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The Trauma of Leaving, the Tragedy of Coming Back: Maturing to Manhood, Experiencing Sexuality and Recognising One's Self in Nicolas Presl's Graphic Novel „Priape“

Nicolas Presl's graphic novel entitled *Priapus* takes place in the reality which consists of iconic elements of Greek culture: e.g. theatre, philosophical academy, and Roman culture: e.g. legions. Referring to ancient times, Presl focuses on the issue which is basic for determining one's identity since the very first days of life – the issue of “Oedipal flaw”. By this I mean the flaw associated with fate, with the possession of some inalienable qualities that make mother's home not a space of acceptance, but of rejection. Abandoned shortly after being born – due to the fact of coming into the world with a supernaturally large phallus – the main character, Priapus, grows up in the pastoral village of his adoptive parents. But even there he experiences unfair treatment and has to leave with a broken heart. Then he searches for the acceptance that is not unconditional, but received through the initiation – while trying to begin the adult life with the help of philosophers' community. Yet this episode becomes to him another one, and the largest source of tragic disappointment.

Presl does not present this series of defeats as a loop with no way out. Priapus meets his fate in a way very similar to the mythical Oedipus. He finds his parents' home and causes the death of its inhabitants. This fact, from Priapus' point of view, can mean the destruction of the very first area of his fatal exclusion. It results in his voluntary exile, during which he is accompanied by the one and only person that loves him “no matter what”. Thus, for Priapus the devastation of his native space – a deed that is indisputably wrong from the point of view of public morality – on the metaphorical level becomes an act of liberation from the primarily unmet need: by the elimination of this need's source. What is more, it becomes the way of finding self-fulfillment in the relationship based not on the community's life rules, but in a relationship of love by choice, based on reciprocity and trust in someone else's entirely selfless commitment.

Priapus is thus a story about self-identification which is possible, on one hand, thanks to the isolation from the community – a socializing factor that should teach us about life, but sometimes fails and turns out to be the source of disappointments; on the other hand, thanks to finding oneself in a relationship both parts of which reject the possibility of abandoning from the very beginning.

In my presentation I would like to discuss the interpretation outlined above in details; after that, I would like to propose the analysis of Presl's work as an example of the trend of classical reception that perceives ancient tradition as a thesaurus of rudimentary motifs. Those motifs provide us with a set of tools for diagnosing and solving some of the important contemporary crisis. In this case by the contemporary crisis I mean the problem of searching for autonomous ways to determine one's identity when social categories shaped during past epochs are not always satisfying for the needs of the present-day's human being.

Bibliography:

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Joanna Kłos, geboren im Jahr 1988, ist Absolventin der klassischen Philologie und der Kulturwissenschaften. Sie erforschte schwerpunktmäßig die Rezeption der Antike in der Kinderliteratur aus der Epoche der Volksrepublik Polen. Seit Kurzem interessiert sie sich auch für die Gegenwart der antiken Tradition in der portugiesischen Kultur, ganz besonders für das künstlerische Schaffen von José Saramago.