

TRAVEL

London and the Tower of London

SOHANA MANZOOR

In a previous article, I wrote about my visit to Haworth, Yorkshire, home of the Brontë sisters. Now I think that if I don't write about the Big Smoke, I will be leaving out a big part of my experience in England. The first thing I realized while walking around the City is that not a single one of all the people I had known who had been to England, told me how charming London is. The buses with open tops, the red telephone booths, Big Ben, the London Bridge and all those pretty buildings simply fascinated us. So, before heading out for Haworth, Nausheen and I walked around in London and took Duck's tour and saw some really enchanting stuff.

We spent most of the day of May 17 at the famed Tower of London, which



PHOTOS: AUTHOR

where people used to be publicly executed on the scaffold, and also Tower Green, where Anne Boleyn and Lady Jane Grey were executed – the spot is now commemorated by a glass sculpture with a pillow on top. The tour ended at the Chapel Royal of St Peter ad Vincula where those executed on Tower Green (including Boleyn and Jane Grey) are buried. Afterwards, we took a picture with the Beefeater outside the chapel.

Next, we went to the building that houses the Crown Jewels. When we eventually reached the vault with the jewels, our eyes were dazzled by the rich display of crowns, scepters, and orbs bejeweled with diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and every kind of precious stone possible. We also saw the famed Kohinoor diamond, set in the Queen Mother's crown, as well as the crown worn by the present Queen Elizabeth II. After the crown jewels, there was also a section of gold plates, serving dishes, goblets, wine jugs, etc. that were used for ceremonial occasions by various monarchs. We will probably never again see such a display of

wealth, and perhaps there is no other place with so much wealth on display in one place. However, all the gold and perhaps some of the obnoxious histories attached with the splendor on display started to make me feel somewhat nauseous, so I was glad to get out into the open air again.

We looked around in the White Tower, which stands in the center with a display of military equipment and history. Then we went to the Beauchamp Tower, which is known for the graffiti on the walls left by various prisoners, including some very high profile ones. At one point, when I saw the graffiti attributed to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, I stood rooted to the spot. It was incredible to think we were standing in the same room where such illustrious prisoners once lived, carving their convictions into the walls.

We walked around the grounds, taking pictures, and then came across some costumed characters, including James Scott, Duke of Monmouth, who posed with me graciously for a picture. The costumed characters put on a dramatic reenactment of James trying

to claim the throne. James Scott is the fellow who required several blows of the axe, followed by a butcher knife, during his beheading on Tower Hill by the half-drunk Jack Ketch. The Beefeater told us the story in all its gory detail, though the reenactment, thankfully, included the trial but not the execution.

We took lots of pictures, including a picture of Nausheen posing with one of the ravens that are kept and bred on the grounds of the Tower. Apparently they have kept at least half a dozen ravens since the time of Charles II, who thought the Tower would fall and the empire disintegrate if he did not always keep ravens there. There is even one beefeater whose job it is to feed and take care of the ravens! Finally, we also saw the room where Sir Walter Raleigh was imprisoned for many years, and the place where he used to walk back and forth (now called Raleigh's Walk).

Our day ended with a brief stop at Tate Modern, which is just across the river from the Tower. I'm not really into modern art, and as I paused in front of a famous painting by Picasso, I had to admit that I understood nothing about its greatness. To me it looked like a misshapen human figure lying on its side. And Nausheen kept on dancing around the pieces and went on explaining what she had learnt in conjunction with modern poetry.

Next morning, we passed Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament on our way to Westminster Abbey where kings and queens are coronated, and where many notable historical, political, and literary figures are buried. It was very crowded, but also a very solemn kind of place – kind of dark and gloomy, with tombs and effigies all around, and Latin epitaphs everywhere. Many of England's kings and queens are buried here, and we saw the tombs of Henry VII, Elizabeth I, Bloody Mary, and Mary Queen of Scots. I got goose

bumps when face to face with the tomb of Queen Elizabeth. It felt unreal.

Eventually, we made our way to the Poets' Corner, which Nausheen was especially eager to see. She got excited seeing the tomb of Chaucer, who is the first person to be buried in the Poets' Corner. We both patted the tomb in homage to the great man. We also saw tombs of various other poets and writers, such as Austen and Dickens, and memorials to writers who are buried elsewhere, but commemorated here nonetheless, such as Shakespeare and the Brontës. Finally, we stopped at the museum shop to buy some souvenirs.

The afternoon saw us at the Tate Britain. We took a tour with one of the museum guides, who took us through the Turner wing. It was really great that they have an entire wing devoted to Turner, since his work is familiar to me from my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Collins's course. There were also paintings by Constable and Gainsborough, but of course, Turner's are the most dramatic and majestic. There was also a smaller wing dedicated to Blake's prints, paintings, and engravings. However, the ones that are most familiar to us, from Songs of Innocence and Experience, are mostly elsewhere, such as in the British Museum, so there were only a handful of those.

The next day was cold and gloomy and we decided to stay in. We made plans of visiting Hampstead, the home of the young Romantic poet John Keats the day after. I knew days would be bad as I was developing a fever. But I could surely rest for one day.

Sohana Manzoor is Assistant Professor, Department of English & Humanities at ULAB. Currently, she is also the Editor of the Star Literature & the Reviews Pages.

FICTION

Two micro-stories of Mohammad Anwarul Kabir

TRANSLATED BY SUBARNA KHAN

MAGICIAN

He has on a worn-out Sherwani, a knee-length coat buttoning to the neck, with faded laces and patches here and there. A black hat covers his head. It appears that the clown from children's book has come alive. But he is not a clown. Meet the Magician who has been making his living by showing magic tricks in rural market places. His magic has earned him a couple of modifiers like "The Magic Emperor" and "The Magicsmith" that sit before and after the name given by his father.

Many of the villagers find it disrespectful to call him simply "Magician," without the suffix "Sir."

However, it has now been quite long since he earned a pocketful of money. It seems as if his fans have got bored of buying the same magic tricks over and over. They don't go near his shows unless they want to waste their coins. Even though today's fair seemed to have a healthy crowd, it hasn't brought him any luck with money. At the end of the day, he has come home empty-handed. And the lifeless, starving faces of his eight-year-old daughter and his wife welcome him as usual. Another day without food.

So, the Magician opens up his magic

box just to put a smile on their faces. Flying his bright handkerchief in the air, he murmurs a spell. Magic!! A rose appears out of thin air and he hands it to his daughter and wife. They both are awestruck by it. All of a sudden, his daughter says, "Abba, bring us some saalun (curry) with your magic. For so many days we've been eating only plain rice."

HAPLESS MURMURING
Mr. Jalil Bhuiyan, a teacher of Bhuapur High school, is on his way back home from the market. It's 9 pm and the road is clear. It was quite late for a semi-urban town like this. His career as a teacher in Bhuapur School is about twelve years old. He knows everyone in the neighborhood. Many of them were his students. Besides, his zero belief in ghosts makes him walk around at night unhesitatingly. The road that leads to Fasalandi is a shortcut to his house. So, he begins walking along the road. After walking for some time he hears the screaming of a female voice coming from the other side of the mound of bricks covering a corner of the road. A helpless scream of "Save me! Please save me!" tears at his eardrums.

The voice sounds familiar. Is that Riazia, the daughter of Mr. Kalam

Byapari? She has graduated from high school this year. He rushes toward the mound. He is able to hear her growling noise along with the sound of struggle. Unexpectedly, his eyes fall on Hannan. Hannan works for the Chairman Shamim. Hannan used to be Mr. Jalil's student. But he had butchered his student life after coming in contact with some junkies. Now his life revolves around the Chairman Shamim. The moment he sees Mr. Jalil, he throws a salute at his former master, and says like an automaton, "The Chairman is in an operation. Now you sir, run! You saw nothing, you heard nothing!" And he starts petting his gun right after he stops talking.

Jalilbhuiyan lets a long sigh out and hurries to his house like a man possessed by a ghost. There is no one by his side, else anyone could hear him mutter, "I saw nothing... I heard nothing."

Mohammad Anwarul Kabir is a poet and micro-story writer, presently teaching Computer Science at AIUB; Subarna Khan is an avid reader and also publishes her poems and short stories and book reviews on G+, Mirakee, Wattpad and many online platforms.

POETRY

TWO POEMS
A Translation of Rabindranath Tagore

NISHAT ATIYA SHOILEE

"Anek Kotha Jao Je Bole"

You say a lot, but not what you hide,
And so in sighs unheard I confide—
Smiles you cast at who dwells in deep—
Or stolen glances, for you to safely keep.
And so to your rescue I retreat— I, then, quit.
Windows to the soul that, brazen, shine—
Light a little world of yours, not that of mine.
What if that cloak you have on warms you, not me?
And so do I spare you — loose you — I leave you be.

"Aaj Shraboner Amontrone"

It's monsoon that calls me out,
As the door creaks time to time,
And all strings detached, I float around
With the World on my hills, in a perfect beat;
While unruly, her tippet, too, drops in sync.
Words of the ancient I hear
In a trembling life anew closing near,
And Follow that East wind chasing the skies — as does my mind—
It lives and dies — after a life as old as death.

Nishat Atiya Shoilee is a Lecturer in the Department of English and Humanities at ULAB. She is also a sub-editor in the Literature and Review pages of The Daily Star.

