



Europejski

Mark Quinn

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Europejski is a cerebral political thriller that is as much about political history as it is about love, friendship, and ambition.

Mark Quinn's political thriller *Europejski* is set during the hectic days of the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the rise of Putin's Russia. It discusses the eternal topics of loyalty, politics, and ambition.

During the 1970s Solidarity protests in Poland, university students Tom, Alex, and Michalski are in the thick of the action in Warsaw. Tom's interest in radical politics seems natural, given that he is from Belfast, where The Troubles rage; Alex is a journalist from a family with hidden ties to political movers and shakers; and Michalski, the trio's mysterious leader, operates in the shadows, motivated by unknown desires and acting like a spy, a mad genius, and an unsavory career politician.

Though its events are set in motion by the Solidarity movement and the martial law government that sought to suppress it, the story finds its true center in 1990s Poland, where it lands after its short opening chapters, and after a long chapter set between Belfast and Warsaw in the late 1980s. Then, Poland has become the world's wealthiest, best-run post-communist country, but Russia is poised to regain its ancient position as the premiere Slavic nation, thanks to the rise of a little-known politician, Vladimir Putin. Michalski wants to become Poland's next president, and the trio is summoned to Warsaw's Europejski hotel in order to decide on the fate of the two countries.

Though it is driven by action, the novel also examines a variety of human emotions. Tom, Alex, and Michalski are dimensional characters with nuanced quirks, tastes, and motivations. Michalski holds attention because he is so unpredictable, while Tom's idealism and politics-entwined love affair with Gosia from Gdansk result in tension. Gosia is a beautiful and alluring woman, and the fulcrum for much of the novel's complexity, as Tom is often confronted with the choice of either picking the path of political altruism or basic love.

Politics and history drive the novel, for which a working knowledge of Poland's revolt against communism is useful. Its story reflects how much was on the line in 1999, as Eastern Europe found itself on the cusp of a counterrevolution in Moscow. Each one of these topics are spoken about from the ground level, with the closeness of a novelist.

In general, the writing is sharp and intelligent, and does a good job of mixing general history with specific characters' tales. However, too much of the novel is focused on the 1980s, while the real meat of the tale stems from the post-Communist epoch. In the end, one still gets a great sense of the tumultuousness of the times, as well as a better appreciation for those who are forced to live through such days.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (April 22, 2021)

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