

Kostka Gallery
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A Moment of Stillness:

Anežka Hošková,
Lucie Svoboda Mičíková
and Pavel Příkašský



Fairy tales: the symbolical narratives which co-shape our cultural identity. They are bedtime stories for our children; they are supposed to have sedating effects. We are also well-aware that classical fairy tales are usually profoundly moralistic – they are supposed to offer a certain worldview where the Good and Evil figure, and the social roles are often petrified. In this regard, “Sleeping Beauty” serves as the example: a sleeping princess waits passively for her prince charming to bring her back to life. Now that is a representation of gender stereotypes if we have ever seen one. However, as we know from the Brothers Grimm besides others, fairy tales usually have a much darker and crueller history than their current versions suggest. We can trace down the basis of “Sleeping

Beauty” as far back as in the collection *Pentameron* (1634/36) by the Neapolitan author Giambattista Basile under the name “Sole, Luna e Talia” (Sun, Moon, and Talia). The princess Talia falls into a deep slumber after she gets pricked by flax and is raped asleep by a king from a neighbouring kingdom. With some help from fairies, she gives birth and suckles his two children while still sleeping. When Talia finally wakes up, she must deal with intrigues from the king’s jealous wife who wants to murder her and her children (she even wants to cook her children and serve them to her husband for dinner). Eventually, everything “ends well” (thanks to a common forethoughtful cook) and Talia can start a happy nuclear family with her children and king... We would likely not want to read this

version to our children, but it is illuminating to see its parallels with our modern version.

A Moment of Stillness exhibition began as a curatorial call to a trio of distinctive painting personalities to create monumental mural paintings on theme of their choice for the Kostka Gallery. Anežka Hošková, Lucie Svoboda Mičíková, and Pavel Příkaský decided to join their individual styles into an intertwined whole and worked closely on the realisation whose scale exceeds all of their previous projects. They were inspired by not only “Sleeping Beauty” but also by the short story “The Poacher” (1993, published in the collection *Xanadu*, edited by Jane Yolen) by the American author Ursula Le Guin.

In her short story, Le Guin retells “Sleeping Beauty” from a new point of view. The main protagonist is a farm boy who discovers a round thorny wall in the woods where he poaches. He makes it his mission in life to get inside. When he finally manages to complete the tough task after years of hard labour, he finds himself inside an enchanted castle which allows him to enjoy seemingly all pleasures of life which he could not afford before, such as comfort, abundance of food and alcohol, and even body of a sleeping maid. Nonetheless, the common farm boy does not dare to even touch the princess; he knows that waking her up could break the spell and, above all, that she waits for a noble prince. Even though he lives in the fairy castle which offers him a luxurious haven (although without a possibility to interact with other living beings), he remains a poacher who benefits silently from fortune of others. He never even remembers his parents living in poverty in his home farm.

The short story can be interpreted in a number of ways, but an especially interesting reading was proposed by the literary scholar Esra Coker Korpez (in the collection *Food in American Culture and Literature: Places at the Table*, Cambridge, 2020). Coker Korpez sees “The Poacher” as a criticism of the false promise of the American Dream for everyone. The main “hero” is an embodiment of a determined self-made man who wants to achieve his dream of better life through hard work and break out of the misery of his ancestors. The success becomes his gauge of honour and value. Nevertheless, when he gets into the castle, he starts to stagnate in the cycle of numbing consumerism. Yet, Coker Korpez highlights that the

protagonist comes to terms with the achieved status quo when it comes to social mobility: “With the acceptance comes the internalization of a worldview that classes like systems are permanently fixed and that highly individuated subjects who have the courage, resolve, and discipline may move easily among them.” In terms of this philosophy, success or lack of it is based on personal preconditions and the individual explores himself more than his social system in his opportunistic pursuit of satisfying his needs and dreams. According to Coker Korpez, this constitutes a type of an “atomized yet docile individual who is fully engaged in the game of capitalist exploitation while holding himself not accountable”. After all, he is just a “harmless” poacher who benefits from the excess of others. However, Coker Korpez stresses that “while the act of ‘poaching’ seems harmless or benevolent, it obscures patterns of class domination and oppression, encouraging the individual to be one with the system. [...] ‘The Poacher’ poignantly illustrates that the quest of the postmodern hero is to neither ‘make’ or ‘break’ the spell but seek a third option: to ‘break into’ the spell and take advantage of and buttress the staying power of ‘privilege’ and ‘class’ while sustaining the belief that he is not really a part of anything at all”.

In this respect, the image of the castle overgrown with thorns and covered with a sticky substance on the walls of the Kostka Gallery may evoke not only the residence of the abused princess and the consumerist haven of the lethargic poacher, but also the concept of so-called Vampire Castle from where the “bourgeois left” casts spells undermining the class consciousness production. As the philosopher Mark Fisher wrote in the conclusion of his well-known text “Exiting the Vampire Castle” (2013): “We must break out of the ‘debate’ set up by communicative capitalism, in which capital is endlessly cajoling us to participate, and remember that we are involved in a class struggle. [...] It must be remembered that the aim of our struggle is not recognition by the bourgeoisie, nor even the destruction of the bourgeoisie itself. It is the class structure – a structure that wounds everyone, even those who materially profit from it – that must be destroyed. The interests of the working class are the interests of all; the interests of the bourgeoisie are the interests of capital, which are the interests of no-one. Our struggle must be towards the construction of a new and surprising world, not the preservation of identities shaped and distorted by capital.”