



The White King

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Winner of the Sandor Marai prize, and in the tradition of 'A Curious Incident' and 'Boy in the Striped Pyjamas', 'The White King' is the story about a young boy in a totalitarian state in a quest for his disappeared father."

The White King Details

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From Reader Review The White King for online ebook

Tamás Szajkó says

Nagyon hangulatos, de kicsit több központozás elért volna.

Vicky Hunt says

This is not worth reading. Maybe it is the translation partially, but the story itself is very poorly written. It sounds like it was written by a 5th grader. The chapters are disjointed and change with no sense of connection. The story features quite a bit of bullying and terroristic behavior of adults toward children. And, many of the characterizations were unrealistic. I couldn't finish the book. It lacked any type of appeal for me. And, I saw no redeeming quality or ray of hope in the story improving by the time I'd finished a third of the book... past page 100.

I intended to read this for my stop in Moldova. I disliked the book so much that I'm totally bypassing Moldova and just hurrying around the country from Ukraine, straight to Romania. What happened in Moldova will stay in Moldova. I will add another spot to my itinerary from among the interesting countries I planned to save for next year. I don't recommend this book to anyone. This hardback is sure to make a satisfying thunk in the garbage can.

Baris Balcioglu says

C'était comme le petit Nicolas mais on peut percevoir ce qui se passait à Roumanie pendant les derniers années du régime communiste. Tous les chapitres sont presque comme indépendants histoires et le dernier est triste même si que les autres sont à la fois drôles et tristes. Ce n'est pas surprenant que ce roman est devenu bestseller.

Heta says

I don't even feel like writing a long review on this book, so, some bullet points:

- told from the POV of an 11-year-old child, and I really don't like kid's POVs except in rare cases when they are written well
- extremely disjointed plot, would have worked better as a short story collection, but considering I didn't really care for anything in the plot, wouldn't have made much of a difference
- stream-of-consciousness narrative that added nothing to the plot and made it hard to connect to
- I was expecting an interesting look into how living in a totalitarian state affects the minds and behaviors of children: what I got was pages on end of "everyone in this country fucking beats each other to pulp all the time and the mental reparations of this are virtually non-existent"

The shortness of this "review" goes to show how much I cared about this book. Next, please.

Angela says

The White King, a short novel illuminating two years of preteen narrator Djata's life under an unnamed regime strongly resembling Ceausescu's Romania, is a sort of *Lord of the Flies* meets Viktor Pelevin. Most of the characters are schoolboys, but their universe is a microcosm of the authoritarian communist world around them, and this adult world spills into and informs every aspect of their lives. Along the way, Djata meets a number of fascinating characters living on the margins of this world in which everyone struggles to make do and a delivery of tropical produce to the local grocery inspires a street riot.

Parts of *The White King* are painful to read, but the novel is infused with the kind of cynical absurdist humor that only Eastern Europeans and Russians are capable of getting exactly right. Dragoman also has an uncommon ability to render his young characters faithfully; Djata's perceptiveness and naivete are in just the right balance.

Dragoman is a beautiful, promising writer who has perfectly captured all the frustration and terror of an absurd world while never overwhelming the reader with too much horror at once or too broad a scope in any of his stories. As for his prose, well, at times you can close your eyes and imagine Faulkner in 1980s Romania.

When the corporal saw us with that gasoline can, he shouted to us right away to take it over to him, and that's when I noticed that he had another bottle of plum spirits in his hand, it was still almost full, and when we put the gasoline can down in front of him, he wedged the bottle of spirits between his thighs, undid the clasp lock on the can, took a sniff, and then took the can in his hands, and then he let out a big groan, raised the can above his head, and dribbled a little of its contents into his mouth, but he spit it out right away and flung the can to the ground, at least a cupful splashed out, and he started shouting on and on about this fucking world, about life being so unjust, and about how his poor old man had had to scrape by on hospital-issue disinfecting alcohol, which was almost undrinkable even when you filtered out the blue dye they mixed in to keep folks from drinking it, and the whole time his father had been drinking this shit, he, his son, had been guzzling top-notch plum spirits by the bottle, why, even now his knapsack was full of the stuff, but from now on, he said, things would be different, and he stood up and lifted the bottle of plum spirits and turned it upside-down and splashed it out on the ground, flailing his arm so wildly while doing so that he almost fell over twice, and when the bottle was empty he flung it into the lake, and then he hobbled over to the small heap of odds and ends, poked at it with a crutch, pried out a pickle jar from among all the clothes, picked it up, and threw it over to Jancsi, telling him to go wash it out, and Jancsi hadn't even gone two steps when the corporal also threw over a bucket and told him to clean that too and fill it with water, and then he picked up one of the plastic bags and said yes, he knew there would be charcoal here that his poor father had used to filter that nasty blue stuff out of the disinfecting alcohol...."

Suvi says

The stream of consciousness writing didn't add anything to the story, it could have done without it. Also, the characters felt to me like mere sketches without being an intense part of the little stories. Not very touching and sometimes only hints at what life was like in a world like this.

Charlaralotte says

Not a book that's easily read in one sitting. Each chapter is a very intense short story unto itself. Excellent stream of consciousness writing. Excellent descriptions and dialogue. What at first seems like a random collection of boy-growing-up stories coalesces into a frighteningly realistic portrait of life in a Soviet country. The violence of the children & the adults as they deal with misinformation, manipulation, and loss of control over their own lives is harrowing.

Margot says

This novel is comprised of a series of scenes/short stories that encapsulate two years in the life of Djata, an adolescent growing up in a mysterious land based on 1980s Romania. In this totalitarian state, Djata's father is taken from his family and sent to work digging at the Danube for being a traitor to the Party. Djata goes about his business as a young boy, making trouble with his friends, getting into fights and sneaking into forbidden areas. But the spectre of Djata's missing father hangs over every aspect of his life, making him an introspective boy forced to become the man of the house.

The writing style is made up of overwhelming run-on sentences that sometimes go on for complete pages. I enjoyed the translation, which captures the boyish youthful exuberance of the breathless narration. It's in first-person, with the limited perspective and limited knowledge of youth.

Here's a sample. This sentence is three pages long, and concludes a chapter describing Djata and his mother packing up their belongings to sell. I'll include just the first page here:

"Before then, we never touched Father's things, we didn't even open his closet or his desk drawers so if he came home he'd find everything just the way he left it the day they came and took him away, and ever since then I stood in front of Father's closet lots of times and looked into the shiny polish of its door as if it was a mirror, and I thought of the smell the closet must have had when Father opened it to take out some hidden piece of chocolate or chewing gum, and I tried imagining that Father was standing there behind me and that the only reason I couldn't see him was because the polish was too shiny, and as I sat there on my bed listening to Mother pack that suitcase, I again tried thinking through my things one after another because I knew I'd have to pick out something anyway, but then I started remembering when I got each one or where I got it from, plus what I'd done with it or wanted to do with it, and I knew this just wouldn't work, that I wouldn't be able to pick out anything this way either, and then I clearly heard Mother opening Father's closet door and giving a big sigh, and I heard the rustling of Father's suits as Mother threw them one after another onto the couch, and then I stood up and stopped in the middle of my room and snooped slowly around like I did whenever I played search-the-premises or pretended I was a burglar, as if it wasn't even my own room but some stranger's as if I didn't know what anything was and where it was from and what it was for, as if I was simply looking for something, and that everything else was just in the way, and then suddenly I heard Mother sniffing softly out in the living room, so I knew for sure that she was packing Father's clothes, and

then I leaned down and pulled an empty cardboard box out from under my bed, a box I wanted to cut up into a suit of armor for the next time my friends and I had ourselves a little costume party, and I went over to my shelf and began taking things off it one after another, and without picking and choosing at all I just threw all my comic books, model airplanes, and hand-painted lead soldiers into the box..."(154)

Noémi says

Erős kezdés (a tulipánok érzelmileg is bevésődtek), és erős befejezés (majdnem katarzis). Ami közte van, az viszont egy lavór langyos zavaros víz, amiben a magyar kortárs írók legnagyobb része merít. Tényleg ez lenne a magyar látens tudat, amit kizórólag megjeleníthet napjaink irodalma? Nincs jogom ítélni és gyors következtetéseket levonni, mert tény, hogy egyre kevesebbszer adok esélyt kortárs íróinknak (pedig mindig megfogadom az ellenkezőjét). De ennek oka van: kimerítenek, lefárasztanak. Csalókák a könyveik: copy+paste motívumaikkal, az (ál)modernitás unalomig ismételt eszközeivel, és a dohos, kilátástalan életérzésükkel az ismerettség érzését adják. És az ismerettség veszélyesen kényelmes. De én nem hagyom becsapni magam. Nekem most is hiányzott az egyedi hang. Az, hogy megtudjam, hogy milyen is Dragomán György. Vagy, hogy mitől különbözik karaktere mondjuk Grecsó Krisztián Darujától. Nem volt rossz könyv, de jó sem. Nekem nem adott sok újat.

Gergely says

Ez pontosan olyan, mint minden magyar kortársregény: hatásvadász, patetikus, didaktikus.

Abc says

I romanzi che parlano di soprusi visti dagli occhi dei bambini sono sempre molto toccanti e questo non fa eccezione, considerato anche il fatto che tratta di un contesto, la Romania di Ceausescu, di cui non si parla molto spesso.

Il libro è suddiviso in capitoli ognuno dei quali sembra quasi un racconto a sé stante, in quanto narra un particolare episodio della crescita di questo bambino a cui i comunisti hanno deportato il papà in un campo di rieducazione in quanto reo di aver sottoscritto un manifesto rivoluzionario.

La mamma e il piccolo Dzsata sono così rimasti soli a sperare che il loro caro torni al più presto sano e salvo. Il nostro protagonista cercherà in tutti i modi di essere forte, aiutato in questo dalla spensieratezza della sua età. Sarà fatto oggetto di violenza fisica e soprattutto psicologica da parte degli esponenti di quell'odioso regime che si è instaurato nel suo Paese.

Con i suoi occhi osserveremo le contraddizioni e le difficoltà di una Romania povera e affamata, ma impossibilitata a manifestare apertamente la benché minima forma di dissenso politico.

Nella stesso tempo il nostro Dzsata passerà attraverso le normali esperienze di crescita che caratterizzano l'infanzia, come la curiosità verso l'altro sesso, la prepotenza dei compagni più grandi e l'avventatezza di certe azioni compiute con gli amici. Tutto questo determinerà la sua crescita, ma non scalfirà la sua innocenza di bambino.

Andreas Münzinger says

The white king is not an easy read. The further I progressed, the more I felt for Djata and his mother. They live in a cruel and mostly heartless world, where people need to be cruel to survive. Dragoman's use of the non judgemental first person voice of Djata makes some of the stories even more shocking and left me quite saddened. Life in 1980s Romania communism must truly have been hell, if even half of what Djata experiences in the book is true. The book manages to portray this feeling very well and therefore gets 5 stars from me.

Dagio_maya says

“Non cercare dov’è questa o quella cosa, prova invece a vedere l’insieme, l’unità del tutto, come se contemplassi un dipinto, o una bella ragazza, sforzati di vedere tutto insieme, certo non è facile, ma se ci riesci, guarderai il mondo in modo diverso.”

Indice

Tulipani/salto/fine del mondo/piccone/musica/numeri/valvola/dono/guerra/africa/giochiamo alla perquisizione in casa/febbre dell’oro/strudel di castagne/cuccagna/cinema/patto/panorama/funerale

Questi i titoli dei diciannove capitoli che, mettendo al centro un oggetto o una situazione, segnano come tacche la crescita del piccolo Dzsátá.

Tutto comincia con il ricordo del padre che un giorno lo saluta prima di partire per un lavoro fuori casa che lo avrebbe allontanato qualche giorno.

I giorni, però, diventano settimane, poi mesi poi anni e il padre non torna.

Siamo negli anni ottanta nella Romania di Ceausescu.

Il regime non perdona la benché minima crepa figuriamoci cosa si può pensare di chi ha posto la sua firma in calce ad un manifesto di protesta.

Dzsátá ha undici anni e la lotta per crescere è spietata in un mondo in cui gli adulti sono i nemici più ostili e crudeli.

Sopravvivere, allora, è come giocare una partita a scacchi: fortuna ed astuzia sono gli ingredienti principali per conquistare il re bianco...

Notevole lettura che mi riconferma lo spessore della Letteratura ungherese.

” strinsi forte il re bianco, l’avorio freddo si adattava perfettamente all’incavo della mia mano, sapevo che nessuno mi avrebbe mai più sconfitto nei giochi di guerra perché in confronto a quel comandante qualunque soldatino di piombo, anche il meglio dipinto, valeva un cazzo.”

CJ says

This book was incredibly painful to read. The author now lives in Hungary, but grew up in Romania in the 1980s. I can't even imagine what that was like - even after reading this book. There were moments of

absolute depravity (a gang of kids with bricks in plastic bags) interspersed with moments of pure joy (a construction worker with a roomful of songbirds). I don't know why I finished it. I wanted to stop many times, I couldn't. Beautifully written (even through the translation).

Núria says

György Dragomán nació en Rumanía el 1973, en una familia perteneciente a la minoría húngara establecida en este país. Actualmente vive en Budapest y el 2005 publicó “El rey blanco”, que ganó el premio Sándor Márai y que ha sido traducida a más de veinte idiomas. Más que una novela compacta es un conjunto de relatos cortos que retratan varios episodios de la vida de un niño de once años llamado Djata. Cuando el libro empieza, ya hace algunos meses que la policía secreta ha arrestado a su padre. Todos los que le rodean le dicen que ya no lo verá jamás porque está en el Canal del Danubio y se dice que quien es enviado allí ya no regresa jamás. Djata, que ahora vive solo con su madre, se niega a creérselo y los domingos siempre los pasa en casa porque, como a su padre se lo llevaron un domingo, está convencido que también volverá un domingo.

El narrador en primera persona de “El rey blanco” es un niño y el autor intenta imitar el estilo en el que narraría un niño, con frases larguísimas, redundancias y una sintaxis de lo más simple. Este truco es realmente peligroso porque uno no puede nunca estar seguro de si la simplicidad es buscada o simplemente incapacidad narrativa. Sin embargo, en esta ocasión, funciona, uno pronto queda absorbido por las desventuras que nos relata Djata y se olvida momentáneamente de cuestiones estilísticas para disfrutar de lleno de la historia. Otro defecto en el que, dada la premisa argumental, podía caer esta obra era el del sentimentalismo y la sensiblería, pero no es así. A pesar de tratar de los infortunios de un niño en un país comunista gobernado por una dictadura férrea y cruel (punto de partida ante el cuál más de uno puede echarse a temblar), “El rey blanco” es una comedia, una comedia a veces cruel y a veces grotesca, pero siempre fresca, imaginativa y espontánea, con aires de aventura picaresca.

György Dragomán ha escrito una obra llena de miedo y violencia. Djata vive en un mundo en que no sólo hay peleas sangrientas con los otros niños del barrio o la escuela y duras palizas de profesores y entrenadores de fútbol, sino que incluso todos los adultos pueden azotar a los niños que pasan por la calle sin tener que dar explicaciones y una cola en el supermercado puede acabar en una batalla campal. Aún así, “El rey blanco” no cae nunca en el melodrama y relata todos los episodios con partes iguales de sentido del humor y de honestidad. A pesar de todo, Djata sigue siendo un niño que hace travesuras, se mete en líos de los que el lector se pregunta cómo va a salir, descubre el encanto que pueden guardar las niñas en la entrepierna, se gasta el dinero de la clase en las máquinas del salón recreativo y luego se ve obligado a buscar un método para escaquearse, busca oro en una mina abandonada, encuentra películas pornográficas en el almacén de un viejo cine, se enrola en una guerra brutal con los niños del barrio vecino, etc. Es un libro lleno de vida. Puro entretenimiento de calidad.
