

WRITING ACROSS MODES

A Collection of Original
Writing and Reflections
Inspired by Experiences in Britain

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THE EXPRESSIVE MODE



Spontaneous Sensory Monologue

“London’s Golden Glory”

I am exhausted and elated – a combination that will only get me in trouble as the dumb American who has just spent three hours walking a labyrinthine path from the Tower of London to St. Paul’s Cathedral. They couldn’t have really been more than a mile or two apart, according to my tattered and frayed map of London that I keep tucked away in my bag to avoid suspicion. Now, the evening breeze sets over the Thames and although the day is still bright, the western sun starts casting its golden touch over the London skyline. I am standing on the Millennium Bridge at five o’clock. I have already trekked a third of the way across the bridge, because apparently I must think I have somewhere to be right now. I don’t.

The bells of St. Paul’s with their dissonant charm jolt me to reality. It is five o’clock, I am in London, and I have no needs but to bask in this aureate glow. So, I step to the railing and look across the churning Thames. Boats ferrying tourists (and I’m not one of them) glide by, upsetting the rhythmic flow of the river whose waters have now, like a chameleon, taken on the same honeyed glow of The Strand.

I fix my eyes over London Bridge to Tower Bridge, with her intricately designed structure imposing delicately but mightily in her postcard-perfect majesty. Midas brightens the scene as the honey hue rises slowly to envelope the bridge. I must move on, because I only have taken fifty pictures of that one bridge, and now one more from this perspective. Music entrances me to move forward, much like the allure of the Sirens’ song. To my surprise, in the midst of the thickening crowd, a small four piece ensemble of musicians is playing a lively, yet seductive tune. The guitar case is open, crimson velvet behind the blinding glow of gold £1 coins, now illuminated by the angled sun. Just over on the other side, beyond the shimmering white and magenta flowers hanging near the bankside promenade stands The Globe with its sunset-imbued flag summoning playgoers to tonight’s performance as they maneuver around me on the bridge. Here in this radiant moment, London is alive and I live with it.

Duologue

Please see the link below to my ToonDoo. It reflects a conversation I had with a street musician named Seb on July 24, 2011. This was my first purposeful conversation with a local resident in Guildford.

<http://www.toondoo.com//ViewBook.toon?bookid=333728>



Personal Journal

My journal was kept from the end of our England journey through mid-September. I wrote in it three or four days a week as I reflected on our trip and tried to record the personal significance of my experience. I found that it was difficult to adjust to being busy and at home again, so the journal served as a transition for me.

THE EXPOSITORY MODE

Review of *The Globe Mysteries Play*

The Globe Theatre, London

Thursday, August 4, 2011

by Kevin Barham

A trip to London would not be complete without a visit to Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in Southwark. A friendly box office staff, simple ticketing procedure and abundant seating options make a first-time visitor's experience pleasurable at The Globe. The reception area is spacious with an intriguing gift shop and concession stands offer fresh squeezed lemonade as the queues patiently form around the perimeter of the building. As spectators enter The Globe, you are immediately struck by the quaintness of the scene. All views are good views of the stage with its simple décor and unassuming design. Don't forget to rent a cushion to make the evening more bearable on the backless wooden pews. Being a lover of Shakespeare, I could not resist the opportunity to see a live performance at The Globe, even if it was not a Shakespearean play itself. The atmosphere is very warm, inviting, and even compelling.

This evening was the inaugural performance of Tony Harrison's *The Globe Mysteries*, a modern dramatization of the medieval mystery play, exploring man's relationship with God. The play begins slowly, but with a poignant introduction to the magnitude of the evening's subject matter. The stage is sparsely set with a few props. Props were very "homemade" in appearance and according to design, were meant to add a bit of levity to the austere themes of the play. Actors appear very comfortable on stage and their interaction seems to suggest a close-knit acting company. Several actors and actresses performed dual roles, adding humor and humbleness to the production.

The Globe Mysteries does not neglect a single significant biblical event. Satan's fall, the fall of Adam and Eve, Noah's Flood and other Old Testament stories, all the way through the beginning of Jesus' ministry were features of the first act. A haunting musical number by the chorus and William Ash as Jesus created a crescendo of powerful emotion in an otherwise slapstick performance as we approached the

intermission. In fact, the serious emotion of the last scene before intermission contrasted so much with the humor of the act, many theatregoers were caught off guard and thought the play was over. The two-hour long first act also did not help those who were bewildered at the timing of the intermission. Some audience members left during the intermission because there was quite a bit of scripture to cover in the second act – and it was already approaching 9:00 p.m.

The acting was superb, causing the audience to sympathize with characters like Judas Iscariot and Jesus. The humor, as I imagine was Mr. Harrison's intent, was designed to make the biblical story real and illustrative to the masses, as the medieval mystery plays may have done as well. Overall, the balance of comedy, charm, and catechism worked well for *The Globe Mysteries*. Patrons attending this play will come away with a perfect confusion that causes one to ponder the mystery of faith. Shakespeare would be proud.

Overall rating: ★★☆☆



A Composed Reflection

British Courtesy and Friendliness

England has been a land of surprises for me. I am charmed by the eclectic culture and the breathtaking landscape. Yet, the most indelible impression is born out of my interaction with her people. From my first moments on this island to this very moment, I have been drawn to and appreciative of the genuine affability of the English and Scottish that extends across the land. I had read about British manners in books and websites, but nothing compares to being in the moment and experiencing the application of it. Apart from the brusque admonition against standing on the left side of the escalator in London's Underground, the friendliness and courtesy by which the people here live is a model for Americans who often seem to be desensitized to personal interaction and cordiality in our dog-eat-dog society. Of course, I realize that one should not generalize an entire nation by only a relatively miniscule interaction, but the motif of unpretentious sociability has recurred to my thoughts unrelentingly every day of our trip.

I remember being taken aback by a simple "Cheers" standing in the line of Tesco on the first day of our journey here. There was no reason for acknowledgement. In the U.S., moving one's groceries farther down the conveyor belt so the person behind me had room for their purchases seems obligatory. However, glares of impatience here were replaced by a gracious thanks. It seems no act of kindness goes unnoticed.

I have been careful to look for evidence of the unpretentious English graciousness. Direct eye contact and a real, natural smile were always, always present. Such an expression adds validity and power to the words "Cheers!" or "No worries, mate!" that the words alone cannot convey. It is important to note here that I am not referring to a slight head nod or a smile formed from a teeth-gritted upward squeeze of our cheeks to reveal our sentiment of "thanks, but I really don't care."

The most deeply affective interaction was experienced with a street musician in Guildford. This twenty year-old singer appeared entranced in his music as I walked past him one evening. I expected he had a story to tell, so I stopped to listen to his music with the hope of engaging him in a conversation. As a native of Guildford, I found him to be a perfect definition for the genuine character of its residents. He told me that he does not sing for the money, but to make people happy as they travel past. What an astounding statement. Life really is quite simple, and it takes people like Seb

(Sebastian) to put the humanity of our existence into proper perspective. We had a thoughtful, transcendent conversation and I thanked him for enriching me, adding my hope that he would maintain his outward focus.

On a beautiful Friday morning, I walked from the Changing of the Guards ceremony at Buckingham Palace to St. James' Park. My purpose was just to walk around the park and take in the famous vistas that cover brochures and websites. I saw a vacant spot on one of the park benches where an elderly couple sat, enjoying the quaint morning. I asked if I could join them on the bench for just a moment, and they were very gracious to allow it. The older gentleman, Roy, wanted to know all about me – where I was from, what I did, and of course, why I was here. It turns out the wife is a retired teacher and was fascinated that I taught British literature here in America. You never have to look too far to find something in common with another person. It was like I was conversing with two friends – like my elderly neighbors with whom I had conversations every day, sitting out in their front yard swing. I felt like I had known these folks forever, but soon I would be on my way with so many places on my agenda for the day. They told me about the best museums and places for a good cup of tea, as if they had a special personal stake in my impressions of England.

Apart from Roy and Betty, most of my experiences with Britain's geniality were granted by young adults, even teenagers. From pub bars and food service queues to sidewalk junctions and town centres, my conversations and brief exchanges prove that Britain's culture of politeness and respect is alive and well across generations. It is reassuring to know that England's young people have been taught to care. I have learned a lot about respect and amiability from the British that has informed and uplifted what I can do to encourage such character in my own students.



THE POETIC MODE

Poem of Detail

This scene describes looking over the whole of Edinburgh from the top of Calton Hill with Taylor Blanton. He and I were the only two willing to brave this impromptu climb as we crossed from the “new town” back into the “old town” for the final time. This was the last day of our weekend excursion to Scotland, and we were surveying the city we had just spent 30 hours hiking on our quest for a free red t-shirt. This moment stands out as the crowning jewel of an unforgettable weekend. 8/1/11

“Jewels”

The panorama of sloping emerald hills
Set around a lustrous diamond
Seals Edinburgh on our minds.
Breathless from the climb and awe, we gaze at the
Manifold stone spires piercing the silver sky.

And here is our entire sojourn before us,
Only now appearing as a miniature model
Of streets, closes and stairs we have traversed.



We smile knowingly at our accomplishment,
Gazing in wonder over the glittering gem below
Here, we are close to touching the top of the world,
Hindered only by the encompassing clouds –
Our feet narrowly on the edge of this ivy-walled
Stone parapet.

Here among these sculpted ruins, we listen.
And the new cool drizzle whispers to us,
“Yes...you *will* come back again.”

A Poem Celebrating a British Author

An Ode to Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens, the scholar and scribe
Defined by perseverance and pizzazz
Inspired by an intrinsic thirst
To entertain, enchant, and endure
Through your window, light radiates
To generations of people just like you --
Teachers, Laborers, Dreamers.

Boz, the inventor and innovator
Defined by change and chance
Inspired by a world of hurtful hope
To correct, create, and connect
The bond of human experience.

In your study, characters of
Substance and strength
Came to life at the stroke of your pen,
Animated by an author who
Could see what we need --
What our world needs --
to persevere, hope, and connect
Once more.

