

He Wants to Inform

Veijo Baltzar's 26-year-old shoulders carry two things: as a Gypsy he is the first novelist and author of his people in not just Finland, but the Nordic countries and western Europe. Therefore he is instantly flagged with responsibility in the minds of other people and readers.

He considers himself an interpreter of the people who want to speak out on the social injustices made against them: the under-privileged and disadvantaged. The intentions and inadvertencies caused to these people by the better-off, the system and life. He wants to inform.

His novel, *The Burning Road*, has just been published in Finnish by Tammi Publishing. Our Swedish-speaking readers can access the book through Söderström Publishing. The book has also been published in Sweden with negotiations elsewhere being made. *The Burning Road* is a story which delves into the development of a young Gypsy couple.

People and society have also interested Veijo Baltzar in a more practical way as he stood as a candidate for the Helsinki Council in the recent municipal elections. He is also writing a play and is in the midst of founding a theatre group with plans to set up his own theatre. His next book is likely to be a collection of short stories detailing young people's problems. He is a graduate of trade school, speaks both domestic languages, studies German, reads literature, assists Nya Pressen and is currently engaged.

Regardless of whether Baltzar wants to be a "flag carrier" or not, he has officially taken the position of his own tribe.

He says that a young Gypsy man realises he has a motherland for the first time when he is conscripted to attend military service. Until that point his rights and duties to the motherland have been as obscure as the entire country because he has lived outside of society. The motherland does

oblige a Gypsy child to attend compulsory schooling, yet at the same time doesn't bother to control whether the child finishes compulsory education or not. In other words, compulsory education may be left unfinished while military service may not.

The school life of a Gypsy child is tricky. He begins his educational career much like others, but leaves in almost no time. A Gypsy child often does not have a home to do their homework and assignments or read his lesson notes. This contributes to their struggle to adapt to the educational environment. Cold hunger and pressure from the school community are contributing factors that cause a Gypsy child to leave their education. Within the first three or four years he will refuse to go to school all together. However, the prerequisite for his own development and change in attitude is the completion of compulsory education. Attitudes of the Gypsies are not one sided: there should be changes in the attitudes of both white people and Gypsies. The latter are only equipped with so little resources that cannot be demanded on before they retain the information they need.

- Why is compulsory education neglected in the case of Gypsy children? Why can society afford a homeless and unemployed group of 5000 people? Asks Veijo Baltzar. They could work to build this country up but instead they are being sustained by resources provided by social security.

- Let us first give them a school and home and then let us see what they are. A Gypsy is said to be a Gypsy so long as they are devoid of any

professionalism and the name is a burden. But we humans are such that when we see a man driving a Mustang, we no longer take note of what tribe or nationality he represents but rather what it is he is doing. Could it be he is a director, a doctor, an architect?

- Attempts are being made to coat Gypsies in a blanket of romanticism, but we are not as miraculous as what is said about us in the schlager songs. The difference between a Finn and a Gypsy can be solely limited to our habits, such as styles of dress, says Veijo Baltzar.

He personally speaks of how he spent one winter wandering with the Gypsies so as to experience their everyday life, and it is by no means uplifting.

Do the Gypsies speak their own language?

- It is very rare nowadays. The language is close to Sanskrit and is disappearing amongst our tribe. It has been recorded to some extent here in Finland. A few examples are seen in my book.

Do you think the Gypsy people will lose its way of dress and language if they attend school, get a job and in general start to live like white people?

- Of course it is feared but I don't believe it. Even today, the Gypsies of Finland should have a moderate ability to spiritually adopt the concept of attending school, as they represent the highest level of cultivation among European Gypsies. Instead, they are at the lowest step when you compare the situation with other countries

- One should recognize – and this is by no means an issue between the Roma and white people, but rather an issue of people in general – that one is not better than another by nature. The youth understands this because they don't feel attached to the system with their churches, doctors or money. Young people accept themselves and that's the whole foundation of everything.

- I have nothing against older people but in my opinion there are other forms of justice than just that which the older generation believes. There is also the present day's justice, which can be totally different to how things were 26 years ago and still are today.