

Nobody's Coming

Matecki doesn't force the reader to get emotional while allowing for it

Jakub Matecki has left the niche of speculative fiction literature for good and with every subsequent book, he becomes more and more rooted in mainstream prose, in contemporary realistic writing which above all is based on psychological vivisection.

In *Nobody's Coming*, Matecki develops two separate plots, but from the beginning we feel that sooner or later they will intertwine. The first takes place in the 1990s. A young couple – Marzena and Antek – has just had a son, but we soon find out that Klemens is not like other children. He focuses too much of his attention on spoons and a carpet which he keeps touching for hours, and too little on toys unlike his peers. Is it Asperger's? Is he mentally handicapped? Matecki doesn't explain, he doesn't provide a lot of details. The other protagonists, apart from Antek, Marzena and Klemens, are Igor and Olga. It's 2017. The latter two just can't seem to pair up due to misunderstandings and misapprehensions, even though we sense that love's in the air.

The author creates a psychological and social portrait of a group of inhabitants in post-transformation



Warsaw. The story's background is filled with scenes and characters straight out of magical realism: a boy with a backpack filled with colourful balloons; his father, a pilot, who dies in a fighter plane crash; a girl who leaves her job in a corporation to bake cakes.

A large part of the novel is spun around Japanese motifs. The Far East is also a source of formal inspiration for Matecki. He sketches his sentences with fine lines, in a minimalist style without any superfluous words. He refines them as if they were haiku poems, read with such passion by Olga and Igor. Each scene and narrative get intertwined at some point, creating a complex structure. And even though the novel is open ended, we are in fact not left with many question marks.

Most importantly, Matecki is not afraid to talk about feelings, but he is not an emotional blackmailer. He skilfully dodges the shoals of kitsch by means of meticulously constructed psychological portraits. He doesn't force the reader to get emotional while allowing for it.

Marcin Kube, translated by Anna Błasiak

She leaned her head against the window-pane and, squinting her eyes, she listened to the rustling names of consecutive tram stops while trying not to look at the title of the book read by the woman opposite. This was one of the most difficult challenges on the tram. She looked out the window, she moved her toes in her soaked shoe and for the first time saw this man, this boy, this child – this combination of all three.

He stood cowering next to the stop, huge and wet. He was wearing wide trousers and two unbuttoned jackets with a vest visible underneath. He had a checkered scarf, shoes with untied laces and a hat with a green pompom. His plump hand was clenched on the handle of a stuffed framed rucksack. He looked at the rucksack, then at the tram, then at the rucksack again. A woman in a red hat standing next to him adjusted the bag on her shoulder and said something without turning her head, as if she knew that the boy-man had not moved from his spot, had not left, so she didn't have to check if he was there.

They got on the tram, filling almost all of the empty space. He pressed the rucksack against his body and looked around, while she, slightly absentmindedly, patted him on his back, which he could not possibly feel through so many layers of clothing.

Olga detached her head from the windowpane and, while looking at the boy-man, she heard the name of her stop, as if she were underwater. She jumped up, wobbled, and moved towards the door. Passing by the tall rucksack, she turned her head: the top flap was torn off, she could see inflated, colourful balloons inside. She got off at the last minute, squeezing through the crowd of passengers with a quiet "Excuse me". She then got home, climbed the stairs, took her jacket off, but when dropping onto the mountain of cushions on the sofa, she didn't remember any of this.

She kept thinking about him for several days. She thought about him when pouring milk over her cinnamon cereal at half past four, at six, when she stopped on the doorstep of the Wypiekarnia backroom, taking in the smell of baguettes and coffee, and around midday, on the patio, having her one-a-day cigarette with Aleks. She thought of him under the concrete ceiling of the subway in the centre, queuing at the market, in her own bed, lying on her side and looking at the spine of one of savagely well-thumbed Steinbeck's novels. Soon he started slowly dissolving in her memory. A week later she couldn't remember his face.

She was wondering how old he was, where he lived, and if he had ever kissed a girl. What his name was, what he liked eating and what his longest journey was. Why he wore so many layers of clothing, why this backpack with balloons. She realised that all the knowledge she had about differently abled people came from some old TV series. She even had long forgotten its title.

When she watched this series, the world hadn't yet sprawled beyond the boundaries of the home and

garden in Kalisz, the centre of the world was still a Sunday cake, the grand piano, the upper terrace and Mr. Felicjan on the upper terrace. Days then consisted of watching TV, chasing Rysio, sitting under the kitchen table and, above all, waiting. She waited for dad to come back from work, for the moment when he sat at the piano and she could scramble into his lap. She slid under his open jacket and he covered her with his tie. And she sat there just like that, bent over, in the safest place in the world. Dad was tall and skinny, he had a scar under his right eye and long, bony fingers. He worked at the Calisia piano factory and he was a pianist himself. At that time he still played: he would sit in front of the grand piano for a long while, take his time getting ready in silence, with his eyes closed and then he would drop his hands from on high onto the keys and suddenly the whole house would be filled with sounds. Several years later he stopped playing – nobody knew why. He ignored and dismissed all the questions.

Excerpt translated by Anna Błasiak



JAKUB MAŁECKI

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Novels published

Błędy, 2008

Przemysł cudu, 2008

Zaksięgowani, 2009

Dżozef, 2011

W odbiciu, 2011

Odwrotniak, 2013

Dygot, 2015

Ślady, 2016

Rdza, 2017

Foreign language translations

Russia

Selected awards

Nike Literary Award (2017) – nomination

Janusz A. Zajdel Award (2011) – nomination