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CTCM 2530: Superheroes Throughout the World

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International Superheroes: An Analysis of *Zenitram*

In 2010, *Zenitram* became the face of the first Argentine superhero film. Rubén Martínez, a seemingly regular man who lives in 2025 Buenos Aires, Argentina, is a garbage worker. At the beginning of the film, we see the poverty of the Argentine people and the economic and ecological challenges they face, specifically in a situation in which Rubén encounters a group that is sorting through the trash for things that they can use. When he realizes this and lets them take what they want, there is a price, and he is fired by his supervisor for not stopping them. Shortly after, he meets a stranger in a public restroom who tells him that he is the “chosen one,” and when he says the name *Zenitram*, he will “become the other who lives within.” After tapping into his superpowers, which include flight and supervision, he must navigate how he will use them for good.

While the story of *Zenitram* mirrors that of Superman’s, as the film goes on, we discover the ways that the Argentine film redirects it and creates new conversations and commentaries. For example, corporate corruption is a major theme in *Zenitram*. We see the economic and environmental struggle of the Argentine population in the drought and the steep price of water. Daniel Durbán, head of the Spanish company WaterWay, exploits the natural resources and the people of Argentina to keep them in their economic constraints. The situation elicited the economic *reconquista* of Latin America by Spanish businesses in the 1990s. The corporate greed

of the company and the powerlessness to stop it that is felt by even Zenitram evokes a thought provoking response from its viewers.

In comparison to the powerful Superman in the most powerful country in the world, Zenitram winds up feeling substantially limited in his power to do good throughout the movie. Both Superman and Zenitram work with the government, earning impressive titles and being officially recognized by the State. However, the two superheroes have opposite outcomes as a result of the title. While Superman becomes more powerful and supported in his duties, Zenitram's power is greatly diminished. Hidden in an office behind a large stack of paperwork to sign, Zenitram quickly feels discouraged and disconnected from what he was meant to do. The sheer amount of red tape he has to cut through makes him unable to use his powers. In showing this, the director critiques the bureaucracy.

Being from a less powerful country directly affects the power of Zenitram in comparison to Superman. The two films could be argued to be reflections of the ways that the two countries see themselves. *Superman: The Movie* displays a nation where good overpowers evil and the superhero is confident and dominant. Superman overcomes his obstacles, gets the girl, and saves the city. He is celebrated by all and returns to peace in Metropolis. Meanwhile, *Zenitram* takes this all-too-well known story and turns it around. It decides to communicate critiques of its country and how it is being led—and by displaying its downfalls, it consequently asks its viewers what they will do about it. Zenitram faces his primary challenges with the people who are meant to be working with him. The conflict, although they, at first, seem to be with the international company, author Vinodh Vanketesh points out “what is truly at stake is the local, communal, and the State.” Zenitram wrestles often with his identity and how he is seen in his own nation. The press and the people attack him and what he does, despite his heroic efforts. At the end of the

movie, rather than the ending we are familiar with playing out, Zenitram has to sacrifice himself to bring back the rain. And while this saves the city for the moment, it quickly ends in another ecological disaster in which the flood takes over. In comparison to *Superman: The Movie*, *Zenitram* presents a much more dark and diminished sense of self, but it is not a film without hope.

Zenitram utilized the story of Superman to comment on both underdevelopment and corporate corruption in its major themes and ideas. It is established from the opening of the movie—in which Martinez encounters the poverty of the lower class, and when he helps, even just by looking the other way, he is fired by his supervisor. Everything is monetized upon, including waste and including water—which leads to the biggest point of corporate corruption. WaterWay exploits the people of Argentina and steals its natural resources, leading to poverty and an economic depression. The film takes the story that we know, and turns it around, creating a commentary on real issues that are faced every day. Through this mirroring of the direct matters of concern that are encountered by the people of Argentina, the film has brought about conversations that need to be had. It then asks its viewers to continue to imagine the world that they want to live in and do whatever they can to achieve it—because hope can come from anywhere.

Works Cited

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