

## Two Hundred Pages in a Year and a Half

– A Gypsy who forgets his background is more deprived than his brother who stays with the clan, says 25-year-old Veijo, Finland's first Gypsy writer and municipal electoral candidate.

Veijo Baltzar is from Suonenjoki, he is the ninth youngest child in his family. He has spent the last five years wandering through Sweden to Helsinki. He has worked as a hairdresser and graduated from trade school last spring.

This autumn, his 200-page debut novel, *The Burning Road*, will be published in both Finnish and Swedish by "Tammi and Söderström & Co", which is in and of itself rare. There are also municipal elections where Veijo Baltzar will be standing as a candidate.

– It's taken a year and a half to write my book. I work every day from 11-18.30. It is the best time to write, since attending school at the same time as writing leaves me exhausted by evening.

– When I started, I didn't have a set path for the structure of the book. The path was made while I wrote it, page by page. I haven't corrected my writing either, my thoughts came so fast that I was afraid they would worsen if I corrected them, so it was only written once for the publisher. I haven't concerned myself with other corrections either, things like t and d typos and a few compound words.

– The book tells the story of a young Gypsy couple moving from the country to the city. The difficulties the head of the family faces with being in the army, amongst other themes are the basis of the book.

### I tried to wander

– For one winter I attempted to wander through the north with the Gypsies. I have not had much experience with wandering since my family has mostly stayed in one place. I came to find that the wandering didn't suit me.

Veijo Baltzar believes that life has been easier for him compared to many other Gypsies. He has continued to strive forward but has always tried not to lose touch with his Gypsyism.

– The education of Gypsies is totally wrong. The parent's irregular life makes the children irregular too, but those who have attended school are expected to move onto further education. No Gypsy is a welder.

He claims that Gypsies are too intelligent for this. After a little thought, he admits, however, that the reason for their incompatibility to be a welder could be due to something else. For example, the fact that the Gypsies are not yet social enough for regular working hours.

– Their lifestyle is such that they do not care to work with something that is not spiritual for them. They don't care about what brings money, but what gives spiritual satisfaction.

## Getting involved in society

Veijo Baltzar believes that the Gypsies should be included in society just as they are. In his opinion, "Finnicized" Gypsies are worse than the Finns.

– In less culturally civilised circles, one can feel that their Gypsyism is a burden. For example, Finns in Sweden have a much more positive attitude towards the Gypsies than those who have never left the motherland. Even those who are derelict might say we are friends, despite my being a Gypsy.

In his debut novel, Baltzar wants to highlight the true nature of the Gypsies and the Finn's attitude towards them in various situations. He himself seems to be arguing the idea of adjusting the Gypsies to regular life, their old life, and the regulations of the tribe. For example, he strongly condemns a Gypsy woman who rejects the standard of dress.

– She is immoral as soon as she abandons the Gypsy clothes. Only after becoming somewhat civilised can she do it without being degraded in a mental or physical way.

However, Baltzar admits that it takes a strong character to go through school and university dressed in such skirts.

## Baltzar the Author

When talking about his future, Veijo speaks with some restraint. He does not dare try to guess at the successfulness of the municipal elections to which he has been called. As a writer, however, he knows himself. The topic of his next novel is already clear and does not reflect on the Gypsies.

Veijo Baltzar is sure that he won't remain as the only Gypsy writer in Finland. However, he thinks that the next generation of writers

won't be for a few years yet. The Roma have received too little education and it is only with the next generation that they will be able to show what they are capable of.

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