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Stanisław Nowaczyk

The Young Spartan [Młody Spartanin]

Poland (1947)

TAGS: Sparta Spartans





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General information	
Title of the work	The Young Spartan [Młody Spartanin]
Country of the First Edition	Poland
Country/countries of popularity	Poland
Original Language	Polish
First Edition Date	1947
First Edition Details	Stanisław Nowaczyk, "Młody Spartanin", *Płomyk* 4 (1947): 114–116.
ISBN	ISSN 0137-8503
Genre	Short stories
Target Audience	Crossover (school children, teenagers)
Author of the Entry	Marta Pszczolińska, University of Warsaw, m.pszczolinska@al.uw.edu.pl
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Creators



Stanisław Nowaczyk (Author)

Stanisław Nowaczyk was a writer and editor, but firstly, a pedagogue and educator focused on school children. Before WW2, his books were published by Ossolineum in Lwów (Lviv), and after the war, he was active in Toruń. There, he was the co-founder and chancellor of Spółdzielcza Księgarnia Nauczycielska (SKN) [Teachers' Cooperative Bookstore], which since May 1945 offered various books and magazines for young readers, such as *Płomień* [The Flame], *Płomyk* [The Little Flame], *Płomyczek* [The Tiny Flame], *Iskierki* [Tiny Sparkles] and *Młody Technik* [The Young Technician]. From 1947, SKN also maintained a wholesale warehouse for Nasza Księgarnia and Światowid publishing houses. Nowaczyk was the author of didactic materials, teaching aids and methodological guides, especially for teaching history in elementary schools, such as *Jak uczę historii w szkole podstawowej* [How I Teach History in Elementary School] (1936) or *Przewodnik metodyczny do Opowiadań z dziejów ojczystych dla V klasy szkół powszechnych Włodzimierza Jarosza* [Methodological Guidebook to *Stories from History of the Fatherland for 5th Grade Students of Elementary Schools* by Włodzimierz Jarosz] (1934) and books about bringing up children and working with them at school *Książka pedagogiczna w pracy dydaktyczno-wychowawczej nauczyciela* [Pedagogical Books in Teachers' Didactic and Educational Tasks]. He also lectured on pedagogy and the history of children's education at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. For over 28 years (1946–1974), he was the editor-in-chief of *Życie Szkoły* [School Life], which focused on the organisation of education and teaching and was published in Toruń at the time.

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Additional information

Summary

Playing near the Eurotas river, a group of Spartan boys learn that their friend captured a little fox. They go to see the animal locked in a cage. Kokkalos feels pity for the little fox and thinks he would have cared for it better. He asks his friend, Fillos, who caught the fox, to give the animal to his group, called Foxes; Fillos'group is called Wolves. The Wolves agree on the condition that Kokkalos intercepts the animal unnoticed.

At night, Kokkalos sneaks to the cage without sound, takes the fox, and hides it under his coat. Unfortunately, one of the "wolves", Iren, approaches. Kokkalos tries to distract him by chatting about the stars. The chat evolves into a discussion about the world, but Kokkalos, focused on the fox who bites him trying to escape, hardly answers. He is in agony but bravely hides his pain. Eventually, he faints from the loss of blood. The next day, he regains consciousness and asks what happened to the fox. He learns that, despite his failure, his behaviour was judged exemplary according to Spartan standards. The boy is quite happy that the little fox is free because he would have also fought if anyone tried to take away his freedom.

Analysis

The story of the Spartan boys and their adventures is intended for an audience of children within the same age group. The protagonist appears, at first, quite ordinary, similar to his contemporary companions, as well as boys of any other period, but it turns out that what seems ordinary in Sparta may prove to be quite unusual today. Kokkalos is presented as a role model. His relationship with the other boys is highlighted. Since he belongs to the Foxes, he never acts as an individual only. Similarly, Fillos, even though he caught the animal, asks the Wolves whether he should give the little fox to the Foxes. The two groups are friendly, and there is no antagonism between them. Each boy "competes" with himself to improve his qualities and develop Spartan virtues desired and appreciated within the community.

Focusing on child upbringing in ancient Sparta, the author shows its intended effects. Kokkalos respects the laws, values, and morals of his country and his group, which functions as his family. He hides the pain he feels from the fox's claws and teeth and does not complain

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even when blood runs down his legs. On the one hand, he wants the pain to stop and is tempted to free the animal, but on the other, the others' opinion is very important to him. "He remembered the lessons he heard every day: a true Spartan would rather die of pain than let the others see it!" (p. 115). He thinks that his value depends on whether he succeeds in hiding his suffering. It brings to mind the epitaph of Spartans who died at Thermopylae – the boy is as obedient to the laws of Sparta as were its most famous warriors.

The scene also reminds the readers of the reality of a contemporary war which ended barely two years before the story was published. The motif of brave, silent resistance in the face of torture is present in many stories for children published in *Płomyk* during the first few years after WW2. Prima facie, the theme might not seem appropriate for children. However, many readers heard, saw, or even experienced torture during the war – either from the Nazis or the Soviets. In the post-war reality, Kokkalos' persistence and love for *leges patriae* (the laws of the fatherland) are very relevant to the readers. Moreover, the issue of freedom is raised twice. Firstly, when Kokkalos sympathises with the captured fox, wishing to make the captivity bearable or even to free the animal. In the end, Kokkalos is happy that the little one escapes, even if it means that his mission fails. His empathy for the creature and his attitude to re-gaining freedom as the supreme good are evident at the story's end. Kokkalos "wished the little fox who made him suffer so much, to be free. He, Kokkalos, if anyone wanted to take away his freedom, would also strike, bite, rip out his enemy's intestines. He would fight until his last breath" (p. 115). The myth of Sparta, present in Polish culture for centuries, appeared to have increased in relevance in the context of WW2.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Sparta Spartans

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth

Adversity Animals Boys Child, children Childhood Freedom Identity Peers Relationships Values

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Culture

Further Reading

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