

A Domestic Problem

Veijo Baltzar: *The Burning Road*. Tammi Publishing, 12/15mk.

It is only recently that people have dared to admit that the oppression of minorities is common in our sweet country of birth, not just in Alabama or South Africa. Perhaps this late awakened conscience has been one of the motives behind the publication of Baltzar's book. Nowadays, it is not the contents of a book that matters but more-so who or what has written it. For example, this is the case with some pop icons having recently published products with the assurance of successful sales based solely by the concept of pop, not the icon themselves.

Therefore it seems possible, or even probable, that the publisher has been more lenient than usual in the case of Veijo Baltzar's work. Because the writer is a Gypsy the publishing house wants to avoid falling under the harsh label of racial discrimination. If this is the case, that the publisher has come to the conclusion of "This person represents a minority, therefore publish the book," it is just as bad as if he were to not publish the book at all based on the author's race alone. Similarly of course, if the critic praises the book solely because the book is written by a person of colour or Gypsy, he is no better than the Ku-Klux-Clan.

Veijo Baltzar's first novel was disappointing for me. Following my interest in his articles published in various journals during the spring and summer concerning mainly racial prejudices, I was looking forward to a much more captivating work of fiction. His articles have been very sharply thought out and formulated with a style of confidence. Neither of these things are anything but rare, with the exception of some parts. The work as a whole feels childish and ridden with a wide range of blunders that makes it hard to believe to have come from capable writer Baltzar. The worst thing

is the sense of artificiality, in rare cases there is a feeling of authenticity but I after how the novel has been advertised as a documentary work, I expected more.

Noteworthy points of the book that are praise-worthy: when the author thinks of the oppression of the Gypsies. Parts that are lacking: describing the relationship and development of his main characters Viktor and Rosita. "Look, I have curly hair and yours is straight." This is how he tried to tease me. It wasn't successful. I replied to him: "Look, I have black hair, you look like a Finn." He didn't like that..."

This, amongst many other ideas concerning racial relations, are the highlight of the book: One can see that he has heavily considered the question at hand and, in my opinion, has come to many profound conclusions. After all, it is clear that prejudices are not just apparent on the side of the majority and those who hold power, but are just as prevalent amongst the oppressed: The oppressed minority only suffers from mighty foolishness.

A praise-worthy point: the attention the writer draws to how the most disgusting bum will – while talking to a Gypsy – seek to sound submissive, as if despite his degradation he were better. This in of itself is one of the most important reasons for the survival of the interracial prejudices: in his own opinion, even a person who has failed completely deserves an ounce of respect when he or she compares him/herself to a minority group that he or she looks down on with despise.

It also describes how the most unsuccessful little ones are usually the most passionate in demanding the erection of boundaries between the races: not because they would notice their personal features but because they do not have courage to admit their state of degradation themselves; It would mean there would no longer be anyone beneath them. However, the worst

prejudice-driven achievements are, according to Baltzar, when those in power are able to indoctrinate a member of the minority. "A Gypsy who has forgotten what it is to be a Gypsy is comparatively worse than the most horrible Finn," says Baltzar, and here he is certainly right.

The novel in which the author has thrown his great ideas should make a compelling piece of work, but this does not happen. The historical material that is involved also seems to contribute to the positive notes of the book, but the main story of Viktor and Rosita's burning road has fallen extremely flat. The writer has apparently had to focus on the racial aspects of the book so much that he has not had enough time to solidify the frame of the story. The story is blanketed with a sense of artificiality and the relationships are lacking description. The structure of the book is rather harsh: the flow is not continual and so loose ends remain untied. During the points at which Baltzar's inexperience shines most one feels a negative school-like vibe.

Baltzar is no Baldwin, but even despite this, his semi-finished book indicates such literary talent that it leaves the reader wishing for a continuation of the story. Focusing a little and reflecting on detail and style will probably produce better outcomes in the future compared to the largely failed first-born.

- Tapani Kontula