Magiczny Kraków

Juvenalia

2011-03-15

***Juvenalia* is both a young and a dying tradition. It all started in 1954 from the *Igrce Żakowskie (students' spectacles)* organised in the Wolski Forest. The first students' celebration drawing upon the tradition of Kraków May festivals was attended by the students of the Jagiellonian University.**

A year later they were joined by the students of the Kraków University of Technology. The idea to organize students' celebrations caught on admirably fast. In **1956** the event moved to the centre of Kraków and gained its new name of *Juvenalia*. The event is said to have been initiated by **Hieronim Kubiak**, then a sociology student and later a well-known party activity included in the so-called *potentially reformable.* The name *Juvenalia* was supposedly invented by the future journalist, **Stefan Bratkowski**.

People who remember these times wonder till the present day how it was possible that during the dark night of Stalinism these celebrations could emerge so spontaneously, joyously and just for fun. It was a fiesta among the cheerless and dull events organised always to the honour of something and obligatorily anyway. Fistly, it seems that the authorities understood the need to let go of some steam from heated student minds; secondly, the Polish October 1956 was coming; and thirdly, the model behaviour of students during the first editions convinced the local party leaders about the harmlessness of these joyous practices.

Soon the celebrations gained a kind of scenario, frequently treated quite freely. It always lasted three days. Starting on Friday, Kraków inhabitants could admire the colourful parades of students marching from the campus and dressed up in attires varying from their regular outfits, and then more and more fancifully. Less refined attires could also be found, but … well. One year the streets saw a student dressed in a transparent foil bag and nothing else. He was accompanied by an elegantly dressed friend informing passers-by that he was the stage agent of the first Polish naked ass. Funny? Maybe not, but these days students get away with quite a lot. Already in the late 1970s there was a freshman student in Kraków walking around dressed up as a rocket with the *Persching* sign. It was an allusion to the press and TV propaganda drive against American armaments.

An important element of the first day was the meeting with the mayor of the city who solemnly presented the keys to the city gates to young people, which symbolised the transfer of power over Kraków to the students' fraternity.

Sunday was the most important day of celebration climaxed with a great open-air ball on the Kraków's Main Market Square. During this ball *Miss Juvenalia*, later gracefully (and not imitatively) known as *The Nicest Female Student in Kraków*, was elected. The first winner of this competition was **Alicja Bobrowska**. *Juvenalia* worth remembering took place in **1964** when the Jagiellonian university celebrated 600th anniversary of its foundation. Since the then Rector was named Professor Kazimierz Lepszy (English translation: Casimir the Better), the students took part in celebrations under the motto of *Od Kazimierza Wielkiego do Kazimierza Lepszego (From Casimir the Great to Casimir the Better)* which, nobody knows why, irritated the comrades from the Voivodeship Committee of Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). In the 1970s the atmosphere of *Juvenalia* turned a bit sour. The events of 1970 and 1976 and the growing social tension, particularly in Kraków academic circles, were increasingly reflected in the more

and more numerous disguises and behaviours of students that expressed their opposition towards authorities. Many people lost the will to have fun. But youth had its own rights and the celebrations continued to finally subside. On the **7th of May 1977,** in the townhouse at 7 Szwedzka Street, the brutally slain body of Stanisław Pyjas was found. Pyjas was a student of Polish philology at the Jagiellonian University, and well-known for his opposition activities. Outraged academics called for a boycotting of *Juvenalia*. On Sunday, the 15th of May, the joyous celebrations in the Main Market Square were replaced in Kraków by a silent march of students dressed in black. *Juvenalia* did not take place that year, nor in 1979 or 1980. Modest celebrations were organised in the hopeful 1981. In the subsequent years of martial law and the so-called *third stage of reform*, nobody wanted to laugh. May in Kraków was an ordinary May. Despite the efforts of the authorities that organised various events and wanted to necessarily show that everything was going in the right direction, students stayed in their dormitories. *Juvenalia* came back only after 1989, though in a much more modest form. So will the old *Juvenalia* return? Doubtful. It emerged rapidly and Kraków's youth treated it like a breath of fresh air for one kept in a stuffy room. The greatest strength of these celebrations was their spontaneity. Today though, students have many more opportunities to have fun.

text: Michał Niezabitowski