariusz Stańczyk and Jakub Oleksów's *Lis* (2014), who returns to Poland after gaining super strength and agility following a lab accident in the UK; however, he does not use his superpowers only for selfless deeds.

- 22 Unlike their American counterparts, Polish (super)heroes followed a different evolutionary path. Aware of the prominence of superhero stories outside Poland, some Polish creators tried to include superhero elements in their stories. However, it was not until the 2010s that classic American-style superheroes started appearing in Polish webcomics and comic books. Previously, creators were rather focused on producing entertaining imitations, which nevertheless may provide interesting insight into the zeitgeist of the times in which they were created. The section below focuses on the Kmiołek brothers' *Biały Orzeł*, who typifies the classic superhero character.

5. The Birth of a Polish Superhero

- 23 It is one in the morning. Clad in a red and white costume, a superhero is flying across the night sky, leaving behind the Palace of Culture and Science. Were it not for this landmark on its cover, readers might have mistaken *Polski Superbohater Biały Orzeł* (PSBO) for a non-Polish superhero comic book. Apart from Warsaw's most iconic building, the rest of the features were undoubtedly inspired by the covers of American superhero comic book series, for instance, the superhero's impossibly muscled body in flight. Spanning twelve issues as of October 2018, PSBO is one of the most interesting American-style Polish superhero series. On the one hand, it adopts the conventions of the superhero genre and the American monomyth, making it, as Żaglewski aptly notes, an "affirmative" superhero narrative (122). On the other hand, it contains many references to Polish culture and history, giving it a more local context.
- 24 The first issue of PSBO, which was published in December 2011, follows the character of Aleks Poniatowski, his transformation into *Biały Orzeł*, his clash with Techcorp's supersoldier Projekt Zero (Project Zero), and a man-eating creature living in the tunnels of Warsaw's Central Station. The Kmiołek brothers could not have made their character's background more Polish. Aleks and his superhero alter ego are Polish to the core: the character's last name, Poniatowski, is a stark reference to the last Polish king before the First Partition of Poland in 1772, while the white eagle is the main element of Poland's coat of arms. Following the conventions of the American superhero genre, Aleks gains his superpowers, albeit temporarily, after being injected with a serum of mysterious origin. Thanks to the procedure that increases his strength and endurance, the main character becomes an altered human and embodies the perfect body. Aleks's codename and costume are determined by his origin: he falls from the 15th floor but is brought back to the living by a white eagle. His costume, which enables him to fly, incorporates the imagery of an eagle as well as the color scheme of the Polish flag. Finally, Aleks's mission is to find his missing father and to protect Poland and her people from evil powers, but he is not alone. He teams up with Hudini, a computer genius, as well as other beings with supernatural abilities, for example, *Wyklęty Polski Rycerz* (Cursed Polish Knight) and *Syrena* (Mermaid), as well as other enhanced individuals, such as the supersoldier Projekt Zero and vigilante *Obywatel* (Citizen). In PSBO's universe, *Wyklęty Polski Rycerz* appears when Poland is in great danger (an

allusion to the legend of the Sleeping Knight). Syrena, on the other hand, resurfaces when her fellow Varsovians are in need of her protection.

- 25 Apart from including legendary characters, the Kmiołek brothers also reinvent traditional tales, for example, the legend of the three brothers Lech, Czech, and Rus, the first of whom founded Gniezno, Poland's first capital city. While there are four instead of three brothers in the comic, the fourth one being the most powerful of them all, the inclusion of Polish legends and legendary characters makes PSBO more relatable to Polish readers, as does featuring real locations. By setting the comic in, for example, Warsaw and Szklarska Poręba, the authors blend the fictitious and non-fictitious worlds, enabling the reader to find connections between the comic and real life. They also include more contemporary culturally-specific elements, for example, Borubar, a reference to the Polish goalkeeper Artur Boruc, and Ząbkowska Street, which used to be known as one of the most dangerous streets in Warsaw.
- 26 What makes PSBO American is the series' adherence to the superhero genre's visual language and the characters' origins, as well as the use of the American monomyth. The stories follow the same formula: Poland is threatened by evil powers; Biały Orzeł steps in to protect the innocent; he eventually wins, enabling the community to return to their peaceful lives; he then disappears, only to reappear when the next threat emerges. It may seem to be just a hackneyed scenario applied only to secure the continuity of the series. However, PSBO manages to keep the reader interested thanks to the grand overarching story, which is slowly revealed in each issue as the series progresses.
- 27 To humanize Biały Orzeł, the creators made their character vulnerable. His origin is marked by several personal tragedies: he falls out the window, sustains multiple injuries, remains in a coma for four years, loses his wife and company in the meantime, and wakes up paralyzed, just to name a few. While Aleks does his best to ensure the safety of his fellow citizens, he is aware of the fact that he is on a never-ending mission. In his crusade, he can depend on not only his sidekick but also other Polish (super)heroes. However, in his private life, he has only Hudini. Finally, to maintain his superpowers, he needs fresh supplies of the serum that was administered to him prior to his father's disappearance, a vulnerability that is, however, resolved later in the series.

6. Conclusion

- 28 The superhero genre is alive and well both in and beyond its original cultural context. Indeed, it seems we are living in a new superhero age; the sheer amount of new content, including comic books and live-action movies, may satisfy even the most avid consumers of everything superhero. While many Polish fans are perhaps more inclined to read American comics, the growing number and improving quality of Polish superhero stories may encourage readers to discover the expanding world of superheroes born and bred in Poland. At long last, the Polish superhero landscape is slowly filling in, with Biały Orzeł at its center. Of all the contemporary Polish superhero comics, Maciej and Adam Kmiołek's PSBO is perhaps the most serious attempt at adapting an all-American genre to a Polish setting. The main character's origin, mission, identity, and powers all make for a typical American superhero story, as does the visual style of the comic and its use of the American monomyth; however, the

remaining elements are predominantly Polish, including numerous references to not only the culture and history of Poland but also the topography of Warsaw and other locations, making PSBO and its characters more relatable to the local reader than their American counterparts and a good example of an affirmative superhero comic book series.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bahlmann, Andrew R. *The Mythology of the Superhero*. McFarland, 2016. Print.
- Burke, Liam. *The Comic Book Film Adaptation: Exploring Modern Hollywood's Leading Genre*. UP of Mississippi, 2015. Print.
- Coogan, Peter. "The Definition of the Superhero," *A Comics Studies Reader*, edited by Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester, UP of Mississippi, 2009, pp. 77–93. Print.
- Davis, Blair. *Movie Comics: Page to Screen/Screen to Page*. Rutgers UP, 2017. Print.
- Denison, Rayna, Rachel Mizsei-Ward, and Derek Johnston. "Introduction." *Superheroes on World Screens*, edited by Rayna Denison and Rachel Mizsei-Ward, UP of Mississippi, 2015, pp. 3–16. Print.
- Gordon, Ian. *Superman: The Persistence of an American Icon*. Rutgers UP, 2017. Print.
- Isidore, Chris. "These Are the Top US Exports." *CNN Business*, 7 Mar. 2018. money.cnn.com/2018/03/07/news/economy/top-us-exports/index.html.
- Jeffery, Scott. *The Posthuman Body in Superhero Comics: Human, Superhuman, Transhuman, Post/Human*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Print.
- Johnson, Jeffrey K. *Super-History: Comic Book Superheroes and American Society, 1938 to the Present*. McFarland, 2012. Print.
- Kidd, Chip. "Batmaniac." *Vice*, 1 Jan. 2000, www.vice.com/en_us/article/expxdk/batmaniac-104-guide-comics. Accessed 10 Nov. 2018.
- Kuwata, Jiro. "Memories of Batman." *Batman: The Jiro Kuwata Batmanga Vol. 2*, by Kuwata, DC Comics, 2015, p. 344. Print.
- Lawrence, John Shelton, and Robert Jewett. *The Myth of the American Superhero*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. Print.
- Nevins, Jess. *The Evolution of the Costumed Avenger: The 4,000-Year History of the Superhero*. ABC-CLIO, 2017. Print.
- Ono, Kosei. "The Charm of Kuwata's Version of Batman as a Scientific Detective." *Batman: The Jiro Kuwata Batmanga Vol. 1*, by Jiro Kuwata, DC Comics, 2014, pp. 358–359. Print.
- Raiteri, Steve. "Batman: The Jiro Kuwata Batmanga." *Library Journal*, vol. 140, no. 5, Mar. 2015, p. 89. EBSCOhost. search.ebscohost.com/login.aspxdirect=true&db=a9h&AN=101900251&site=ehost-live.
- Roche, David, Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot, and Benoît Mitaine. "Introduction: Adapting Adaptation Studies to Comics Studies." *Comics and Adaptation*, edited by Benoît Mitaine, David Roche, and

Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot, translated by Aarnoud Rommens and David Roche, UP of Mississippi, 2018, pp. 3–29. Print.

Romagnoli, Alex S., and Gian S. Pagnucci. *Enter the Superheroes: American Values, Culture, and the Canon of Superhero Literature*. Scarecrow Press, 2013. Print.

Szyłak, Jerzy. *Komiks: Świat przerysowany. słowo/obraz terytoria*, 2009. Print.

Thurtle, Phillip. “What Superheroes Are Made of: Phillip Thurtle at TEDxRainier.” YouTube, uploaded by TEDx Talks, 28 Nov. 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkKymhU7yi0.

Timofiejuk, Paweł. “Polski komiks jako narzędzie propagandy.” *Kontekstowy MIKS. Przez opowieści graficzne do analiz kultury współczesnej*, edited by Grażyna Gajewska and Rafał Wójcik, Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2011, pp. 179–198. Print.

Venturella, Vincent R. *To Be A Hero: A Superhero Role Playing Game*. Venture Land Games, 2006. Print.

Wojteczek, Mariusz. “Doman. Wydanie zbiorcze—sentymalna podróż do lat 80-tych [Recenzja].” Review of *Doman*, written and illustrated by Andrzej Nowakowski. *Dzika Banda*, 16 Oct. 2018, dzikabanda.pl/recenzje/komiks/doman-wydanie-zbiorcze-sentymalna-podroz-do-lat-80-tych-recenzja/.

Żaglewski, Tomasz. “Białe Orły komiksu. Wokół polskiej specyfiki narracji superbohaterskich.” *Teksty Drugie*, vol. 5, 2017, pp. 108–128. journals.openedition.org/td/pdf/625.

ABSTRACTS

The superhero genre is thriving, as can be seen by the success of the DC Extended Universe and the Marvel Cinematic Universe, among others. Although essentially a product of the American comic book industry of the twentieth century, superhero characters continue to have a universal appeal and, as Alex S. Romagnoli and Gian S. Pagnucci write, “have become entrenched in the collective consciousness” (2). Oftentimes simple and predictable to contemporary readers and moviegoers, superhero stories attract new generations of fans both in the United States and internationally. They have also inspired non-American creators to produce their own costumed characters with superpowers. This article discusses the popularity of superhero narratives and their adaptations, including Maciej and Adam Kmiólek’s *Polski Superbohater Biały Orzeł* (PSBO). The Kmiólek brothers borrow from and adapt the conventions of the American superhero genre, while simultaneously infusing their stories with Polish cultural elements, which makes PSBO one of the first contemporary affirmative Polish superhero comic book series.

INDEX

Keywords: comics, adaptation, superheroes, Polish superheroes, Biały Orzeł

AUTHOR

EMMA OKI

Emma Oki received her Ph.D. in Cultural Studies from the SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, Poland. She teaches courses on visual culture and practical English. Her

research interests include Asian American graphic literature as well as representations of ethnicity in the medium of comics.