



Persuasive and Communicative Potential of Hagiographic Narrative Structures in Screen Representations of the Polish Underground Soldiers Struggling for Independence after World War II

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Abstract

The author analyses audio-visual productions from recent years referring to hagiographic narrative structures, with a main focus on the construction of characters typical of literary and film hagiographies. The presented study shows that hagiographic structures infiltrated film narratives about soldiers of the Polish underground fighting for independence after World War II and fulfil communicative functions analogous to their literary versions. The undertaken research leads to the conclusion that what dominates are persuasive functions aimed at shaping patriotic attitudes and promoting values which influenced the characters modelled on historical figures of the so-called indomitable soldiers (or “cursed soldiers”) who opposed the communist power in Poland.

Keywords: hagiographic film, narrative structure, literary hagiography, cursed soldiers, indomitable soldiers, sacralisation of film characters, religious symbols

Słowa kluczowe: film hagiograficzny, struktura narracyjna, hagiografia literacka, żołnierze wyklęci, żołnierze niezłomni, sakralizacja bohatera, symbolika religijna

The hagiographic feature film is so meagrely represented in the Polish cinema that it virtually does not exist as a separate genre. It is symptomatic that the well-documented *Światowa encyklopedia filmu religijnego*¹ lacks an entry entitled “hagiographic film.” An attempt to discuss this phenomenon with reference to genre studies was undertaken by Magdalena Kempna-Pieniążek in her book on the modern religious

¹ *Światowa encyklopedia filmu religijnego*, M. Lis, A. Garbicz (eds.), Kraków 2007.

cinema.² A hagiographic work is most simply defined as a biographical story of a saint who was proclaimed as such by the Church (canonised or at least beatified³), or who was perceived by the public as a saint or died enjoying a reputation of sanctity. In a similar manner, literary hagiography is defined in *Słownik terminów literackich*⁴ as “a section of biographical writings,” and “a section of Christian writings related to lives of saints – legends about their lives and deeds.”⁵ Lexicographers point out that hagiography was commonly known in the Middle Ages, and back then it belonged to the current popular culture, which found its reflection in the oral tradition which foregrounded the fictional and creative aspect of lives of saints, including in biographical stories also apocrypha, and even fantasy “in the form of mythological, fable-like and romance plots.”⁶ Popular stories, both transmitted orally and as written down as stories describing lives of saints, were part of the old “public opinion” which contributed to the origins of the holy aura surrounding the deceased person. At present, the functions of popular stories – including hagiographic ones – have been taken over by audio-visual narratives.

In order to define hagiographic narrative structures, it is necessary to refer to the etymology of “hagiography” and “hagiographic.” From the Greek, “hagiography” means “a section of writings comprising legends about saints and stories about their lives, especially Catholic saints,” and figuratively, “a tendency of biographers to uncritically glorify renowned figures.” The latter aspect is visible especially in adjectival references: “hagiographic” does not only mean “referring to hagiography” but also “excessively idealizing renowned figures.”⁷ Hence on the basis of etymology, one can distinguish the main components of a hagiographic narrative, which is a biographical story about a life of a person recognised as saint who usually has some particular additional qualities. It is significant that hagiography is not associated with exploration of the phenomenon of sanctity itself, as such writings usually do not contain phenomenological studies on the essence of sanctity, as is the case in Rudolf Otto.⁸ In line with Christian theology, “sanctity is a complex reality which not only touches upon the very mystery of God, but also cult and morality [...]. It seems to be limited to the inaccessible God, yet it is also attributed to his creations.”⁹ The present analysis will not analyse the essence of sanctity, as the field of my explorations

² M. Kempna-Pieniążek, *Współczesne filmy hagiograficzne*, [in:] eadem, *Formuły duchowości w kinie najnowszym*, Katowice 2013, pp. 65–73.

³ Beatification, that is proclaiming a person to be blessed, is the first formal step which leads to their canonisation.

⁴ *Hagiografia*, an entry, [in:] *Słownik terminów literackich*, J. Sławiński (ed.), Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1976, p. 149.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Hagiografia, hagiograficzny*, entries, [in:] *Słownik wyrazów obcych*, J. Tokarski (ed.), Warszawa 1980, p. 265; M. Zowczak, *Bohater jako święty*, “Etnografia Polska” 1987, no. 2, pp. 139–159.

⁸ R. Otto, *The ‘Idea’ of the ‘Holy’: An ‘Inquiry Into’ the ‘Non-rational Factor’ in the ‘Idea’ of the ‘Divine’ and Its Relation to the Rational*, transl. J.W. Harvey, Oxford 1957, <https://www.realheathenry.com/download/books/The-Idea-of-the-Holy-Otto.pdf> [access: 12.09.2018].

⁹ *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, L.X. Leon-Dufour (ed.), Poznań 1990, p. 972.

are contexts of the semantic field related to morality and mechanisms of attributing features of sanctity to certain people by a community, including creating quasi-cults around such people as a result of the respect surrounding them. I intend to analyse how narrative forms once used to tell stories about saints in literature are applied in audio-visual works. That is why beyond the scope of this paper remains the question whether the person depicted in the film genuinely deserves to be seen as saint or why he is presented as one. The key question here is rather whether components typical of hagiographic narrative forms are used in narratives about heroes of the Polish underground struggling for independence, and whether they have similar communicative functions, including persuasive functions. Although “saints” are discussed as characters of hagiographies, sanctity itself does not undergo analysis here. Thus, terms such as quasi-hagiography and quasi-hagiographic are also used throughout the paper.

Traditional hagiographies described the life of the hero, but also constituted “an attempt to reconstruct the saint’s personality.”¹⁰ Moreover, as a hagiography can be a “legend,” nowadays it is necessary to consider a “biographical legend,” interpreted with reference to culture,¹¹ which is a created, dominant part of the public image of a given person. It is assumed that creating such a legend is accompanied by idealizing tendencies, presenting certain features and achievements of the person in an excessively positive manner, omitting any unfavourable elements. It is thus a subgenre with a clearly marked didactic intention¹² or even an “educational-panegyric”¹³ one. Assuming the perspective of theory of communication, in this case visual communication, hagiography has a persuasive function,¹⁴ and its aim is to convince readers, to influence their opinions and attitudes. Thus this genre fulfils an important social function, creating patterns of behaviour employed to shape approved attitudes,¹⁵ especially among younger generations.

Kempna-Pieniążek treats literary hagiographies, including the lives of saints, as a point of reference, pointing to the composition of a narrative as the main genre-related distinguishing feature for the modern hagiographic film as well. She emphasises the three-part structure of hagiographic narratives, with prologue, main part, and conclusion. Particular parts are associated with particular communicative functions and ways of their realisation through particular content. The prologue is usually dominated by a rhetorical function, whose aim is to evoke interest and admiration in the recipient-reader. The main part contains the proper presentation of biography,

¹⁰ See *Biografia*, an entry in: *Słownik wyrazów obcych...*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹¹ M. Haltof, *Autor i kino artystyczne. Przypadek Paula Coxa*, Kraków 2001.

¹² *Hagiografia, hagiograficzny*, *op. cit.*

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ See: A. Kruszyńska, *Świętość jako kategoria argumentacyjna: tradycja hagiografii średniowiecznej w literaturze współczesnej*, “Forum Artis Rhetoricae” 2005, no. 3, pp. 33–46. Cf. J. Jurgała-Jureczka, *Od średniowiecznej literatury hagiograficznej do „zwyčajnej świętości” w utworach współczesnych*, “Bielsko-Żywieckie Studia Teologiczne” 2002, vol. 3, pp. 423–430; *Święci i świętość w literaturze i kulturze*, M. Kopsztein, B. Szargot (eds.), Bytom 2009; E. Szczepkowska, *Tradycje hagiograficzne we współczesnej popularnej prozie religijnej*, “Literatura Ludowa” 2005, no. 4–5, pp. 13–20.

¹⁵ T. Bedouelle, *Święci jako wzorce*, transl. M. Żerańska, “Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny Communio” 2003, no. 2, pp. 157–169.

including the saint's origins, the most important events from their lives, and usually descriptions of miracles accompanying their deeds. The conclusion, summarizing the whole story, worked as a symbolisation,¹⁶ transcending the meanings of the presented history into a different dimension, into the sphere of spiritual and religious values.

In her anthropological-cultural study,¹⁷ Agnieszka Morstin-Popławska proved that elements of the Christian religion have so profoundly permeated into the Polish culture that they also manifest themselves incidentally, often outside the religious context, even against the intentions and aims of the author. This phenomenon, which consists in the Polish culture, a culture with its internalised Christian values, symbols and topoi, can be termed "cultural absorption." It evinces, in my opinion, in the fact that elements of narrative and compositional structures, and even more importantly construction of characters, including re-creating the personality of a historical hero as a quasi-saint and his or her biographical legend, penetrated the recent film stories of soldiers of the Polish underground struggling for independence after World War II.

Modern hagiographic films, similarly to the literary lives of saints, still popularise knowledge of biographies and outstanding achievements of Church figures;¹⁸ they have "entertainment and promotional"¹⁹ functions, and contain persuasive and didactic elements, creating role models evaluated as positive by the community which creates a given biographical story. Creating a positive image is obviously related to a certain narrative selection, and elements which would show the character in an unfavourable light are removed, while those which confirm their high moral standing are foregrounded. Such a narrative selection concerns the fact that authors of such works frequently use means of expression which aim at engaging the viewer emotionally, for instance melodramatic structures.²⁰ Hagiography as a functional model to be possibly applied in cultural communication in order to shape images of certain figures was noticed by cultural studies scholars some time ago.²¹ The following analysis will attempt at showing that the elements typical of hagiographic narrative structures outlined above, including their communicative functions which determine the assumed effect on the viewer (didactic and related to creating patterns of behaviour) and persuasive functions (creating a positive image of the character), can be found in recently produced films and TV programmes about soldiers of the Polish underground after World War II. It is not uncommon that the way their biographies are presented on screen becomes the modern actualisation of hagiographic narratives. The persuasive function is then related here primarily to shaping patriotic attitudes associated with the Christian system of values.

¹⁶ Cf. M. Kempna-Pieniążek, *op. cit.*, pp. 70–71.

¹⁷ A. Morstin-Popławska, *Jak daleko stąd do raju? Religia jako pamięć w polskim filmie fabularnym*, Kraków 2010.

¹⁸ ks. Z. Adamek, *Ekranostas: przewodnik po filmach hagiograficznych*, Tarnów 2010, p. 274.

¹⁹ M. Kempna-Pieniążek, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

²⁰ See e.g. M. Marczak, *Konwencje melodramatyczne w filmie hagiograficznym na przykładzie „Pieśni o Bernadecie” Henry’ego Kinga*, "Media-Kultura-Komunikacja Społeczna" 2007–2008, no. 3–4, pp. 238–245.

²¹ M. Zowczak, *op. cit.*, pp. 139–159.

Application of hagiographic structures beyond the religious context was first analysed by Krzysztof Kornacki,²² who exposed their presence in socialist realism films, primarily in the way Lenin and Stalin were portrayed.²³ Means of expression characteristic of the religious film, including the hagiographic film, were used there to build a message subject to ideological persuasion, thus an untrue message.

In subsequent years the manner of employing means typical of the hagiographic film became subtler, and nowadays they are used on screen to depict victims of the communist times as “saints.” The topos of the “cursed soldiers” (“indomitable soldiers”) for years present in the public discourse, and even in writings of historians,²⁴ rarely appeared in texts of culture, including the audio-visual arts. The first works to address this topic were two teleplays: *Inka 1946. „Ja jedna zginę...”* [Inka 1946. “I’m the only one to die...”] (2006, dir. Natalia Koryncka-Gruz), devoted to Danuta Siedzikówna, alias Inka, and *Śmierć rotmistrza Pileckiego* [The Death of cavalry captain Pilecki] (2006, dir. Ryszard Bugajski). In both cases focus is placed on the flawless ethical stance of the characters, the total unfoundedness of the accusations against them, the excessive brutality of enquiries against them, and their indomitableness and perseverance. In the case of Inka, her young age is emphasised as well, juxtaposing her experiences with scenes from the lives of modern seventeen-year-olds, her peers. In the teleplay about Witold Pilecki, the focus is on the unprecedented patriotically-motivated accomplishments of a cavalry captain during the war. In both plays we see absolutely innocent people of gentle predisposition selflessly helping others (Inka, a medical orderly in a guerrilla squad, also helps the enemy soldiers from the battlefield). In their suffering for the sake of the values they believed in, their biographies are reminiscent of lives of saints. Audio-visual narratives about them are certainly similar to hagiographic narratives as far as the communicative and social functions are concerned. At present, these narratives present heroes whose attitudes evoke admiration, as they seem improbable in their heroism. Yet their truthfulness is confirmed by documents and reports of living witnesses or written testimonies, just as it is in the case of saints. These biographies are as popular among their audience now as literary hagiographies were in the past. Teleplays were the first to make them available to a wider audience, adding to what has been popularized on the Internet and in popular culture, such as through comic books or songs performed by rappers or rock singers. The narrative structure of these stories also seems similar: Pilecki and Inka, like the martyr saints²⁵ of the olden days, suffer innocently, although not

²² K. Kornacki, *Religijne aspekty polskiego kina socrealistycznego*, [in:] *Ukryta religijność kina*, M. Lis (ed.), Opole 2002, pp.15–35. Metaphorical understanding of “sanctity” as an analytical-interpretative category was applied in film studies by S. Bobowski, *Święci i naprawiacze świata w filmach Krzysztofa Zanussiego*, “Tygiel Kultury” 1998, no. 1–2, pp. 90–96.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

²⁴ One of the first articles appeared in “Gazeta Polska” of 23 February 2011 (Leszek Pietrzak, *Po prostu – Niezłomni*), while an avalanche of publications started in 2013, with a book: J. Wieliczka-Szarek, *Żołnierze Wyklęci. Niezłomni bohaterowie*, Kraków 2013.

²⁵ See: E. Albingier, *Męczennicy jezuickcy w „Żywotach świętych” Piotra Skargi*, “Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Litteraria Polonica” 2013, no. 3, pp. 259–269; R. Jaworski, *Wyznawcy, męczennicy*, “Mówią Wieki” 2014, no. 3, pp. 11–15.

because of their belief in God, but because of their belief in their Fatherland. Belief in God is, however, in their case also a component of national patriotic values. Similarly to the saints of the Christian Pantheon, these two characters remain faithful until their deaths as martyrs. Inka dies shouting “Long live Poland!” while the Cavalry Captain’s mouth was gagged so that he could not pronounce his faith in the reborn Fatherland.

The first feature film made with grandeur to present soldiers fighting in World War II against the Germans and after the war opposing the communist powers imposed by the Soviets is entitled *Historia „Rója”. W ziemi lepiej słyhać* [The Story of “Rój”], (2016), dir. Jerzy Zalewski. It presents what is typical of a hagiographic composition: a rhetorical prologue which shows an incident towards the end of Rój’s life, when the young captain of a guerrilla squad has already become legendary among the local citizens, a fleeing hero, appearing out of nowhere and escaping every calamity. The character seems to be especially protected by God, Like a saint or mythical hero he appears among enemies, dodges most of their bullets, and disappears safe and sound, as if by miracle. This colloquial application of the word “miracle” is significant because the director recreates a legend which accompanied the hero during his lifetime. It is typical of such a film to blend historical and cultural elements, just as it was done in the medieval hagiographies. The screen representation of the figure comprises cultural codes related to hagiography as a branch of popular culture, which serves various purposes (religious, promotional, educational and entertainment-related). Exposing one of the final episodes of the hero’s life at the very beginning of the film serves rhetorical-persuasive purposes. This sequence in particular is to engage viewers and keep them on the edge of their seats, while simultaneously focusing on the uniqueness of the character, who in this story appears to be almost fantastic, film-like, or mythical. At the same time, as it is believed by the community represented on screen.

This may be also considered a special case of a film which waited a very long time for its premiere, just as some films censored in communist Poland did for years. The film was shot in 2009–2010, and it had its opening six years later (in 2016). Difficulties occurring in the post-production stage effected the artistic quality of the work, as the film is burdened with construction errors, although they were corrected in a TV series under the same title (2015, episode 1 premiered in March 2017). Despite the difference in the quality of realisation, both the cinema version as well as the TV series analogously create a community of indomitable soldiers, comprised mainly of the main characters, but also many other figures modelled on real people. The “indomitable” soldiers function as “saints” of the nation, martyrs suffering for the nation, fighting for the survival of its identity and on its behalf (in the place of those who do not do that) and for its defence (opposing political and military aggression). Religious motivations and values in the ideological layer of this narrative have been replaced with national and patriotic values. The soldiers who are indomitable (from the perspective of the nation) and cursed (from the perspective of the imposed Communist powers) fight for the right to self-determination, for the political existence of the nation and its state, and for the traditional ideological attitudes rooted in the Catholic religion. Communist powers directed their aggression as much towards this religion

as towards the soldiers. This is shown in the film as aggression towards religious symbols, such as the cross in Rój's family home, when a member of the secret political police (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, UB) brutally questions the hero's mother about the whereabouts of her son. Such virulence was caused by the fact that the system of national values stemming from Christianity followed by the indomitable soldiers exposed the methods and purposes of people who installed the Communist state in Poland. These people imposed their authority by force: they used political (falsified elections) and ideological (reversing values in their description of reality) lies. Heroes and patriots were called traitors, cowards and bandits. Traitors subject to the invader were called heroes. Although in fact they were bandits who destroyed the heritage of national culture and sadistically tortured the nation's elite, they were presented to the nation as the ones building its greatness, unlike the elite, presented as vermin.

This reversed order of symbolic reality is shown in the presented historical film fresco of Jerzy Zalewski, as in both of his works the director preserves the motivations and character construction typical of heroes of the drama of Polish Romanticism.²⁶ In the Polish culture, Romantic heroes helped people believe that moral victory could be achieved "here and now," while the pragmatic victory would come in the future. The spirit of these heroes was resurrected in the legend of the indomitable soldiers.²⁷ In the film, these soldiers are mainly (although not solely) young people who decide to sacrifice their life, youth and love in order to fight, although their fight soon proves impossible to win in ways other than symbolic, spiritual-moral, and religious. This is caused by the physical, political and military supremacy of the enemy, imposed through the apparatus of the Soviet totalitarian state and its acolytes.

The eponymous Rój – Mieczysław Dziemieszkiewicz – is not only a brave young soldier who, thanks to his courage, intelligence and wit, can fight effectively with bravado (these are elements of the adventure film). He is also a religious man who believes in God's Providence, and this helps him bear the brunt of life in the underground squad and undertake seemingly impossible tasks. The latter are mostly successful, including attacks on strongly defended militia posts and prisons of the secret political police. In the film narrative, the end of his heroic, brave, adventure-filled life comes as death on a battlefield. "Rój" and his friend "Mazur" are surrounded by a huge military squad and shot from all around. The final episode is especially meaningful, being shaped along the structure of a hagiography. In the penultimate sequence, Mieczysław Rój is modelled to remind viewers of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (elements of Christ figure²⁸), although with a certain modification. Just

²⁶ This interpretative context related to the category of Messianism is so broad that addressing it requires a separate study. That is why it is only signalled here, see for example: *Spór o mesjanizm. Rozwój idei*, A. Wawrzynowicz (ed.), Warszawa 2015; P. Coates, *Cinema, Religion and the Romantic Legacy*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2002, see: P. Coates, *To może być Jezus: o Chrystusie i figurach Chrystusa*, transl. T. Rutkowska, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 2004, no. 45, pp. 14–35.

²⁷ This aspect of hope which is related to the victory of values, especially, Christian values, in the future against barbarians employing revolutionary violence is most vividly present in Zygmunt Krasiński's plays: *Irydion* and *Nie-Boska Komedia*.

²⁸ Bibliography on the topic of Christ figures is very rich and its extensive selection can be found in the book: M. Lis, *Figury Chrystusa w „Dekalogu” Kieślowskiego*, Opole 2013; see especially: L. Baugh,

like Jesus, Rój knows that he will be betrayed (by his fiancée), and yet he goes to a place which is well-known to his future murderers, with no intention of escape. In a hut in which he is happy (like Christ, who visited the Olive Garden with his disciples on numerous occasions) he is waiting with his last faithful friend. This is the only significant difference: the friend (“Mazur”) is with him during the last night of his life and promises to share his fate. Christ waited alone. This alteration is truly meaningful, as Christ’s torment was a lonely sacrifice, while Rój shares it with his friend. This points to the community-based, collective character of the situation when one is betrayed, left alone and murdered. Such an element is important historically, but also for the origins of the legend of the cursed soldiers – it is the whole community that is abandoned by the rest of society, betrayed and given away to suffer a martyr’s death at the hands of the enemy. Similarly to that of Christ, this sacrifice is undertaken for the benefit of those who betray, for their future salvation, i.e. regaining freedom. From the current perspective, it can be said that this sacrifice laid foundations for building an independent Polish state based on authentic values rather than on the reversed values which led to the origination of the communist state. The collective character of the screen representation of the cursed soldiers as presented in Rój’s story is further emphasised in a symbolic, visionary scene. Before his death, Rój dreams that he is imprisoned and mercilessly tortured, and then his massacred body is held by his mother. His mother with the mutilated body of the soldier as an expressive cinematic Pietà is a symbol of sacralisation not only of one hero, but also of the whole community of “cursed soldiers” whom he represents and who shared his fate, and in turn the whole tormented personified Fatherland. In reality, Dziemiszewicz was killed during a round-up, and was not tortured,²⁹ yet such a fate is representative, most typically of tens of thousands³⁰ of Polish patriots beaten to death because they had been fighting against the Soviet Communist oppression after World War II. The visionary Pietà symbolically expresses the feelings of thousands of mothers who had to suffer for the torment of their children. These mothers could not even mourn their children, as they could not give them a proper funeral. Rój’s mother represented as the Mother of Sorrows of the Polish nation embodies an obvious rhetorical message: the sacrifice is futile only seemingly, because it originates from a transcendent power

La rappresentazione di Gesù nel cinema: problemi teologici, problem estetici, “Gregorianum” 2001, no. 2, pp. 199–240, *idem*, *La rappresentazione metaforica di Gesù nel cinema. La figura cristica*, “Gregorianum” 2001, no. 4, pp. 719–760, I. Sever, *Cinematographic Christ Figures*, [in:] *Cinematic Transformations of the Gospel*, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–112; *Eadem*, *La rappresentazione metaforica di Gesù Cristo nel cinema. Le figure cristiche femminili*, Roma 2011; P. Coates, *op. cit.*

²⁹ K. Krajewski, R. Łabuszewski, *Mieczysław Dziemiszewicz „Rój”*, https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dok/09/394-411_Mieczyslaw_Dziemiszewicz-Roj.pdf [access: 27.09.2018], pp. 407–408.

³⁰ Historians have not to this day determined precise numbers. A. Friszke, *Polska. Losy państwa i narodu 1939–1989*, Warszawa 2003 – it is said that in 1945–1946, about 100,000 people were arrested and about 60,000 deported into the USSR, while in the subsequent years there were about 15,000 people arrested every year. In 1944–1949, military courts handed down 50,000 verdicts, out of which officially 4,000 were death sentences (p. 109), yet in 1946, 35,000 people were arrested for political reasons, and 10,000 were killed in battle. In 1945–1947, 2,500 people were sentenced to death, and about 10,000 killed without a verdict (*ibidem*, p. 134). The number of people who died pursuant to torture is still not known.

which endows it with profound meaning – spiritual victory, analogous to the victory of Christ the Redeemer.

The message resulting from the history of Rój shown as a representative of the indomitable soldiers is clear: their heroic life full of sacrifices terminated in a lonely death which followed torment in the gloom of imprisonment and meant total annihilation. The last meant not only death itself, but also erasing the soldiers from the memory of the living, lies about their history and destruction of their bodies after death, as well as all their physical and symbolic traces. However, such an end of life would be a nullification of the hagiographic story, which essentially consists in solidifying and spreading knowledge about weighty deeds of extraordinary people and miracles they performed or that happened thanks to them. In the world of the film story, such a miracle consists in Rój's heroic achievements, which are "improbable" from a rational point of view. The "miracle" in the cultural sphere refers also to the fact that the memory of Rój (and that of the other "cursed soldiers") has survived despite the attempts of the communist powers to destroy it, and their positive legend has been rebuilt. This legend is fed by such quasi-hagiographic stories, praising the deeds, uniqueness, special traits of character, fidelity to values and martyr's death of these soldiers. The already mentioned elements of narrative structures and characters shaped like those typical of old hagiographies fulfil analogous persuasive and communicative functions, as it was shown earlier. These stories popularise life histories of heroes who were so far forgotten, display their positive features (virtue, indomitableness, fidelity to values, loyalty, piety, justice), weaken or remove their negative features,³¹ create socially expected personal patterns (patriotic attitude, readiness to sacrifice oneself for freedom, loyalty towards friends, forgiving enemies³²).

The second example of sacralisation of suffering of the main character employing vivid visual symbols refers to a brief but significant thread in the film *Zaćma* [The Blindness]. The filmscript is based on the biography of Julia Brystygier,³³ one of the most sadistic executioners of the secret political police in Stalinist times. Despite her high position in the hierarchy of the police, she personally tortured prisoners – those who resisted the Communist authorities. After many years "Luna," (her alias) starts looking for contact with the church, and she embarks on the road to self-reflection. The cinematic story is centred around revealing the circumstances and motivations of her extraordinary transformation, which ultimately concluded in conversion, an element missing in the film. The film focuses on the beginning of Brystygier's road, as an attempt is made to grasp the moment when the conscience of a person, an embodiment of evil, stirred for the first time. In the process shown in the film, one image proves to be of key importance in the diegesis. It is an image of one of the tortured soldiers, whom Brystygier sometimes sees in her memories as Christ covered with

³¹ Rój diminishes the punishment for the informers who were caught pursuant to denouncing the indomitable soldiers and for the villagers cooperating with them – instead of the death penalty they are to be "fatherly whipped."

³² Rój expects that his fiancée, who was arrested, will betray him, yet he knows methods used in Communist prisons and does not bear a grudge. He is only sad that his death is coming.

³³ In 1945–1954, the head of the social-political department of the Ministry of Public Security – A. Friszke, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

blood, wearing a crown of thorns, hanging on the cross. The same prisoner (played by Bartłomiej Porczyk), covered in white bed sheets in a prison hospital, reminiscent of Christ after resurrection, speaks (his mouth is closed but we hear his voice) to his tormentor in meek words and does not put any blame on her during an investigation aimed at her. These are clear signs of forgiveness which seem to exceed human capacity. This forgiveness is the eponymous “blindness” in the worldview of the Stalinist executioner, and it constitutes the basis of equating a nameless indomitable soldier with Christ, which leads to shaping him as a cinematic Christ figure, one who is the essence of sanctity.

Another type of sacralisation is found in a docu-feature film entitled *Pilecki*. In the case of this eponymous hero, verified historical facts recalled in a documentary narrative are enough to create a kind of hagiography without any need for further idealisation. The film narrative serves rather to trace the source of his behaviour, which is so unusual that it is easily associated with sanctity. It is also an attempt at recognising and understanding the ordinary in the extraordinary. The film documentary about Pilecki as a “saint” of Polish independence fills in blank spots in history, as his name was absent from historical handbooks throughout the whole period of the Polish People’s Republic and a few years more. His memory and the remains of his body were to be annihilated, and his burial place was not to be found, similarly to the graves of other “cursed soldiers.”

Although Captain Pilecki is not called a saint in the film, his deeds are said to have been impossible for an average man to perform. Although he underwent the cruellest torture and was treated unfairly, his fidelity to his Fatherland and God as well as his goodness seem almost unbelievable. All of the circumstances make viewers think of some transcendent support and provide unambiguous associations with the conceptualisation of the noun “saint,” both in its colloquial and religious meanings. A “saint” is a man of high moral standing. From the perspective of Christian theology, sanctity is the essence of God which is imparted to people selected by God with the help of the Holy Spirit and Christ’s sacrifice.³⁴ However, there is another significant component – it is related to moral improvement, that is effort invested in spiritual development,³⁵ understood to be a close relationship with God as the only true sanctity. For Christians, such a visible pattern, “an icon of God” which is to be a model for man to follow, is embodied in Jesus in his dual human-god nature.

The supposed sanctity of Witold Pilecki was shown as a path on which a man follows Christ leading his layman’s life, yet determined by Christian virtues, which is described by Thomas à Kempis.³⁶ This book, which has been shaping European Christians for centuries, had an impact on Pilecki’s spiritual development. Quotes from the book provide a frame for the film narrative and also appear in the story.

Dramatised scenes and sequences bring the presented character closer to the viewer and make him more understandable, especially in his emotional aspect. This effect is strengthened by how the film narrative is supported with the testimony of

³⁴ *Słownik teologii biblijnej...*, op. cit., pp. 974–977.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 977.

³⁶ Tomasz à Kempis, *O naśladowaniu Chrystusa*, transl. A. Kamieńska, Warszawa 2016.

Pilecki's son and others who knew the captain. Casting an actor similar to the character in appearance – fair-haired, with clear blue eyes wide open – emphasises his meekness and innocence as a victim. Marcin Kwaśny portrays the character in a restrained manner, showing his internal focus and a certain sadness, also visible in Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane – the sadness of anticipating his tragic end, fear and readiness to follow Christ on this pathway to the very end. Here, in the “miracle” essential to every hagiography, he does the impossible (voluntarily entering a concentration camp, organizing a resistance and a channel of communication to convey information, as well as escaping from the camp, going abroad and coming back). The miracle continues when, like a phoenix from the ashes, he is resurrected in the Polish social consciousness, history, popular culture, and culture. He has become the most recognizable of the group of cursed soldiers, a legend, a figure who functions in the public space as a sign-symbol of the entire group. The pattern-originating function of hagiography employed in the past is still present in narrative structures of this filmic quasi-hagiographic story about a national hero admired by the youth. Thus the persuasive function is realised as well, as the values for the sake of which the captain remained indomitable are also accepted by the viewer.

The last film to be discussed here, *Wyklęty* [The Cursed] (2017, dir. Konrad Łęcki), is a realistic story of the life of the last soldier of the Polish post-war underground. His story is based on the life of Józef Franczak, alias Lalek, the last of the indomitable. The hero is not idealised, and various stages and forms of his struggle are shown: starting from the early post-war period when the squads were numerous and well-organised, to wandering alone and starving in winter in woods and caves. The film is realistic, without embellishment, but also without exaggeration. It shows faith in God as the last form of support for the hero, who is physically lonely and mentally tormented, yet he is not presented as a saint or martyr. The realism consists mainly in the faithful rendition of political circumstances: the “Cursed” has no alternative. He knows that an attempt to reveal himself or live a normal life would result in sharing the fate of other indomitable soldiers. He knows this as he had experienced torture in the quarters of secret political police, to where he does not want to return. This film is a novelty in the Polish cinema, showing the Polish Home Army generation in a way different from the one established by the films of the so-called Polish school, which contributed to the legend of the Home Army. In *Popiół i diament* (*Ashes and Diamonds*), fighting in a guerrilla squad and a peaceful life were presented as two alternatives equally available for a person with the freedom to choose. *Wyklęty* is one of the most neutral film stories about the post-war lives of the soldiers of the Polish underground. Death at the doorstep of a church has a religious sense, yet it is its existential aspect that is most important. The man tormented after wandering alone seeks refuge in God, that is in the source of existence. Franciszek Józefczyk, alias Lolo, is killed in a manhunt, killed in the church as a man who adhered to his difficult path, although he had not wanted it. The film is a voice in the discussion about the theological aspect of sanctity, yet it does not contain hagiographic narrative structures. The life of Emil Fieldorf (*General „Nil”*, 2009, dir. Ryszard Bugajski) is presented in a similarly realistic manner.

The above analysis leads to the conclusion that literary structures of hagiographic stories, especially those treated as part of popular culture or folk religiousness, have become absorbed by the Polish audio-visual culture. It is clearly evident that screen representations of the analysed topos of the “indomitable soldiers” contain elements of narrative structures characteristic of literary or film hagiographies in their persuasive functions. An especially typical element of this can be found in Jerzy Zalewski’s film about Rój. All the analysed films focus on the pattern-generating function of hagiographic structures. In the presented narratives, persuasion concerns the sphere of patriotic values, also related to Christian values, such as fidelity to basic ethical norms, including truth, freedom and justice, as well as readiness to sacrifice one’s life for the sake of these values. Their stasis was the Fatherland, for which the Indomitable sacrificed their lives. Hagiographic structures and Christian symbolic iconography, as well as shaping characters to be reminiscent of Christ figures or of his followers-emulators in stories about them strengthen their positive cultural legend. They promote patriotic and Christian values, thanks to which attitudes which they represent have become personal patterns worthy of respect and admiration. A film character who promotes a positive personal pattern becomes the dominant element of these narratives, one with a mythopoetic function. This way, the collective imagination is populated with national heroes perceived as if they were martyr saints of Polish independence, as all of them in their stories die at the hands of their enemies for the sake of their Fatherland’s freedom in the future. Their victory is symbolic and spiritual, as in the case of the religious saints and Christ himself. The victory comes despite physical annihilation through death, which becomes a sacrifice. Their sacrifice and people’s memory of it, expressed in this type of narrative in the popular culture sphere of Polish collective life, are confirmed to be a “saint” in the collective memory and tradition, becoming at the same time a foundational sacrifice of the new Polish state reborn after dozens of years.

So far other representations, both excessively exaggerated and naturalistic, as well as realistic, have been less frequently produced by Polish filmmakers. Hagiographic structures are more productive when it comes to representing the theme of the Polish underground soldiers fighting for independence after World War II.

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