

Truths of Matters

by strannikov

“Is truth real?”—what a time for such a question to emerge! Such an elementary question, too, a pity no one was asking it two days ago.

Two days ago an American journalist, a Russian fiction writer, and an Austrian violinist walked into a bar somewhere. The journalist ordered a double espresso, then was obliged to re-order and request instead two shots of slivovitz, the Russian saved time and ordered shots of vodka, while the violinist settled on dry martinis.

“But fiction is not real,” the journalist was insisting.

“But fiction is real,” the Russian insisted back, thereby initiating a counter-argument.

“Is journalism real?” the violinist asked.

“But fiction is not true!” the American blasted.

“But fiction is true,” the fictionist calmly retorted. “It relates actual states, or is capable of relating actual states. If you insist that subjective states have no inherent reality or truth to them, well, that’s another story.”

“What ‘reality’ is journalism capable of portraying?” the Austrian reframed her earlier question.

“Fiction is neither true nor real, it’s all just invented truth, fabricated details, imagined conversations . . .” the Northwestern graduate authoritatively declared after tossing down his second slivovitz and just before he ordered another two.

“Fiction is both true and real and puts the lie to scientific claims that only repeatable phenomena have valid claims to existence or veracity. I wonder whether our sciences even have a cogent working model of either ‘truth’ or ‘reality’, because the whole lot of them continue to deny how their entire enterprise is mocked daily by the measurement problems they all refuse to recognize,” the Russian (a native of Simbirsk, although some say Omsk) asserted, with conviction if not utter plausibility.

“Plausibility is itself an overlooked category,” she politely interjected, her violin case had been stolen once the thief or thieves had exercised the care and kind regard to first remove the violin, a curious case for the local authorities wherever they resided: not every day does a case of a missing case come along.

“Facts are the currency of history and journalism,” the American assured his interlocutors as he shoved back his third and then his fourth slivovitz, before ordering two more.

“Fiction has a closer relationship with truth and reality, mundane quotidian human existence, than journalism will ever enjoy, though I will say nothing to impugn history as a proper way to account for prior temporal sequence,” said the fictionist just before tossing down the first shot of vodka, who had not been at all thirsty when they'd entered this establishment, all of whose little tabletops accommodated water rings, spills, and drops of various sizes and chemical constituencies.

“This is an excellent martini,” the first violinist with the missing case confirmed. “By the way, even if we agree to construe that Puritanism enjoyed its heyday in the seventeenth century, the additional fact is that puritanism exists in the twenty-first century,” she continued, and her inflection somehow communicated for her two companions her sequential use of capitalization and lower-case orthographic preference and practice, although admittedly the word's pronunciation doesn't vary much whether its printed form is read as with a capital “p” or a lower-cased “P”.

—All of which goes to prove that regardless of words' relations to human functions (drinking alcoholic beverages or losing violin cases to a thief or thieves, for example) and the role human languages are forced to play across the spectrum of human pursuits as varied as asking a bartender for a slivovitz in any country, the writing of history (of historical narratives, that is, of narrative accounts of events purported to have occurred and of circumstances with supporting contemporary contexts alleged to have existed, evidence of which must be provided or significantly inferred from

other documentation), the composition of shopping lists, the filing of copy to meet a publication's deadline even over the objections of one's editor, or even conforming in the important aspects to a thumbnail biography printed in the program for an opera being staged within a radius of sixty miles of whatever bar you care to sit in, and many other things besides (writing stories for children, for instance, children of no great age are less picky over questions of existence and actuality, of category and taxonomy, we know this from our interrogations of young children and of less young children and of older children, some of whom have not yet entered puberty but some of whom might already have turned into adolescents and so can no longer strictly necessarily be construed properly as children: but I digress, even without pointing out that children at least under age five have a dim appreciation for both Puritanism and puritanism, and vice versa . . .)

The Russian and the Austrian each demonstrated fine command of English.

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