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Murzynek B. by Artur Daniel Liskowacki

Summary

This article is a review of the book *Murzynek B.* Arthur Daniel Liskowacki wrote his novel in a very characteristic way. Short, jagged sentences huddle in one long text. It looks like a train of thoughts, discussions and descriptions of events. The reader must pick up, guess, analyze and read very carefully to not get lost in this fight between good and evil, between black and white.

Keywords

Artur Daniel Liskowacki, prose, novel

Artur Daniel Liskowacki's latest novel, *Murzynek B.* is like a long black river, which is supposed to reach the awareness of the readers. The very black text on the white pages clearly outlines the cultural and mental picture of Polish people, permanently assigning them the role of villains. The main character is like a black magic in a white despair. He usually has black thoughts, as he clearly understands that the world around him is frightening and full of white hatred pointed at him. The author denigrates the national Polish mold, closer defined as Poland just for Poles. Not without a reason, as the place of action he decides to pick a place full of patriotism, but also intolerance. *Murzynek B.* is thus extremely interesting implementation of the prose, which stops halfway between the claims to deal with the cognitive tools

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and the faith in a clean provenance. The main aim of this book is to become Polish sting of remorse, as Murzynek B. is afraid of no one else, but his Polish neighbors, friends, colleagues at school. That is why it is a story about us, even though we are not the part of it. It perfectly exposes our weaknesses in a meeting with the Other and the inaction against the perpetrators. It shows us that we have a huge tendency to live in a big lie about ourselves. A country that is open, well informed and experienced seems to be just the sham representation of the Polish community.

Although the novel *Murzynek B.* was published for the first time in 2011, its subject matter is absolutely timeless. It is a little ironic, but very intelligent kind of a novel with lively written language, marked by a difficult, non-linear, although the consistent narrative. It deals with the issue of the feeling of alienation that is familiar to many of us regardless of skin color, religion or political opinion. It is not an easy novel. Many details are not given directly, clearly or transparently. As in a real life, nothing is clear or simple. It is a very challenging, but also curious and ambitious position to read. The main character of this book is B., or Murzynek B. We may only guess what does this B. stand for. B. lives in one of the major Polish cities. Although the name of the city is not stated in the novel, there are some signs, for instance Szczecin Shipyard, that point Szczecin as the place of action. B. is about the same age as his country's freedom. His mother, whom he calls Barba, is Polish and his father, Anthony Onouora comes from Nigeria, Africa. As it very often happens in Polish reality, B.'s father disappeared after the birth of his son. Anthony's contact with B. is limited to occasional phone calls several times a year. One would say that this is not enough for a young boy, but B. seems not to miss his father at all. In fact, how he could miss someone who has never been a part of his life? After Anthony's departure to Lagos, Barba, supported by her own mother Mary, brings up very intelligent and talented kid. He is a very good student at school and becomes a student of the school of music playing drums in a band.

The story is even more dramatic as a reader meets B. in a very complicated moment of B.'s life. It is a difficult period of adolescence, when he tries to build up his identity and find answers to the questions: who am I, where I come from and where it all goes. However, it is harder for him than for his peers from the same environment, because what makes B. special is not only his musical talent but mainly the color of his skin. It is something that makes the eyes of many to be focused on him. As he himself admits, "Anyone can see Blacks, of course with the exception of Blacks. Blacks can only see that others can see them."

B. has a very poor social life what can be a reason for his lack of self-confidence. His only friend is Matthew May, who is the beginning and the end of B.'s list of friends. It is author's suggestion that our intolerance to the Others is like a natural instinct, as even children, who are too small to understand, do not like B. just for being different than the majority of them.

That is why it is hardly surprising that B. is very touchy and easily intimidated, as since his early age he experiences many annoyances arising from his darker skin color.

However, it seems that some of us are aware of our national attitude towards those who are not like us. When it comes to Polish lesson time to read the famous poem by Julian Tuwim *Murzynek B.*, B.'s mother is even invited to the school for a consultation whether the real Bambo B. should participate in these classes. The teacher wants to be generous offering B.'s mother her help saying, "I will help him. Children are a little, you know. We are going to the Europe, still. But Africa is not part of the Europe, says Barba." We can easily fill out the spot of the taboo part of teacher's saying. We know how the children are. They are cruel, immature, selfish, arrogant, and just childish. But does it mean that it is opposite to the behavior of the adults? Not when it comes to Poland. It is true that children show their true attitude toward B. more ostentatiously. In the kindergarten they do not want to hold B.'s hand, school friend has a dog with a name 'nigger' and his colleagues call him Kali when he is on the field. On one of the school trips at the museum, when B. and his classmates watch the reconstruction of an African village hut, children ask B. to come into the hut, so they could take a commemorative picture of adequate "exhibit." However, the teacher does not instruct the class that their behavior was very inappropriate or not nice to B., what she says is that according to the museum's rules no one can touch the exponents. How then anyone can expect from us a better behavior when the problem of intolerance seems to be socially acceptable? On the streets B. hears jokes about Blacks, he also meets police-racists and hooligans, who warn him not to get closer to the white women. He is always haunted by his own fear that he is being watched, chased or that someone wants to beat him. He does not even drink an alcohol because he wants to be always ready to run away.

Even though Poles have a high conviction of themselves and their land, it seems that this dispassionate, brutal and ruthless reality is filled with passive and senseless people. The problem of B.'s darker color skin is a concern not just of his, but also of everyone who is related to him. B.'s mother, Barbara, a woman marked by a black bastard, by virtue of committing unpardonable mistake, functions as a second-class citizen. Trying to find himself in this hostile to him world, B. starts to look for his roots, he looks at himself and his ancestors. Suddenly, he finds out that his mother has her own problems regarding her heritage, which she does not want to discuss with B. It comes out that B. is not only the black man, but he is also a Jew. He starts to call himself Muzyd. He is completely sure that there is nothing else worse than his current situation. Now he is everything all the people around him hate the most and are not able to tolerate at any cost. They seem to be born with their intolerance to Blacks, Jews, and even themselves.

The fact that we do not find out the full name of B. raises many connotations. It provokes the reader to start to be aware of the deep-rooted stereotypes. Even for B. the knowledge of Africa starts to be equally exotic as for the rest of the people around him. He learns about Nigeria and Africa from books, Internet and stories told by others. He becomes strongly connected to the country of his mother. The question that arises here is what is B.'s real country and what is the real country of his mother. They are sure it is the one they were born in, but "the real Polish people" do everything to make those two aware that Poland is only for Poles and no one else will be accepted. They do this in a very harsh and brutal way.

The structure of this novel is equally complex to its subject matter. Although the time frame is about eighteen years, it does not show the life of the protagonist on the day-by-day basis. There is no continuity at all, as there is no order or continuity in B.'s life. It is just series of jumps from one event to another, some disconnected threads, notes and digressions written by the same hero. Arthur Daniel Liskowacki wrote his novel in a very characteristic way. Short, jagged sentences huddle in one long text. It looks like a train of thoughts, discussions and descriptions of events. The reader must pick up, guess, analyze and read very carefully to not get lost in this fight between good and evil, between black and white.

Author wants to confuse us perfectly playing with the language. Some of the sentences are completely separated from the context and they do not fit the thread like B. does not fit his community. Sometimes this language is extended into youth slang, full of literary cultural references and citations. As some digressions we can also find some examples of Black humor to show how perfectly we can make fun of others. Liskowacki uses many word games, rhymes, and sayings. Maybe he wants to awake readers' imagination or just to delude him a little. It is hard to say. This confusion of words and the volume of created events emerges a complete picture of our Polish reality, where we so willingly discuss the problem of discrimination, but we do not want to do anything about it, giving it our tacit approval.

Moving beyond the multifaceted structure is impossible. Especially when the entire structure is controlled by griot. Griot's identity is mysterious. It is one more important character, or maybe the author himself, who is permanently associated with the culture and traditions of Africa. He attentively listens to the reality and then implicates his observations in his novel and in the life of B. He tries not to omit anything. He focuses on very small, but significant details that help him build a concrete structure full of events. Griot's short digressions confuse the reader, who loses track at some points. Liskowacki does not avoid irony while drawing the characteristics of the Polish population. He perfectly pinpoints and names all Polish fears and paranoia.

The ones who really tell the story in this difficult, painful and bitter novel are we. This is our narrative, dependent on our memory, our beliefs, experiences, sensitivity and empathy.

Throughout the story B. escapes his executioners, who see him as savage and nothing worth dung. They want to beat him to the death. They are like his shadow. B. is afraid of us and this is the time for us to realize it finally. Liskowacki seems to say: do not be ridiculous, see how you all lie to yourself. He says it by writing a novel about uncomfortable problem, with magnificent linguistic awareness, full of bitter humor and sharp accusations. Under the black color of B.'s skin, Liskowacki hides other dissimilarities that are stigmatized in Poland. He wants to heal Poles of xenophobia and condemned racism. He tries to show us that each of us, at any time and place, can become an alien and be exposed to similar repressions.

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Murzynek B. Artura Daniela Liskowackiego

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi omówienie powieści *Murzynek B.* Artur Daniel Liskowacki napisał ją w charakterystyczny sposób. Krótkie, postrzępione zdania tworzą jednolity tekst, choć na pierwszy rzut oka to strumień świadomości, dialogów, opisów wydarzeń. Do czytelnika/czytelniczki należy podążanie za narracją, analizowanie jej i uważna lektura, która pozwoli nie zagubić się w ogniu walki między dobrem a złem, między „czernią” a „bielą”.

Słowa kluczowe

Artur Daniel Liskowacki, proza, powieść

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