

Documentary About the Gypsies

Veijo Baltzar's debut novel, *The Burning Road*, is a sometimes clean and informative, sometimes unmotivated blunder of the author's own memories and experiences, and stories that the older generations have told and fantasies.

The Roma writer's strength lies in documenting the portrayal of the Gypsies' vagabond lifestyle – the stylised layout is perhaps a little imperfect.

The Burning Road is the story of Viktor and Rosita; their difficulties and experiences in a world that does not accept them.

Viktor and his family meet people who run all Gypsies through a comb, they also meet people who truly want to help them yet won't because they are afraid of being shunned. They stumble upon police officers with an aversion to Gypsies, who are happy to use them as scapegoats. They also meet people who judge them on their personalities rather than their race.

A fight breaks out when Viktor attempts to defend Rosita after being mocked. The police believe the instigators more than Viktor and take him to the police station. He is only defended by one person; a doctor. Veijo Baltzar himself says that he wanted the person who defends Viktor to be a doctor as he believes that doctors belong to a group of people who do not deal with prejudices.

Military service calls and Viktor is forced to leave his family. He manages just fine - he knows that he has no other choice. Despite belonging to the best company, no trust is

placed on him. His commander doesn't trust him, nonetheless he is "kind" to him. He must have more freedom than others, one thinks; he is a Gypsy.

The second half of the book perhaps lacks what the first part promises. Viktor's life changes somewhat radically – he becomes a doctor. The leap from a wandering Gypsy to a respected doctor seems unnatural. It almost seems as if the author has allowed the plot to escape him; as if he couldn't hold the strands in his hands.

According to Veijo Baltzar himself, the change of the plot plays an important function for the book. The author has intentionally given Viktor a well-respected career that is difficult to attain. We humans judge one another based on our wealth and position in society. When Viktor the scorned Gypsy becomes a doctor, all doors open up to him. He remains unchanged as a person, yet those who wish to bask in glory have forgotten their aversion to the Gypsy Viktor.

Rosita and Viktor strive to help their people. They arrange discussions where both Gypsies and the majority take part. They hope to establish a mutual consensus. Viktor considers how the Gypsies want a choice in the future shaping of their lives. He mentions how many the white* have seats in the Gypsy Associations just so they can have status. He opposes the abandonment of one's traditions, language and history being the entrance fee for a position within society.

The camps, dances, and burning flames which Veijo Baltzar writes of in his book no longer exist. What does continue to exist, however, is the myth of the Gypsy people's hot temperament. It is high time that the veil of ignorance was lifted, says the author in a poem that concludes the book.

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