



Two Caravans

Marina Lewycka , Vesa Suominen (Translator)

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Also published as *Strawberry Fields*.

The bestselling author of *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* is back with an "effervescent comedy" (The New Yorker)

The follow up to her hugely popular first novel presents a *Canterbury Tales* inspired picaresque that is also a biting satire of economic exploitation. When a ragtag international crew of migrant workers is forced to flee the strawberry fields they have been working in, they set off across England looking for employment. Displaying the same sense of compassion, social outrage, and gift for hilarity that she showed in *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*, Marina Lewycka chronicles their bumpy road trip with a tender affection for her downtrodden characters and their search for a taste of the good life.

Two Caravans Details

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Author : Marina Lewycka , Vesa Suominen (Translator)

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From Reader Review Two Caravans for online ebook

Rebecca says

This is a respectable follow-up from her first book, *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*. I don't know why I'd describe it as light, when it involves prostitution, minimum wage, exploitation of 'unskilled' workers, not to mention the battery chicken farm episode which has put me off eating poultry for at least the next week. The East European accents may grate after a while, and some of the charming illegal immigrant workers are bordering on stereotypes, as are the pantomime baddies. But there are lots of astute points in there about immigration, Western consumerism, relationships, etc. etc. Not to mention an accurate insight into a dog's mind - ah, poor dog - that was one of the sad bits. Perhaps the summer strawberry picking was a bit unrealistic too - she never mentions rain, it's all a bit Famous Five-like only on a sliced white bread diet. Oh, and Marta's inventive cooking on a limited budget had my mouth watering. Nice light easy read but some food for thought in there too.

Andika says

Buku ini bercerita tentang sekelompok pekerja imigran yang bekerja di perkebunan stroberi di Inggris. Mereka berasal dari berbagai macam benua. Tokoh utamanya, Andriy dan Irina, berasal dari Ukraina. Juga imigran dari Polandia, negara yang kini sudah bergabung dengan Uni Eropa sehingga status imigrannya legal, Tomas, Marta, dan Yola. Ada Emanuel dari Malawi. Dua gadis beretnis Cina, yang satu dari Cina dan yang lainnya dari Malaysia. Mereka semua masing-masing datang ke Inggris dengan harapannya masing-masing yang sebetulnya tidak jauh berbeda: mencari kehidupan yang lebih baik.

Selain kelucuannya, yang telah menjadi trademark Lewycka sejak *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*, yang menarik dari *Two Caravans* adalah bagaimana sudut pandang yang digunakan menggerakkan alur cerita. Paling tidak ada empat sudut pandang yang saya temukan dalam buku ini. Pertama, sudut pandang orang ketiga untuk menceritakan perasaan dan latar belakang Andriy, the polish, para gadis Cina, dan karakter pendukung lainnya. Kedua, sudut pandang orang pertama dengan Irina sebagai narator. (Irina adalah si bourgeois schoolgirl yang baik tetapi menilai segala sesuatunya dari tingkat keberbudayaan menganggap dirinya lebih berbudaya dari orang-orang di sekitarnya.) Ketiga, sudut pandang orang pertama dengan anjing bernama Dog sebagai naratornya. Narasi dari Dog cukup menghibur karena ditulis dengan huruf kapital, dicetak tebal, dan pilihan kata yang lucu. Keempat, sudut pandang orang pertama oleh pemuda bersuara merdu, Emanuel. Narasi Emanuel sangat personal dan hangat karena berupa surat yang ia kirimkan untuk kakak perempuannya.

Meskipun menggunakan pendekatan komedi, *Two Caravans* menyentuh tema-tema serius. Dapat dikatakan novel ini lebih *Eastern Promises*, dari *Short History of Tractors*. Tema yang disentuh mencakup kehidupan imigran di Eropa Barat, kondisi kerja dan tempat tinggal para imigran, human trafficking, revolusi Oranye di Ukraina, sampai gadis-gadis dari Eropa Timur yang menjadi pekerja seks. Walaupun demi fokus cerita, tema-tema tersebut tidak mendapatkan porsi yang sama. Dan tentu saja ada storyline yang lebih ringan, seperti kisah cinta Andriy-Irina, lalu kenangan Irina atas kehidupan di Ukraina: bagaimana ayahnya yang seorang dosen politik meninggalkan ibunya untuk menjalin cinta dengan mahasiswinya.

Sebetulnya sudah tiga minggu lebih saya memiliki *Two Caravans*. Sebetulnya novel berbahasa Inggris setebal 310 halaman ini cukup mudah untuk dibaca. Hanya saja tiga minggu belakangan saya diserang perasaan gloomy, gejala tipus, UAS, dan tugas sehingga saya on and off dalam membaca *Two Caravans*. Saya juga merasa beruntung dapat membaca novel ini ketika sedang mengambil mata kuliah Hubungan

Internasional di Eropa. Kelas kami kebanyakan membahas Uni Eropa dan kegagalan organisasi regional di negara-negara Eropa Timur. Sedikit banyak saya jadi mendapat contoh konkret bagaimana Uni Eropa berimplikasi pada warga negara anggotanya. Novel ini juga memberikan porsi yang cukup, kalau tidak bisa dibilang sedikit, tentang pergolakan politik dan sosial di Ukraina. Bagaimana Irina, yang mendukung kapitalisme ekonomi, sindir-sindir dengan Andriy, anak pekerja pertambangan yang mendukung integrasi ekonomi Ukraina dengan Rusia. 'Mong-omong Two Caravans menjadi short-listed nominator Orwell Prize 2008, sebuah penghargaan di Inggris bagi karya-karya sastra yang berhasil memuat kandungan politik tanpa menurunkan nilai sastranya.

David Chazan says

In honor of my wedding anniversary, I thought I'd update one of my older reviews that I consider a classic love story. The one I picked is Marina Lewycka's second novel "Two Caravans," which American audiences you may know as "Strawberry Fields." While this book isn't quite as good as her debut novel, it certainly is fun! You can read my revised review on my blog here. <http://drchazan.blogspot.com/2014/08/...>

Cate says

I liked this. I think it is a stronger story and more interestingly written & structured than the History of Tractors book (read in Spain, 2006, but that's a complete aside). Sure, this is whimsical with migrant workers picking strawberries in Kent, living in caravans: but there's a dark undercurrent to the tale. Exploitation, poor working conditions, Eastern Euro cultures struggling to part from the communist past but taking with them the worst excesses of capitalism. I saw the book as very much a critique of capitalism but also the commodification of humanity full stop. I really felt for poor Irina as she was literally hunted by the crooked, criminal migration agent & employment "consultants". But equally she was leered at by men in general. Other than her compatriot Andriy. He almost begrudgingly takes her under his wing & falls in love with her, despite her representing the new Europe, the new Ukraine and him representing the old. There is some nice allegorical work in here. The depiction of the poultry farm is graphic, horrific & you kind have to laugh at the black comedy or you'd cry. And turn vegetarian. The Dog who attaches himself to this caravan & the band of characters is a good touch of magic realism - we see events, albeit briefly, but we do see them from his dog perspective. Very simple & to the point. The narrative switches between the characters and in some senses time is irrelevant. I'm not sure how on one page Vitaly was picking strawberries and selling overpriced cans of beer to his comrades in the caravan & the next is working for the migrant employment agency in Dover finding dodgy jobs for those fresh off the ferry from Europe, dreaming the big dream of legal work in the EU. I found the setting of Dover vaguely reminiscent of how Bill Bryson described in Notes From A Small Island. Kind of drab & down on it's luck. It's worth a read, this one.

Gill says

I enjoyed her "Short history of Tractors" probably because my family has links with the Ukraine, and many migrants both to and from the UK, so that parts of the dialogue, the attitudes and the problems resonated with me.

Many of the reviews here seemed to criticise that book for not dealing with the present immigrant wave from the Eastern European countries, so that in this book Lewycka seems to have tried to address all those current problems from EE thugs, exploitation in illegal immigration, pay below minimum wage, inflationary

compulsory prices for living and food and forced addiction and prostitution. It doesn't sound very optimistic for the theme of a humorous light easy-to-read book does it?

Somehow though the author manages to keep a light and humorous note all the way through the story and that is both its strength and its weakness. The jokey style makes it easy to read on - but equally it bathes the whole story in a mist of unreality, so that the suspension of disbelief necessary in most novels to allow for the chance and coincidences being so neat, is difficult to sustain.

Are there any parts of the book where the varied and numerous work opportunities presenting themselves to the characters are NOT the concern of the original agency that employed them? Also the love story that unfolds is a bit sacchariney for my liking.

There are parts of the story that will inevitably shock the reader, but somehow I can't imagine any decision made on the strength of changed attitudes from reading this story to last much beyond the week in which the book is read. The humour and the unrelentingly uncaring attitude of all the employers makes it all too easy to believe that the premises are unreal and can be totally disregarded. In other words the story draws superficial caricatures rather than painting people about whom we really care.

Lewycka has a real feel for prose, with some lovely cameos of dawn, sunset, a clearing in a wood etc., but she does not, to my mind, fully exploit her ability as a writer to make the people convincing. I also could have done with a list of dramatis personae at times. There are quite a number of characters initially, any or all of whom may prove to be central to the story, and the main story does not necessarily follow the ones whom one finds most engaging. This has caused many people to complain of dropped threads and unfinished stories. That does not irritate me because life is seldom neat and conclusive, but I do feel that overall Lewycka has missed an opportunity here by being a bit too frivolous in her approach.

Perrin Pring says

First, let me say, that despite what the cover of Two Caravans says, this book is not hilarious, nor is it funny. In fact, it is mostly sad and depressing. I can see that Two Caravans tries to be funny, but it fails for four major reasons.

One: The characters are rather flat and cliched.

Two: The subject matter isn't funny.

Three: It is trying way too hard - the dog's dialogue, I didn't even read it.

Four: Any book that explains, in detail, the killing of chickens (and other animals) isn't funny. It's sad.

(I actually believe that the quotes on the book's cover are made up.)

Perhaps I would have found this book better if I lived Europe. Maybe if I was from Europe, the subtleties of the immigrant strawberry picking politics would have been funny. Not being from Europe though, I found myself just hoping that the next chapter would be better than the last. Alas, I finished the book and it never got better.

I don't recommend this book.

Anna says

I think Lewycka is incredible - she manages to write a novel about illegal immigrants, prostitution, exploitation, battery farming chickens... and make it funny without ever diminishing the horror - in fact it's

because it's fun that we don't turn away or stop reading because it's unbearable.

I thought the characters were wonderful and varied and the scenes more likely to win people over than a mass of outraged journalism or cold statistics. And the characters just go on living - the humour doesn't allow us to see them as victims even though we can feel sorry for them.

Brilliant!

I would recommend this to anyone who enjoyed White Teeth.

Lenore Beadsman64 says

breve storia dello sfruttamento delle masse socialiste al di fuori del loro paese

giovani ucraini, polacchi, africani e cinesi alla ricerca di un lavoro in Inghilterra...inutile dire che finiranno a raccogliere fragole nei campi per pochi spiccioli ai quali verranno detratti i "costi" per il vitto e l'alloggio

la prosa è semplice e leggera, ma il dramma raccontato è reale e non so proprio come questo si possa alleggerire parlandone come di una specie di favola

l'alchimia del primo libro non si è ripetuta, stavolta sotto lo smalto splendente della pubblicità si intravede molto di più il vero marcio che è stato coperto in fretta con la scusa dell'economia globale...

Lavinia says

Several years ago I listened to Lewycka read from this book and I thought I was going to like it a lot. It starts very promising, with a bunch of strawberry pickers in UK (mainly Eastern Europeans, but also African and Chinese, quite a diverse cast, Hollywood should learn from this, lol), but then they part ways and the novel goes in too many different directions ("too much plenty", to quote one of the characters), some people are dropped in the first third of the novel (really, what happened to the Chinese girls in Amsterdam?), other 3 around the middle, end we end up with just two of them for the last half. It's like watching the last 4 seasons of Friends with only Ross and Rachel. Sort of.

However, the novel raises some very serious issues, like illegal immigrants working on the black market for less than minimum wage, improper work conditions, human traffic a.s.o. It's also somewhat funny, if you enjoy linguistic humour, but if you consider reading anything by Marina Lewicka, you'd better choose A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian.

Joanna says

Magnificent! Utterly charming, relentlessly thought-provoking, delightfully fashioned. The story of a rag-tag company of immigrant strawberry pickers is told via a kaleidoscope of tale-tellers. Each character, including a mythically perfect dog named Dog, has a distinctive voice and a strong world view. Each character is flawed, but each takes a turn narrating and showing the reader the world as he or she sees it. It is a world full of happiness and beauty much loved, side by side with horrific images of exploitation, suffering, and fear. The characters all wish for Goethe's "the best of all possible worlds" and each tries to fashion such a world.

Despite some heavy subject matter, the light hand of the author keeps the story flowing merrily along and there are tremendous moments of comedy.

Heather says

I really enjoyed this, I can't believe I've owned 'A short history...' for years but never bothered to read it, Lewycka is a wonderful writer!! It sounds strange but I found this novel to be a lovely light hearted read although it dealt with issues like consumerism, prostitution, illegal immigrants, mass produced GMO food. I think Lewycka had a lot to say about the Western world and she managed to get her points across whilst telling an entertaining story. The characters clicked with me straight away and I was gripped. Recommend to all.

Marja says

Ridiculous, stereotypical, condescending characterisation, stupid plot points and some very bad video-game like "here's your mission in this chapter" exposition, and the humour didn't work for me. On the whole, a very disappointing, if readable, book. Though I guess it's good somebody's writing approachable stuff about this subject.

Amanda Patterson says

Funny, clever writing. You will remember this book long after you've read the last page. Lewycka manages to write about terrible things with a light touch.

Two Caravans is all about illegal immigrants, prostitution and exploitation. And she manages to make it funny so that we carry on reading all the way to the end.

Talya says

This story explores the experiences of a random group of Eastern European immigrant workers in the UK. It very cleverly captures the changes that have occurred in the UK over the last 5 years since Europe started expanding into the East. I also like the way the book is written in the voice of all of the characters involved (except for the dog which is just plain stupid). I was thoroughly confused by all of the comments that covered the book from the press about how it was "hilarious", "the funniest book" etc. I guess this was their marketing ploy but it isn't hilarious, in fact the situations the characters find themselves in would only be funny if it wasn't so true. The fact that the dedication at the front of the book is to the Morecambe bay cockle pickers says it all. The ending becomes absolutely ridiculous but given the content of most of the book, I was willing to let it go. Not a masterpiece by any means but definitely worth reading from a social standpoint.

Alta says

Not quite as good as the author's first novel, but still very engaging. Written in the tradition of Ilf's and

Petrov's satirical novels (The Twelve Chairs and The Golden Calf). The reviewers who have criticized Marina Lewycka don't know HOW to read a novel: any novel needs to be read within the tradition(s) it comes from. When Lewycka introduces a lot of characters whom she later abandons, she follows the above tradition, whose goal is to depict a panoramic view of the society at a certain moment in history.

John Martin says

This book ticked a lot of boxes for me. I loved it.

It's not the easiest read owing to the mix of third-person and first-person points-of-view (one of the first person POVs is that of a dog - first-canine perhaps?).

But it's certainly worth sticking to it because it allows the reader to get inside a number of heads and find out what makes them tick and see the world through their eyes through the filter of their knowledge.

This book plumbs the depths and goes to some squalid places that can make us feel ashamed to be part of the human race.

But it also has some splendid comic moments.

To my mind, that's what makes a great writer - the ability to go from light to dark again and back to light again. There's no black, no white, just lots of shades of interesting grey.

I also like that this book was written to no formula that I know. It's original. A breath of fresh air.

Shannon says

I am not going to lie. This book caught my eye simply because of the title. Well, that sounded stupid, isn't that how a lot of books catch people's eyes? OK, well this title caught my eye because I am a huge Beatles fan. Now, this book has absolutely nothing to do with the Beatles, but on first review it still looked interesting.

The short version: told from many different perspectives, Strawberry Fields is the story of a group of immigrants from Europe and Africa who find themselves picking strawberries on a farm in Kent, England. This is the premise that brings them together, and then, of course, many things happen and they begin a journey together (somewhat) around England.

Here was my inner monologue when reading this book and there is a spoiler, if you consider revealing a major part of the book's ending a spoiler.

1. Well, this isn't too bad.
2. I really like how the narrative voice keeps changing and keeping things interesting. Irina, the young Polish girl is in first person. Andriy, the handsome Polish miner's son is in third person. Emmanuel, the God-fearing singer from Malawi tells his stories through broken English letters to his sister.
3. Is this part being told from a dog's point of view?
4. It is. This is the single best character in the book. "I AM DOG I AM GOOD DOG I RUN FAST."

5. The whole chapter of the book that takes place at chicken farm / processing plant is horrifying. I had to skip most of it. I never want to eat a chicken again.
6. Maybe I shouldn't read this book...
7. Ooh! Eco terrorists!
8. You know, the single best part of this book is the inner monologue of the dog. It reminds me of the movie "Up".
9. Did they SERIOUSLY just kill the dog? A few pages from the end? What the *#\$.@.

Favorite passages:

It is the privilege of young people to fall in love with the wrong person, and they did.

I AM DOG I AM GOOD DOG I SIT WITH MY MAN I EAT DOG FOOD MEAT MAN EATS MAN FOOD BREAD FISH WE ALL EAT WE ALL SIT ON SMALL SMOOTH STONES NEAR BIG WATER SUN SHINES HOT THIS WATER IS NOT GOOD TO DRINK BAD TASTE BIG WATER RUNS AFTER DOG DOG RUNS AFTER BIG WATER BIG WATER HISSES AT DOG SSSS DOG BARKS AT BIG WATER WOOF DOG SNIFFS BIG WATER SNIFF SNIFF NO DOG SMELL NO MAN SMELL ONLY BIG WATER SMELL EVERYWHERE STONES WOOD WEEDS WASTE DOG FINDS MAN-SHOE BESIDE WATER WET SHOE GOOD MAN-SMELL SHOE DOG BRINGS WET SHOE TO SOUR-PISS-STRONG-FEET-SMELL MAN HE IS HAPPY GOOD DOG HE SAYS I AM GOOD DOG I AM DOG

Gumble's Yard says

The book gives an excellent perspective on the immigrant workforce in the UK, including casual strawberry picking, (most memorably and shockingly) the poultry industry, fishing off a pier, nursing homes (including a character from "Short History of Tractors in the Ukraine", the restaurant trade and prostitution but is overall too weakly written to be a good book.

The main sets of characters all come together in two caravans (one male and one female) in a small Kent farm. The book eventually concentrates on two Ukrainians - Irina (a young, impressionable, pro-Western Ukrainian, daughter of a politicised History professor) and Andriy (from the other pro-Russian Ukraine, the son of a miner killed when the unemployed miners in desperation tried to re-open the pit and dig with their hands) who are increasingly drawn together as their life gets more dangerous pursued by the middle-man Vulk who wants Irina either for himself or his clients or both and increasingly compromised by the Moldavian Vasily (initially a fellow picker but eventually a middle man).

The story is told in the first person by each of the characters – sometimes for a paragraph each, which can make the style awkward.

The sections of Andriy and Irina give a good perspective on the Ukraine, and the Poles (Yola – the supervisor and lover of the farmer, Marta her religious niece and the older Tomasz) are interesting but the naïve African Emanuel (who sections consist of letters to his sister) is unconvincing in voice and as a character while the two Chinese girls, except for a short section when they give their background, are stereotyped and the sections featuring the dog (and written in unpunctuated paragraphs of short sentences in

'Spiele' die Arbeiter nach Feierabend mit den überlebenden Tieren anstellen. Mir ist schon klar, um welches Milieu es geht und auch, was es für ausbeuterische Machenschaften gibt aber man hätte das auch anders als hier vorliegend vermitteln können.

Schade.
