

Reception of Czechoslovakian Cartoons in the Polish Contemporary Educational Sphere

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Czechoslovakian animated movie after many years of having been broadcasted solely on TV, became interactive. Despite passage of time since its broadcasting, it is still easily found and watched in Poland not only online (where the old-time cartoons are easily available), but also published on CD's or cassettes. It is also a subject of analysis in academic and popular publications. Moreover, they are the theme of art and literary competitions organized by kindergartens, schools, libraries and cultural institutions. They even have their own permanent exhibitions, where requisites related to them are presented. The images of their main characters become a fashionable gadgets presented on the key chains, cutlery, children bedclothes, school accessories, toys etc. They also function in the social and media sphere as advertisements or occasional memes. It was particularly visible during the Euro 2012 tournament, when the internet sphere made the Czechoslovakian cartoons one of the leading theme of the Poland-Czech match. The main feature of this occasional memes was to present the other side by the way of symbols, i.e. recognized and liked characters from Polish and Czechoslovakian cartoons.

Key words: *Czechoslovakian TV cartoon; Polish contemporary educational sphere*

Postwar Czechoslovakian cinematography, particularly during the so called New Wave (1962–1972), belongs not only to one of the most original and interesting in Europe, but also recalls one of the most recognized film schools worldwide. Films of that time, despite being made at the period of deep political transformations, moved far beyond politics, focusing mainly on thorough observation and reliable reflection of the social and lifestyle realities. Young artists, such as Miloš Forman, Jiří Menzel and Věra Chytilová, presented in their works “the reality that exists, not the one that needs to be created”¹. Jerzy Płażewski, Polish distinguished expert on film art wrote that “it was something deeply Czech – funny and smart in its avoidance of martyred solemn dignity, moving towards the mocking exposure of the system absurds”². For many Polish film lovers titles such “Ostře sledované vlaky” (Closely

¹ PŁAŻEWSKI, J.: *Historia filmu 1895–2005*. Warszawa 2010, p. 304.

² Op. cit. p. 425.

watched Trains) (by J. Menzel, 1966)³, “Lásky jedné plavovlásky” (Loves of a Blonde) and “Hoří, má panenko!” (The Firemens Ball) (by M. Forman, 1965, 1967) or “Ecce homo Homolka” (Behold Homolka, by J. Papoušek, 1969)⁴ still remain the synonym of the Czech history and mentality.

Next to such genre and stylistically varied, excellent drama movies, almost concurrently began the Czechoslovakian puppets, and cartoon movies boom. It was possible thanks to rich tradition of puppet theaters, but mainly because of the Prague, biggest European movie-set village Barrandov of that time (it managed to survive the turmoil of the Second World War), and movie production centre operating until 1961 in Gottwaldov (Zlín nowadays)⁵. Works created in these places initiated spectacular history of Czech animated movie, whereas “the level reached at that time [...] guaranteed its continuity in the period when little attention whatsoever was drawn to small forms of intimate film plastics arts”⁶.

After the fall of Prague Spring in 1968, and gradual decline of the great and original cinematography of the Czech New Wave, it did not manage to find equally great and original successor. However, the animated movie still succeeded, and its contemporary reception (also in Poland) may be referred to as one of the unique pop culture phenomena.

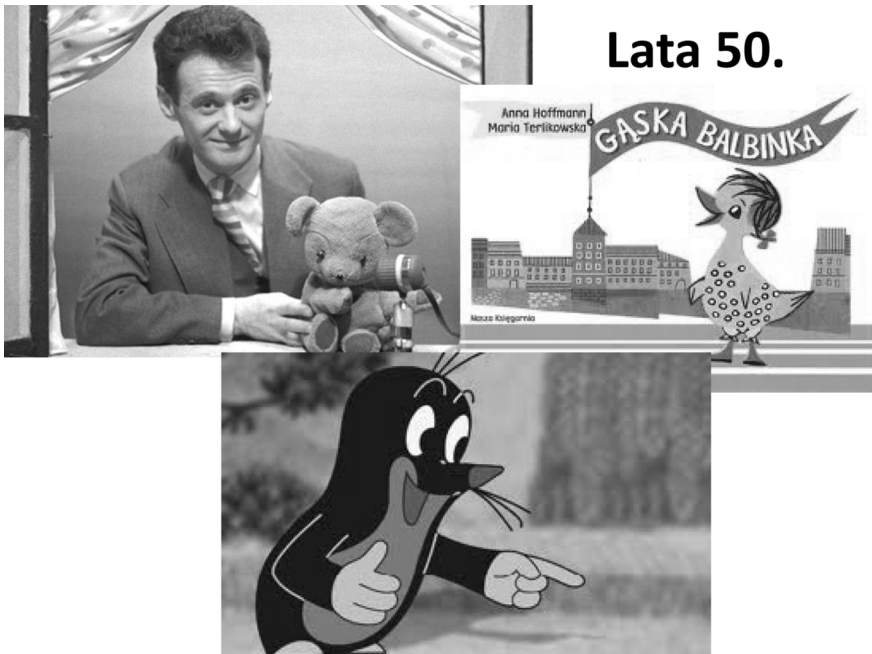
The youngest Polish audience had the opportunity to get to know Czechoslovakian cartoons as late as at the beginning of 1970s, when they were broadcasted within the evening programme for children, called Dobranocki (until 1993), and then referred to as Wieczorynki. Although one of the very first Polish children cartoons had been broadcasted on TV in the 1950s, (**Fig. 1**) (“Miś z okienka” in 1958 and “Różne przygody Gąski Balbinki” in 1959), they did not present such resourcefulness and technical innovative as in case of the cartoons for children made by our Czech neighbours. It particularly refers to one of the most popular Czechoslovakian animations “Krtek” (The Mole), that was shown as early as in 1956. Its author, director and animator, Zdeněk Miler, came up with the idea of a small creature (not having been invented before by Walt Disney) that for 46 years (until 2002) had merely changed its image; its nose and tail was shortened, some hair was added to the top of its head, eyes were made bigger making its face happier and in general more a boy-like. Getting rid of the dialogues made the cartoon universal and understood worldwide, whereas sounds

³ “Ostře sledované vlaky” by J. Menzel are considered the counterpart of the Polish movie “Popiół i diament” directed by A. Wajda in 1958.

⁴ TRONOWICZ, H.: *Film czechosłowacki w Polsce*. Warszawa 1984.

⁵ The name Gottwaldov functioned between 1948–1990 commemorating the first president of the communis Czechoslovakia Klement Gottwald.

⁶ PŁAŻEWSKI, J.: op. cit., p. 228.



made from time to time by Krecik, expressing happiness and sadness, were the recording of Miler's little daughters' voices.

Only "Bolek i Lolek" (Bolek and Lolek, 1963) and "Reksio" (Rex, 1967) (Fig. 2) – Polish children cartoons from the 1960s managed to gain popularity among the youngest audience comparable to the Czechoslovakian craze. The same happened with the Czechoslovakian "O loupežníku Rumcajsovi" (The Robber Rumcajs, 1967) and "Bajky z mechu a kapradí" (Thales of Moss and Fern), with the main creatures of "Křemílek a Vochoomůrka" (Křemílek and Vochoomůrka, 1968).

The 1970s made also a great decade for Czechoslovakian cartoons, with their main characters equally popular and liked. The example sets the following: "Chťopiec z plakatu" (The Boy of a Poster) (1970–1981), "Cypísek – syn loupežníka Rumcajse" (Cypísek – The Son of Good Robber Rumcajs, premiere in 1972), "Maková panenka" (Poppy Doll, 1972), "Psi život" (Daily Life, broadcasted in Poland as late as in 1991), "Víla Amálka" (Fairy Amelia, 1975), and excellent "Sąsiedzi" (The Neighbours) and "Vodník Česílko" (Water Goblin Česílko) from 1976.

After many years of first Polish broadcasting of the Czechoslovakian animated movies, they are still popular, commonly known and valued. In



Lata 60.



the latest ranking of *Večerníček* (evening TV programmes for children) organized by one of the Polish online portals⁷, there were 4 Czechoslovakian and 3 Polish cartoons out of ten in general. The first three included “Bolek i Lolek” (Bolek and Lolek, 25 % of votes) “Kртеček” (The Little Mole) i “Pat a Mat” (Pat and Mat) (11 %), and the following: “Reksio” (Rex, 10 %), “Křemílek a Vochomůrka” (Křemílek and Vochomůrka, 8 %), “Baltazar Gąbka” (Baltazar Mushroom, 6 %) and “O loupežníku Rumcajsovi” (The Robber Rumcajs, 4 %). The rest of the places are as follows: 4th place – “Volk i zajac” (Wolf and Hare, Russian production, 11 % of votes), 7th place “Včelka Mája” (Maya the Bee, Austrian-Japanese production, 7 % of votes) and the 8th place taken by “Muminki” (Dutch-Finnish production, with 7 % of votes).

Czechoslovakian animated cartoons, after many years of having been broadcasted solely on TV, became interactive. Despite passage of time since its broadcasting, it is still easily found and watched in Poland not only online (where the old-time cartoons are available and accessible), but also recorded on CD's or cassettes. It is also a subject of analysis in academic

⁷ 10 best evening programmes for children (in Polish): komediowo.pl

and popular publications. Moreover, they have become a theme of art and literary competitions organized by kindergartens, schools, libraries and cultural institutions. They even have their own permanent exhibitions, where requisites related to them are presented. The images of their main characters become a fashionable gadgets presented on the key chains, cutlery, children bedclothes, school accessories, toys etc. They also function in the social and media sphere as advertisements or occasional memes.

The first marketing application of Czechoslovakian cartoon on a large scale on the Polish trade market took place while advertising a washing powder “Cypisek” (Fig. 3). Producers of the domestic detergents from Bydgoszcz (“Pollena”) used the name of Manka’s and Rumcajs’ son (Rumcajs was the main character of the cartoon about this “positive robber”) to call the first export product for babies, that appeared as an object of Polish mothers’ desire in the 1975⁸. It can still be bidden in online auctions such as Allegro.

More than 30 years later, the main characters of popular Czechoslovakian cartoon “Pat a Mat” appeared in Polish advertising campaign of life insurance company Link 4. in 2009, and in this-year campaign of local ads Tablica.pl (2012)⁹.



⁸ The first showing of “O loupežniku Rumcajsovi” took place in 1967, whereas its continuation was “Cipisek”, screened in 1972. The first part of the 39-episode evening programme for children on the good robber, in his unique red hat, black beards and an acorn revolver living with his wife Manka and little son Cipisek in the forest of Jičín, was broadcasted in July of 1970.

⁹ Pat and Mat, the main characters of “Pat a Mat”, are extra-ordinarily clumsy friends in their typical hat, that before managing to build something, spread damage destroying everything around. Finally they would overcome all difficulties, shaking hands at the end, as a symbol that they succeeded. The cartoons first broadcasted in 1976 (until 2004) had 78 episodes altogether. It was broadcasted in Poland from 1988 on the Friday

Pat and Mat, two slightly feather-headed do-it-yourselfers, despite many initial failures experienced in each undertaken action leading to total destructions of what was to be build or fixed, at the end of the story always happily shook hands, promoting optimistic attitude to life and trust put in common actions. In the small adds bulletin, Pat and Mat make successful deal of selling and buying a chest of drawers and a picture.

Czechoslovakian animations, particularly the recent ones, are beginning to function in Poland also in extra-ordinarily intense nostalgic and educational dimension, referring to and promoting this, what could be considered as the most positive in Polish People's Republic or at least worth rescuing from oblivion. The example of popular character publication is the lexicon by Bartek Koziczyński called "333 pop cult things of PRL" referring to widely perceived pop culture of the years 1945–1989¹⁰. The lexicon has an index including titles of the most popular evening programmes for children, with Czechoslovakian productions among them.

The educational stream may be exemplified by the article written by Katarzyna Pawłowska-Salińska *Fajne bo czeskie... nasz alfabet* (Cool because Czech... our alphabet), published in 2012 in highly opinionforming newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza"¹¹. The title itself implies the nature of this article, which aim was to present Czech, Czech culture and mentality in the most interesting context for a Polish reader. Therefore, apart from Czech beer, "Becherovka" and "Lentilky", surnames of popular singers, i.e. Karel Gott and Helena Vondráčková, as well as the character from literature – Švejk, and the main characters from children cartoons could not be missed. Therefore, the author recalls four Czech cartoons and their cult characters most popular in Poland: Pat and Mat (Pat and Mat), Krteček (The Little Moll), Rumcajs (The Robber Rumcajs), as well as Křemílek a Vochoomůrka (Křemílek and Vochoomůrka)¹².

The educational aspect is also presented in the museum of evening programmes for children in Rzeszów (Muzeum Dobranoczek), drawing

edition of the evening programme for children. Link 4 advertisements and Tablica.pl also available on the YouTube website.

¹⁰ KOZICZYŃSKI, B.: *333 popkulturowe rzeczy PRL*. Poznań, Vespa, 2007.

¹¹ PAWŁOWSKA-SALIŃSKA, K.: *Fajne bo czeskie... nasz alfabet*. Gazeta Wyborcza" 2012, dodatek Wysokie obcasy, dataek 16. 06. (online edition)

¹² Křemílek and Vochoomůrka are inseparable dwarfs that help the animals, plants and water nymphs and the main characters of the animation "Bajky z mechu a kapradí" (directed by Z. Smetana), first broadcasted in October 1968. The author of the beautiful music with the unique theme of violin and trumpet was composed by Martin Zeman. PAWŁOWSKA-SALIŃSKA, K.: *ibidem*.

great interest not only among children, but also adults brought up with Dobranocki and Wieczorynki in the background. This local institution was created thanks to private collection of Wojciech Jama, who, in 2008, donated for the city around 2 500 exhibits. The collection included toys, posters, cards and stamps, records, games and many other items related to the main characters of these programmes. Most of them have their own exhibit areas, such as Krteček (The Little Mole), Rumcajs ((The Robber Rumcajs), or Křemílek a Vochomůrka (Křemílek and Vochomůrka).

Promoting Czech culture referring to Czechoslovakian cartoons launched in 2010 was another interesting initiative of educational character. Within the Year of Czech Culture in Lower Silesia, Mikołaja Reja's local and public library along with the Regional Centre for Education and Culture in Oleśnica invited pre-school and school children to participate in two projects: an art and a literary one. The main character of the first one called "Rumcajsowo – kolorowo", was Rumcajs – the main character of the book by Václav Čtvrtík and a cartoon, whereas the literary competitions "What do we love Czech cartoons for" was addressed to the pupils of primary and junior-high schools from the Oleśnica district. The authors of the best works were awarded during the 11th Cultural Presentations taking place in May 2010 in Oleśnica¹³.

Enormous popularity of the Czechoslovakian cartoons broadcasted of Polish TV in 1960s (particularly "O loupežníku Rumcajsovi"), encouraged Polish artists to adapt the books (films) for the stage. In 1974 the Polish Theatre in Warsaw staged the musical "Przygody Rozbójnika Rumcajsa" ("Adventures of the good robber Rumcajs") with libretto by Ernest Bryll and music composed by Katarzyna Gaetner. It is still staged in many Polish theaters, including the Polish Theatre in Bydgoszcz (premiere in 2004), Baltic Drama theater in Koszalin (premiere in 2009), Theatre of Zagłębie Children in Będzin (premiere in 2009) as well as in Słupsk, Szczecin, Jelenia Góra and many others.

The cartoons owe their ongoing popularity to their accessibility via Internet, used also as educational tool, with websites aiming at gathering and selecting information, making files with new episodes of the cartoons accessible, discussing or recalling on the forums their favourite episodes, characters and stories from the childhood. For such purpose www.nostalgia.pl website or spodlady.com, as well as kultowedobranocki.pl (having its branch at the central train station in Warsaw), online shops were created. The owners of the latter, Tamara Kurowska and Grzegorz Krasnodębski, the animated movies lovers, apart

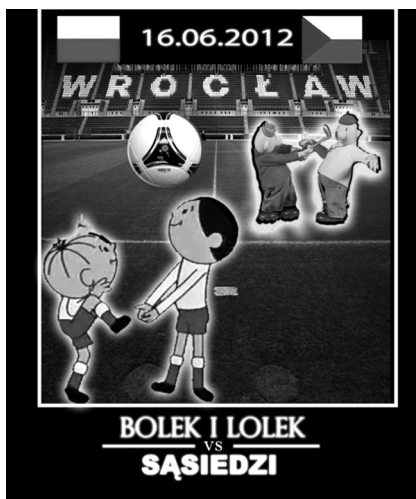
¹³ "Panorama Oleśnicka" 2010, nr 3 (20–26 l).

from selling books, mascots and games consider this shop as a place of children memories open to everyone.

The Internet quickly responds to given events, phenomena and processes enabling its users to access practically limitless information. Then, very often unrelated contents begin to merge, creating common discourse commenting the reality around.

It was particularly noticeable during the Euro 2012 European football championship, as it had overtaken the Polish media sphere long before the opening ceremony. Intense emotions and high hopes accompanying this event were directly reflected in the variety of internet comments and opinions. One of the themes accompanying the match between the Polish and Czech national representation on June 16th 2012 in Wrocław, was the Czechoslovakian cartoons, made one of its leading themes.

The main characteristics of such occasional memes is the depiction of the opposite team players using symbols, i.e. recognizable and liked characters from Polish and Czechoslovakian cartoons. The football rivalry was brought down to series of duals between the



animated features of the childhood heroes: Krteček and Reksio **(Fig. 4)**, Pat and Mat, Bolek and Lolek **(Fig. 5)** or even two “cartoon” representations of Czech and Poland **(Fig. 6)**.

The photos, despite tackling the sport rivalry of adults, convey clear message – this football meeting is accompanied by solemn, but positive, peaceful, “neighbourhood” atmosphere, strikingly different from the one during the previous match between Poland and Russia on June 12th 2012 in Warsaw, or with Greece on June 8th 2012 in Warsaw.

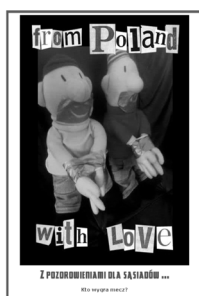
Most of the pre-match photos clearly indicate the Polish victory – in the duel between Krteček and Reksio, the brave puppy seems to gain advantage, as also noticed by the King Julian **(Fig. 7)** – a popular character (especially among the adults) from the recent series of animated movies “Madagascar”.

On the other hand, the “Czech nightmare” (i.e. the forgone conclusion of Polish football fans on their victory over the Czech) is illustrated by Krteček **(Fig. 8)**, as drawn by a popular cartoonist Remek Dąbrowski and posted on his blog two days before the match.



It is worth to notice that next to the cartoon characters, i.e. elements of significantly pop culture nature, in the football euro-discourse there were also elements related to the folk tales and Polish history, such as the three brothers from the legend about Lech, Czech and Rus, that are joined by the Greek god Zeus (reference to the A group members in the final stage of Euro 2012: Poland, Czech Republic, Russia and Greece) **(Fig. 9)**.

Nevertheless, some of the cartoon graphics refer to violence and negative motions, as some of the illustrations base on a stereotypical associations which are obvious for an adult, but not always in case of children, as in the example of Reksio, attacking petrified Krteček's goal, growling with bare teeth **(Fig. 10)**, and the “duel between childhood titans” kept in the stylistics of the bloody film “300”, telling the story of the



Thermopile battle in a cartoon manner (Fig. 11). Still, the illustrations of tided up “Czech hostage” and “Pat a Mat”¹⁴, make an adult smile, rather than scared (Fig. 12). Nevertheless, these are not the graphics that may be used for educational purpose, as shown in previous examples.

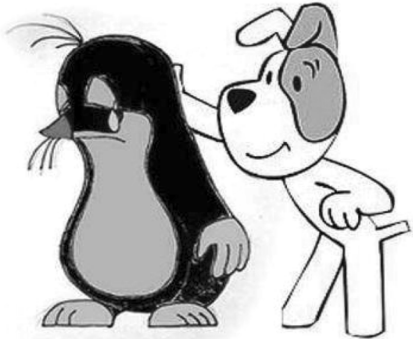
The appearance of the themes of Czechoslovakian cartoon in graphics while commenting the preparations for the football match between Poland and Czech had its continuation also after the match. Despite the failure of Polish representation (1:0), illustrations using the theme of Polish and Czechoslovakian cartoons applied in various ways could be found on the Internet the very same evening, showing satisfied Krteček and angry Reksio. And as the proverb goes, “he laughs best who laughs last”, in most cases they presented the Czech cartoon character as the winner of the rivalry with the character of the Polish animation. This element was also used in an original way in an add promoting real estate offers online (Fig. 13).

Graphics on the Internet, referring to the Czech failure with Portugal (quarterfinals: Portugal-Czech 1:0, 21st June 2012) when the Czech team

¹⁴ The writing under the Pat a Mat illustration directly refers to the title of one of the Bond's movies “From Russia with love”.

was eliminated set a great fair play example, as they show Reksio cheering up the crying Krteček (Fig. 14).

What makes these Czechoslovakian cartoons dating back to 1960s or 1970s so special, as they enjoy such interest and liking among both young and older audience? What made them unrivalled in comparison with Disney's productions of that time, or the Japanese animations that try to win the recognitions among the youngest?



Despite many changes taking place in the post-war Czechoslovakian education, these cartoons did not become subject of such changes, presenting lasting values and Czech mentality, what definitely made them genuine. Mariusz Szczygiel, the most distinguished promoter of a Czech culture in Poland, in his excellent book *Gottland*¹⁵ presents the Czech features pointing compliance, distance towards the world and own self, hard work, resistance, and specific sense of humour. And this is exactly what the Czechoslovakian cartoon characters are like.

¹⁵ SZCZYGIEL, M.: *Gottland*. Warszawa 2006.