

Andreas Slominski

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I have eleven sons.

The second is handsome, slim, well made; one draws one's breath with delight to watch him with a fencing foil. He is clever too, but has experience of the world as well; he has seen much, and therefore even our native country seems to yield more secrets to him than to the stay-at-home. Yet I am sure that this advantage is not only and not even essentially due to his travels, it is rather an attribute of his own inimitable nature, which is acknowledged for instance by everyone who has ever tried to copy him in, let us say, the fancy high dive he does into the water, somersaulting several times over, yet with almost violent self-control. To the very end of the springboard the emulator keeps up his courage and his desire to follow; but at that point, instead of leaping into the air, he sits down suddenly and lifts his arms in excuse. -- And despite all this (I ought really to feel blessed with such a son) my attachment to him is not untroubled. His left eye is a little smaller than his right and blinks a good deal; only a small fault, certainly, and one which even lends more audacity to his face than it would otherwise have, nor, considering his unapproachable self-sufficiency, would anyone think of noticing and finding fault with this smaller eye and the way it blinks. Yet I, his father, do so. Of course, it is not the physical blemish that worries me, but a small irregularity of the spirit that somehow corresponds to it, a kind of stray poison in the blood, a kind of inability to develop to the full the potentialities of his nature which I alone can see. On the other hand, this is just what makes him again my own true son, for this fault of his is a fault of our whole family and in him it is only too apparent.

The seventh son belongs to me perhaps more than all the others. The world would not know how to appreciate him; it does not understand his peculiar brand of wit. I do not overvalue him; I know he is of little enough importance; if the world had no other fault than that of not appreciating him, it would still be blameless. But within the family circle I should not care to be without this son of mine. He contributes a certain restlessness as well as a reverence for tradition, and combines them both, at least that is how I feel it, into an incontestable whole. True, he knows less than anyone what to do with this achievement; the wheel of the future will never be started rolling by him; but his disposition is so stimulating, so rich in hope; I wish that he had children and children's children. Unfortunately he does not seem inclined to fulfill my wish. With a self-satisfaction that I understand as much as I deplore, and which stands in magnificent contrast to the verdict of the world, he goes everywhere alone, pays no attention to girls, and yet will never lose his good humor.

My eighth son is my child of sorrow, and I do not really know why. He keeps me at a distance and yet I feel a close paternal tie binding me to him. Time has done much to lessen the pain; but once I used often to tremble at the mere thought of him. He goes his own way; he has broken off all communication with me; and certainly with his hard head, his small athletic body -- only his legs were rather frail when he was a boy, but perhaps that has meanwhile righted itself -- he will make a success of anything he chooses. Many a time I used to want to call him back, to ask him how things really were with him, why he cut himself off so completely from his father, and what his fundamental purpose was in life, but now he is so far away and so much time has passed that things had better stay as they are. I hear that he is the only one of my sons to grow a full beard; that cannot look well, of course, on a man so small as he is.

(Frank Kafka, „Eleven Sons.“)

Andreas Slominski was born in 1959 in Meppen, and lives and works near Berlin. He holds a professorship in the department of sculpture at Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg.

Slominski has been invited by numerous institutions worldwide to show personal exhibitions, among them Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Kunsthaus Zurich, Fondazione Prada, Mailand, Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam. The artist has received many international awards and prices, including Karl-Ströher-Preis (Frankfurt/Main, 1991), Hannah-Höch-Preis (Berlin, 2013, and the Lichtwark-Preis (Hamburg, 2014).

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