

## ***PERFEKTY I AMBARAS: Family is not determined by blood***

**Kyra van Zevenbergen and Josephine Scholte (University of Amsterdam)**

On Sunday, June 9th, we saw *PERFEKTY I AMBARAS* in the Wrocławski Teatr Lalek. It was produced by the Puppetry Theatre Pleciuga from Szczecin and directed by Jakub Krofta. The show is a fairytale situated in a fictional kingdom. The story is about the son of the king, called Ambaras (Rafał Hajdukiewicz). After the king and queen divorce, the king (Dariusz Kamiński) introduces his new wife (Katarzyna Klimek), including her son Perfekty (Aleks Joński). Ambaras does not want to accept the new situation and decides to run away from home, followed by Perfekty, who initially tries to stop him. Perfekty does not want to run away, gets scared and wishes to go home, however he's not familiar with the neighbourhood and is depending on Ambaras to find the way back home. Ambaras is not planning on going home and tricks him, after which they get lost. This is the start of an exciting, adventurous journey, turning the boys into real brothers. For us what stood out in the show was the political character of the script, as well as the themes of identity and contemporary families.

The script is written by Maria Wojtyszko. She made a very humorous text, using funny names like Ambaras (Polish word for *trouble, problem*) for the boy who bursts of energy but tends to get sushed all the time, while Perfekty makes the perfect son for his mother, always staying close to her and never breaking the rules. Identity plays a big part in the show regarding Ambaras. He's positioned as different from the rest. His quirkiness is showed in his energetic movements, dancing around, falling on the floor and jumping up again, supported by the powerful, catchy music composed by Tomasz Lewandowski. This is an image we don't immediately associate with a royal son, and it is clear that he doesn't match his father's expectations either. He seems to embarrass the king. His running away is an attempt to escape the pressure and freeing himself from obligations and conventions, resembling his mother's choice to join the hunters and leave the royal life behind. Elements of Ambaras's mother's past life are brilliantly made visual in her costume, designed by Matylda Kotlińska. Her hunter's suit is subtly combined with a blue balloon sleeve, referring to the royal dress.

Even though Ambaras comes home to a warm place of love and acceptance from his dad after being away for so long, he expresses his desire to join his mother. She initially refuses to take him with her, wanting to protect him from the dangers of the jungle. He gets angry and says that each child has different needs. Eventually his mother's new husband stands up for him and Ambaras goes to live with his mother. This shows the children in the audience that it is okay to want things that are different than what's expected of you, and it encourages them to stand up for themselves.

*PERFEKTY I AMBARAS* is also a very political story. It makes references to migration and

asks who has the right to cross the border. This is when Ambaras and Perfekty approach their country's border. Ambaras is very casual about crossing it, going back and forth, while Perfekty is hesitant. Eventually they both cross and get arrested since there are no kids allowed in the other country. This is somewhat similar to the refugee policies in real life, where people are discriminated and denied access, based on their ethnic or sexual identity, even if they are children.

*PERFEKTY I AMABARAS* is a beautiful effort to represent not only the difficulties, but mostly the joys of having a combined family, showing that family bonds are not determined by blood.

Listening to the audience reactions, we think the dynamics of a family are recognizable for both parents and kids, and it is an entertaining and fulfilling afternoon for everyone.