

R.K. N*r*yan on fake Chernobyl poetry and two reasons for pastiche

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Abstract. In this paper, I predict a reaction within the English literary world if Ukrainian poets head to England owing to war. I also identify two reasons for pastiche. I attempt to do so by means of a pastiche of a notable writer from the Indian sub-continent, for a version of one of these reasons.

“I’m going to entertain these two people,” said the minor philosopher to a blonde woman with glasses and curly hair, who had somehow found her way into his narrow domain. They were outside an ASDA supermarket in Longsight. A white man who looked very thin and poor was talking to a black woman. They both spoke in a Caribbean dialect.

The minor philosopher interrupted their conversation, “Did you see that? Someone who worked from Tesco just went into there,” gesturing towards the rival supermarket.

The white man turned to the black woman and said, “Someone went into there in a Tesco uniform.” His accent was more local now.

“That’s okay, you’re free to do that,” she said to the minor philosopher.

“But if a sportsman has a sponsorship deal and uses another brand, they get in trouble.”

“The worker is free to shop where they want,” said the thin white man and then smoked his thin cigarette, ignoring the sportsman comparison.

The minor philosopher was tempted to press the issue of double-standards, but decided this was a dead end. “Once I was in Tesco and I saw a Sainsbury’s advertisement on Tesco TV.” The white man smiled. The black woman looked at him suspiciously. “You don’t believe me. Look at this face. You think I’m lying?”

“No, you look like the sort of man who would see that sort of thing,” said the thin white man enjoying the theme. The black woman was faintly smiling. She attended a writer’s club. She might use this.

The minor philosopher and his “friend” walked past a take away which had large green uncurly letters like the ASDA logo. It was a message, but what did it mean? Neither of them knew. They went into a restaurant and ordered two samosas. “No bag,” said the minor philosopher, “We’re eating in.” They were given the food in a paper bag inside a plastic bag and the samosas had not been warmed. The service was usually so polite here. Was it because of this new friend of his? What was her past? She hardly spoke.

“Listen, there are going to be Ukrainian poets coming here, because of all the trouble over there. Do you know what that means?” She shook her head. Her golden locks shook a little as well. “They’re going to come here and they’re going to say, ‘We’ve got Chernobyl poetry.’ So we’re going to have to write Chernobyl poetry. Can you do that?”

She had a reputation as an imitator of a European psychoanalyst of popular culture, but could she do any other tricks? “Do you know why we need Chernobyl poetry?” She shook her head. “Two reasons at least. To send out a message: we don’t need your Chernobyl poetry; we can make poetry about living next door to Chernobyl without you. And to determine how difficult it is to do.”

There was a long silence as they ate. It was a good-sized samosa with plenty of meat. The unheated pastry was like school pastry, and the minor philosopher felt a nostalgic satisfaction. She was an academic, but he wondered: had she even been to school? Her face gave him impression of excessive perceptiveness, so why did she speak so little?

Suddenly she found her voice: “I think I can do it.”