

Literature

A Novel About the Roma

Veijo Baltzar

The Burning Road

Novel

Tammi Publishing, 1968, approx. 200 pages

Amongst last Autumn's most interesting publications is Veijo Baltzar's debut novel *The Burning Road*. The fact that the author of the book is a Romani "Gypsy" makes the book more interesting and worth exploring.

Veijo Baltzar is 26-years-old. He was born in Suonenjoki where he lived in a farmhouse as a boy. After attending school, conscription in the army and trade school he has made his home in the capital. Whilst studying at trade school he was struck with the idea of putting his thoughts down on paper. Those papers were then kept "in a drawer" until, through a happy coincidence, the "drawer writer" became known within literary circles. The result is visible – a solid entity, a novel about the Roma.

The main characters are Viktor, his dark* and fiery wife Rosita and her brother Janne. *The Burning Road* is a true description of the life of the dark tribe, their habits and wandering. Most of all though, it is about the fate of Viktor, Rosita and Janne. (By the way, Rosita and her brother come from Rääkkylä, where they reside at the time she meets Viktor). While following their lives, the reader is convinced of what it is to be a Gypsy in Finland. When Baltzar brings forth the problems ahead of us from the perspective of both the Gypsy people and the white, we get a clear picture of how things are and how they should be.

At the end of the book, Viktor reaches his dream of being a doctor – though only in his imagination. *The Burning Road* ends with the dream of a better future, an image of a time where the Gypsies are also respected and given their dignity in Finland. It

is in this sense that Sweden is also ahead of us. There is no difference between a dark and light neighbour.

The few minor weaknesses in this debut novel do not undermine the overall image it portrays. It is a good start for the writer's future. A book about Finnish "apartheid" is really a welcomed novelty. Hopefully, it will find its way onto as many bookshelves as possible – its message is a thorn in every white man's conscience. *The Burning Road* wants to correct our preconceived notions of the Gypsies and at the same time dispel the prejudices the white people have towards them. Hopefully the young writer of Gypsies will melt our innermost ice.

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*In the Finnish language the traditional word for the Roma/Gypsy has been *mustalainen*. In this context, the word *valkolainen* has been created as an opposite comparative. While talking about the Gypsies within Finnish society there is often a reference made to the white (*valkolainen*) and dark (*tumma/mustalainen*). This is a means of talking about the two different nationalities within Finnish society and is not meant in a "white vs dark" way.