



Touring the Land of the Lake Poets

A Birthday Tribute to William Wordsworth who was born on April 7, 1770.

SOHANA MANZOOR

The picturesque mountainous area in the north-west part of England, commonly known as the Lake District, is a top favorite tourist spot. To the literary crowd it is ever more special for its association with the Lake Poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who were also the pioneers of the nineteenth-century English Romanticism. And that is where Nausheen and I were headed after our visit to Haworth (published in Star Literature, December 22, 2018). We wanted to see where all those famous poems of Lyrical Ballads were made.

We took the train from Keighley to Carnforth, then the 555 bus from Carnforth to Windermere. The scenery on the way was breath-taking with open fields and little streams. When we reached Windermere, we discovered the Backpackers Hostel to be right near the main railway & bus station. Light



Clockwise from top left: Dove Cottage, Trail to Alcock Tarn, Alcock Tarn, Grasmere Hostel.

Keswick and back to enjoy the scenery, and passed Grasmere on the way, including Dove Cottage and Rydal Mount, the places where the Wordsworths lived once upon a time. Coleridge was a regular visitor here. It was our main reason for visiting the place, but we wanted to have a feel of the place before entering the house. At the moment, I was somewhat disappointed at not being able to have a glimpse of "a host of golden daffodils." There was the lake, the trees, but not a single daffodil fluttered in the breeze. Even though it was quite cold for my Bangladeshi temperament, it was late May and hence the English summer. We learnt that the Daffodils were gone even before the beginning of the month.

Next morning, Nausheen wanted to go up one of the fells to see a "tarn" (a lake on top of a mountain). Let me confess here, I suffer from acrophobia (severe fear of heights), and hence I detest any kind of climbing. It was a 3.5 mile trail to Alcock Tarn, but since we had already done a 2.5 trail yesterday at Orrest Head, she convinced me that I could do it. The trail started from behind the Swan Hotel at Grasmere, and we started climbing uphill. It was challenging and I was often painfully out of breath and having to take the inhaler. When we got to the bench (a row of benches set to enjoy the view) half-way up, I was relieved to be able to sit down. The view of the other mountains and the village

below was quite beautiful. After the half-way point, the climb became steeper, and I was furious with Nausheen for dragging me here, and berating myself for allowing her to do this. She was very apologetic though – she had not realized it would be so steep. And after climbing so far I also did not want to go down like a defeated soldier.

Finally, we reached the top of Butter Crag and what we saw took our breath away. The Alcock Tarn was simply stunning. It was strange to see a lake on top of a mountain, but here we were, and sure enough, there was the tarn. It was not very deep and one of the climbers had told us that originally it was a small mountain tarn named Butter Crag Tarn until sometime during the nineteenth century a Mr. Alcock of Grasmere decided to enlarge it. We sat down among the crags and took pictures of the views, which were absolutely gorgeous. The descent was quite gentle, compared to the steep climb, and I had little problem going downhill.

The next morning was cloudy and we packed our stuff and left the Windermere Backpackers Hostel and headed towards Grasmere. A long dreary walk in the rain took us from the bus stop to the Grasmere Independent Hostel where we had booked us for the next couple of nights.

Our agenda for the afternoon was Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth

Museum. Dove Cottage was tiny and charming – the roof was very low, and it was quite dark inside the downstairs parlor. I recalled from my readings of Dorothy Wordsworth's journals that the rooms were often smoky due to lack of ventilation and defective chimneys. So the inhabitants were sometimes forced to spend their days in the gardens. Little wonder that her brother took long walks in the wildernesses. During his visits, Coleridge, who suffered from different ailments, kept the inmates awake by coughing and rambling through the nights. Our tour guide was excellent and maintained a good balance in weaving together the life and the poetry.

Then we went to the Wordsworth Museum next door which was very impressive. The upper floor was devoted to William, while the downstairs area had a special exhibit on his sister Dorothy. We saw letters and manuscripts, including Dorothy's Grasmere journals. I stared in wonder at the different items and how they managed to find paintings or pictures to match exactly what Wordsworth was describing in a given excerpt. It gave us both a newfound appreciation for Wordsworth, now that we had actually experienced such things as beck, crags, fells, tarns, and pikes.

The museum also had an interactive area where visitors could write letters using a quill dipped in ink. There were instructions on how to fold the letter the way letters used to be folded back then, and the museum would post it for the visitors. Here I sat and wrote a letter to my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Collins. What an arduous task it was! And here I thought writing with a quill would be easy!

We returned to the Grasmere Independent Hostel. The room we took for ourselves was very cozy and had two skylights looking out onto a mountain. The building itself was an old stone farmhouse converted into a modern hostel, run by a very friendly couple named Dave and Sally.

The next morning we decided to go rowing in Grasmere Lake. We found our way to the cute little Faeryland café and rented a boat for an hour. As we made our way out onto the lake and circled around the little island at the center, we wondered how Dorothy and William used to also row on this lake and visit this island (it's now privately owned). On the way back to the starting

point, we noticed a gigantic swan which we had seen earlier heading straight towards us. The swan swam right under Nausheen's oar which she was holding up, and then – incredibly – came to a stop right beside me and looked at me intently. We looked at each other like that for several long moments, perhaps 7 or 8 seconds. It reminded me of Yeats' "Leda and the Swan" and I wondered if it was a good idea to pet it. Just then, the big guy started biting at the edge of our boat! We got scared and were rowing furiously back towards the shore, with the swan following us. When we reached the shore, the man helping us out of the boat told us that the mad swan was called Henry. He was 27 years old and lived on the mere with his wife Charlotte. Apparently, he was quite aggressive and could pick up small dogs and throw them three yards. I glanced back as we were walking up the gangplank. Oh dear, Henry was looking at us with mean, beady eyes in an attacking pose. Both of us yelped and ran as fast as our legs would carry us.

Chastised by a lake-swan we were moderately subdued and had a quiet lunch in Grasmere village. After that we headed to the Wordsworth Museum again, and looked at the displays. We also went to the museum shop, and as usual ended up buying quite a few post cards. I got a little calligraphy set too.

Wednesday was our last day in Grasmere, so we took the bus to Bowness, situated on the bank of Windermere Lake. The water seemed rough and choppy, and it was quite cold and windy, so we didn't go onto the lake. Instead, we fed the ducks and swans. The swans here were very polite and well-behaved, not like the churlish old fellow Henry at Grasmere. Sitting by the lake I suddenly realized that there was something immensely calming and soothing about the Lake District. Even though we did not come across a single daffodil, and even the regular daisies seemed sparse, we had experienced the fabled beauty of the place and could comprehend perhaps just a little why Wordsworth could become the great worshipper of nature that he was.

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Lake Windermere

PHOTO: AUTHOR

breakfast and tea/coffee were always available in the kitchen, which seemed welcoming. After dropping off our stuff, we went to Booth's and had fruit scones with butter, jam, and cream.

By afternoon we got hold of walking trail maps from the visitor information center, and we went up to a viewing point called Orrest Head which offers spectacular views of Lake Windermere and the surrounding mountains. The climb was a bit steep, but the view was worth it, and we took a lot of pictures at the top. Our descent was through pastures (full of sheep), and then woods and over a beck (brook or stream).

After that, we took a bus ride up to

The Last Burger

MUSFEQUR RAHMAN

A brown, robust dog looks on anxiously while sitting at a busy intersection of the city. The male dog has chosen a dark and safe place in between two genetically modified palm trees on the footpath. He peeps out frequently to stare at a fast food shop. The shop has a glass door and the dog observes people having their snacks, or waiting for hot spicy food, or getting a parcel of food.

After frequent intervals the dog tries to count the number of beef-burgers kept sideways one after another on the top shelf of a glass food counter. For some unfathomable reason, he targets the last one in the row. Something makes him sure that it will come to him.

At the beginning of the day, the number of burgers was twelve.

Three young beautiful college girls and a boy enter into the shop and purchase four beef burgers from that row. They share soft drinks and enjoy the food while gossiping and having fun.

It is unsafe for the dog to stay in front of the shop staring at food and therefore he walks to and fro. He watches customers having various items other than burgers in the shop.

Around 7:30 p.m. the dog feels restless. The shop usually closes at 9:00, which means he has ninety minutes in hand, and for seven more burgers to be sold before getting the expected last burger.

It starts to drizzle and the street becomes deserted, interrupted occasionally by the honking of speeding vehicles.

Suddenly, a couple with their two children rushes into the fast food shop. Their father purchases two beef burgers for them and two vegetable-sandwiches for himself and his wife.

Still five more burgers to be sold before the waiting dog can get his.

Amidst the drizzling, a man and a woman embark from their car and enter the shop. They take various food items and also share the fifth burger in the row. They come out from the shop with hot coffee from the ma-



chine and leave the place.

As the drizzle fizzles out, peoples' movements gradually intensify, so the dog has to hide between two palm trees. The drenched dog shakes himself vigorously to remove water.

At 8:45pm, our dog again comes in front of the shop and finds only two burgers in the glass box.

The boys working in the shop start to wipe down the glasses of the shop with spray cleaners. The man and the woman at the counter are busy wrapping up the day's accounting.

The dog observes those activities from the street, deceptively with cunning furtive glances, so that security sentries of the area cannot notice him.

And ten more minutes pass by but no new visitors enter the shop, and the remaining two also complete their dinner and leave. Now the shop is empty of customers and the staffs of the shop chat amiably about their day's business.

It is 9:05pm. The boys are pulling down the shutters of the shop. Right at that moment, a middle-aged man enters the partially closed

shop. On his humble request, the boys agree to sell food. He purchases the remaining two burgers and two bottles of juice.

The man looks exhausted. He sips on his juice and asks the boys to serve one burger to him. A boy heats it up in the electric micro-oven and serves him.

The man eats half of the burger with eagerness. Some of the fluorescent lights of the shop are switched off and the man with the remaining food comes out of the shop. He throws the rest of the burger on the footpath and disappears in the crowd.

Taking an eager leap, the waiting dog takes the burger into its mouth.

But instead of gobbling up the much awaited food, he spits it out and a gut wrenching whine escapes his lungs.

As he trots away from the place, he wonders how was it that he could smell his beloved bitch in the remaining portion of the last beef burger.



Two Poems

BY MASUD MAHMOOD

I.
Autumn leaves are seasoned
Into myriad memory metaphors.
When the seasons are done
Some grey out or slowly turn
Into intense colours and burn
Glittering bright on stark boughs.
Like forgetting is the mind's winter
When thoughts begin hibernation
Autumn leaves come off and fall
All over the mind's darkest floor.
When you take a memory walk
Down this dank autumn forest
The brighter leaves claim the eye
And the rest are remaindered.

II.
A white moth came to my room
With a freight of superstition
On its still dull white buttery wings.
It sat equilaterally
Like a perfect triangle
sharp-ended
With a lethal intent.
Its beady eyes fixed
The silence with authority
And imposed in the room
An unearthly solemnity.
Coming from the guts of darkness
It asserted all the more its eeriness,
Superstition's primal pigments.
My study turned into an ideal setting
For communion with unknown beings
Or some truth that never goes
Beyond an unverifiable hypothesis.
I sensed an abiding equation
Between death and learning:
Knowledge never quite enlightens us;
It's a path from light to darkness.

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