

**Q U A R T E R L Y**  
**P R E S S R E V I E W**  
FOR ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

SPRING 2019



**London Memoirs**

**London Memories**

- I'll Always Have London by *Leonard Quart*  
London: 1970 by *Jonathan Raban*  
Cycling in London by *Andrew Gimson*  
South London by *Christopher Reid*  
A London Childhood by *Anne Chisholm*  
An Aussie in London by *Caroline Moorehead*  
Move Around in London by *John Tusa*  
Canadian London by *Holly Luhning*  
Londoni napló, 2011 *Tárnok Attila*

QUARTERLY PRESS REVIEW

is an electronic magazine consisting of texts found in the public domain abridged for educational purposes.

Back issues: <http://pressreview.atw.hu>

Correspondence: [tarisz@hotmail.com](mailto:tarisz@hotmail.com)

## I'll Always Have London

by *Leonard Quart*

I'm off to London for the first time in a couple of years. There are friends to visit, art exhibitions and plays to see, and especially the city's parks, streets, alleys and neighbourhoods to explore – more this time out of a sense of nostalgia than expecting any new revelations. Still, there are always those moments that bring unexpected pleasure. Like the fond memories that are invoked when I sit outside the NFT near the Thames, memories of being a much younger man in London and avidly attending European art films with my wife there. For a time London had turned into a second home for us. But my wandering freely and easily has recently become a problem. At seventy-eight I don't have the same capacity to walk miles. Neuropathy makes my feet at times feel difficult to move, as if they are stuck in cement. So I know I will have to make many pub and café stops along the way to keep my energy up. But I'm trying to get the most I can out of this trip, since I don't expect miracle cures in the near future for ageing and neuropathy.

After an uneventful but tiring plane trip, I arrive a little the worse for wear to stay one night at a grand but seedy budget hotel I have gone to for decades. Everything remains as it was in the neighbourhood (Bloomsbury) surrounding the hotel, with the same restaurants smelling uninvitingly of oil, fried food, and indifferent sanitation, and an all night squalid convenience store where all the fruit they sell looks rancid. But the next day – a Summer Bank Holiday with most of the stores closed – I move to a friend's flat. We head for the Matisse exhibit at the Royal Academy, located on that handsome shopping street, Piccadilly, that has been a main road since at least medieval times. The street houses such striking places as Fortnum and Mason, the Ritz Hotel, the Burlington Arcade, and Burlington House.

The latter House is the last surviving town palace of four built in the 1660s, and has been home to the Royal Academy since 1867. It has gone through many architectural transformations, but has consistently offered well-curated and original exhibitions. That includes the aforementioned Matisse exhibit, which is filled with his studio's treasured objects, and which focuses for the first time on their role in his work.

On another day, I walk haltingly and with care – no more bold, unthinking strides – across the suspension Millennium Footbridge to the Tate Modern. I am there to see a grand exhibit of Giacometti's sculpture and

paintings, ranging from his early realistic heads through surrealism to the final quarter-century of his life where in his sculpture he relentlessly pursues the truth of the human condition. (“I am very interested in art but I am instinctively more interested in truth.”) The stirring isolated forms he produced are open to a variety of interpretations, but they have become emblematic in our collective consciousness of modern men and women.

But if this trip were built primarily around viewing art exhibits, I would be no different than many other tourists. Instead, I walk and closely observe the utterly familiar streets of a city I have resided in or visited for 45 years. Near the financial district I see many building cranes and new indistinguishable box-like office buildings, with hordes of junior executives, clerks, and secretaries pouring out for lunch at sterile cafes and restaurants. The City (London’s financial district) still contains more than a trace of grace, for no developer and politician has been allowed to destroy the Guildhall and Leadenhall Market and other historic buildings. But the City does have a new skyline dominated by oddly shaped buildings with vivid nicknames: the Gherkin, the Walkie-Talkie, and the Cheese grater.

Despite all the justified concern that Brexit elicits, London remains the dominant European city for the wealthy, for it is more convenient, more connected and

more open than other cities. And though – depending on the outcome of EU departure negotiations – there will be some attenuation of London’s financial community, few are predicting a total meltdown.

But like any city that is a magnet for the wealthy (e.g., New York, San Francisco) there are many homeless young people camping out on the Strand and Piccadilly. Shelter, the housing and homeless charity, calculates that 170,000 people are homeless in London today. The mayor of London, the generally admired Sadiq Khan, has said that the scale of rough sleeping in the city was “beyond shameful” as he announced a £4.2 million funding boost to help the most vulnerable homeless. It’s a problem that defies easy answers in every major city that confronts it.

On another day I walk through neighbourhoods dominated by council housing (public housing) – not the hated tower variety like Grenfell, that burned down recently, causing many lives to be lost – but solid red brick 4/5 story buildings with balconies. They are drab and homogeneous and offer nothing aesthetically appealing to the passing observer. But they often provide decent, reasonable housing to working class residents. However, since Thatcher allowed council flats to be sold, those located in affluent areas like Chelsea or in gentrifying areas are being sold off to the middle class. In fact, since 2014 figures from 72 London councils show more than 12,000 properties have been

sold and only 4,300 have been built.

And there are always other streets that are bursting with nightlife, with countless restaurants, outdoor cafes, theatres, and boutiques like Upper Street In Islington. It's a street I feel at home in, just as I do in affluent, arty Hampstead's quiet, leafy ones. Despite my physical unease, it was a gratifying trip. I hope to return next spring. ♦

## London: 1970

by *Jonathan Raban*

The best place to commit suicide in north London is from the top of the Archway Bridge, a magnificently vulgar piece of Victorian ironwork that carries Hornsey Lane high over the top of Archway Road. Your death leap will cast you from the precarious gentility of N6 into the characterless squalor of N19. All Highgate trembles on the edge of that abyss, perched, like a gentlewoman of rapidly reducing means, above the 'vapid plains' of that 'hot and sickly odour of the human race which makes up London.' Highgate was firmly behind the nineteenth century rector of Hornsey, Canon Harvey, who declared (in a letter to *The Times*): 'I have tried to keep Hornsey a village but circumstances have beaten me.' It was always a place for prospects and dreams of the city lying below it: Dick Whittington turned again on Highgate Hill; Guy Fawkes's cronies gathered in Parliament Hill Fields to watch the Houses of Parliament blaze. Then it became an escape hatch, as the middle classes built their purple brick villas like castles on the northern heights, in defence against the chol-

era and typhoid germs of William Booth's Darkest London. N6 is an embattled vantage point; it overlooks the city with a chronic mixture of anticipation and fear.

Highgate village still has the air of a tiny community of local gentry huffing and puffing about the encroaching council estates, the new commuters and the decline of churchgoing. The gentry have their Literary and Scientific Institute (whose president is a knight), their Highgate Society, their self-consciously 'local' pubs and teashop. Forget the Renault 2CV's, the Volkswagens and the Citroens, and Pond Square could be in Wiltshire. A querulous, female upper-class voice braying 'Colonel...' through the elms; a Red Setter vainly pointing towards Kentish town, scenting, perhaps, some dim racial memory of pheasants ker-rumphing up from where only sparrows now cough bronchially on the washing lines of Albion Villas. But the huddled old ladies have had their day: the awfulness of N19 has got a stranglehold on Highgate Village and it won't let go. Already there are signs. In the evenings a gang of skinheads congregates at the bus turnaround in Pond Square, scuffing their heels proprietorially. I don't know where they come from, but their soft jeers mark them, like a crew of seedy dealers moving in on the dissolution of the Big House. They know that history's on their side.

For the rest of us, Highgate is a kind of sidestep from the main current of things, an uneasy and ambiguous transit camp, a compromise. Jews who have fallen out

somewhere on the great migration from the East End to Golders Green to Cricklewood just manage to maintain their synagogue and ailing delicatessens. The Irish live in a tatty group of streets off the Archway Road; their Islington from home, as it were, is a huge, fusty gin-palace of a pub called the Winchester Hall Tavern, practically next door to the synagogue. Behind the engraved glass-nouveau they do a great trade in stout and reminiscences. On Archway Road, there are moody West Indians in fluorescent shirts and mittel-Europeans in brown raincoats embarking on complicated bus rides to Swiss Cottage. The pompous villas of the 1880s and '90s have been split up into flats, full of admen and tv technicians with white Ford Cortinas. An interior landscape of bullrushes and green bottle glass, of stained Penguins by Elizabeth David, of stripped pine and Parker Knoll, of dinner parties that sag on the stroke of ten, of cheerless bedrooms rarely used for fun. N6 is too nervous and unconfident to have flair; dolly girls hardly ever venture further north than NW1, unless to Hampstead or the suburban dottiness of Muswell Hill. My brother, an art student, lives only a mile away in Kentish Town, NW5. There people keep broken down Bond three-wheelers under flapping tarpaulins in their front gardens. William and his friends play penny whistles and chant mantras; they drink pale coffee out of mugs that have lost their handles. The students get high on

cough mixture in Lady Margaret Road and beat their gas meters with broomsticks. You can't imagine that sort of thing going on in N6.

For my part of Highgate is anxious, isolated, hopeful, frightened. Hornsey Lane Gardens, where I live, is on the ragged fringe dividing Highgate-proper from Crouch End. Along the road at Saint Augustine's they teach karate on Thursdays ('Fast . . . Safe . . . Sensible'), and stringy men in kimonos lean on the railings outside, shrivelled Oddjobs who could deal you a death chop if they cared. They gaze mournfully down Archway Road. Or the man with the ratty moustache who runs the used-car lot; he twitches at customers on the pavement like a decayed colonel trying to interest a trout with the wrong fly on a hot day. Just after midnight once I listened to a conversation between two Irish girls outside my ground floor window. One was crying. The other said, 'He's only a man, for godsake, Birdie. He's only a man.' And last Sunday I was walking up Archway Road to the pub at half-past seven; a man stopped me, holding out a glistening cellophane package. 'Would you . . . by any chance . . .' his voice fled, then came back in an enthusiastic rush ' . . . be interested in buying a shirt, sir?' All gestures that have the resonance of impossibility about them; in vain, but still believing.

I'm so new to London that – I suppose inevitably – my response to it is strident. For years I've been

circulating around distant provincial perimeters – Lymington, Hull, Aberystwyth, Norwich – growing more and more infatuated with a starry notion of London life. In Aberystwyth I read Margaret Drabble's *Jerusalem The Golden* and identified completely with the marvellously naive aspirations of Clara the heroine: . . . 'What social joys are there. . .' In Norwich, more knowingly, but still in love with a dream of a faraway city, I taught courses on literature and society in nineteenth century London. The deep swirling fog, the crowded tenements, the clerks streaming over London Bridge, the tramways and the endless alleys, each ready with a coincidence to turn the plot, in Dickens, Gissing, Wells. The 'London' series of prints by Gustav Doré; W. E. Henley's resounding, mock-epic *London Voluntaries*. Visiting London, you can impose almost any fictional identity you want upon it, and at weekends I stayed in a city which might easily have turned up Edwin Reardon or George Ponderevo in the subway at the top of Charring Cross Road.

Coming to N6 last June, with the urban equipment of a reader of *Tono Bungay* and *The Nether World*, was the kind of appropriate accident that makes one really believe one is a character in the hands of the Great Fiction Writer. For Highgate is sufficiently far above, and far away from, the involving complexities of Central London, Kensington, Chelsea, to enable one to see the city itself as a sequence of perfect images. Soho

is a squalid nightmare, full of men in raincoats on their way up to Françoise, 3rd Floor; South Kensington is foreign girls working at the Swiss Centre and eating huge cakes in patisseries; Belgravia is bored girls with white MGB's waiting for sugar daddies... It's so easy to acquire a kind of pseudo-knowledge, to feel that, from the top of Highgate Hill, the whole of London is within one's conceptual grasp. It's all height, distance, dreams. The best literary analogy I can think of is Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*: the islands of East and West Egg, places for ever-hopeful westerners like Gatsby and Carraway to gaze across towards the sparkling possibilities of New York City. The Valley of Ashes, that symbolic wasteland presided over by the rotting eyes of Dr T. J. Eckleburg on the giant hoarding, finds its exact correlative in the grisly acres that stretch from Archway to the northern (and so far unreclaimed) half of Camden Town.

And dreaming is a lonely, private occupation. Gatsby and Carraway subsisted mysteriously; they might, from all we see of their actual work in the novel, have been freelance writers. In some sense the isolation of my own routine seems perfectly to match the landscape I'm trying to identify as N6. It's dependent on, yet distant from, the activity of central London; it looks hopefully out towards Great Turnstile, Thurloe Place, Broadcasting House, Wood Lane; it hangs on the end of a telephone. There are days when I can feel the

telegraph wires crossing the north London escarpment, homing in a dense net to the centre; sometime in the day it's got to be my line buzzing – a message, like in a bottle, from down there. One day I'll pick up the phone and there'll just be the faint sound of Bow Bells. Perhaps.

I don't belong. My clock is odd; I get up late and my curtains stay publicly pulled-to. I'm not a student, nor on the Assistance, nor exactly a housewife. At lunchtimes I sometimes play snooker at the Winchester Hall Tavern. There old men, Irish mostly, talk very slowly. When they go to the billiard table their cues seem to move with a lugubrious deliberation. The man I play snooker with, an old friend, currently works part-time as a laundry delivery driver, and somehow his job shows; you can see he's employed. But the old men watch me curiously; I'm displaced, have no badge of office. I work in the bay of an enormous five-sided window at home, a sort of announcement that I work therefore I am. Stray kids, tightroping on the low wall outside, occasionally grimace at me, but other people don't take much notice. My work is socially unestablished, placeless; beside it, N6 becomes a tangle of contingencies that seem always to be slyly forming themselves into a sinister logic.

On days like this my room feels like a tethered ship, somehow afloat from the tall villas and straggly trees of the road outside. It's cold and windy; a dog is

barking in someone's distant garden, and smoke from a chimney is flattened into a thin, transverse line across a colourless sky. Work is bits and pieces: reviews, written in single sentences and stray paragraphs on separate sheets of paper; a pile of novels to read, crisp from the publishers but mostly soggy inside; this piece, written disjunctively over the last ten days; the messed-about script of a tv play; notes to prompt me at a radio recording tomorrow. Nothing in my room relates to the street beyond the window; to work is to disconnect oneself from N6, to untie the mooring rope and drift into a geography mercifully free from postal districts.

Going out, for food, cigarettes or papers, can induce a kind of culture-shock. I know the people in the newsagents and the Irish couple who run the off-licence: talking to them is suddenly awkward, spluttering, full of helplessly grinning silences. One has to retrieve one's identity as local resident, unsheathe and dust it, before speaking. I suppose this sudden inability with words is merely an occupational hazard for those who don't live in the constant chafe of an institution; in a day you can almost forget how to talk. But for me, it's a sensation rooted in a place. Like most suburbanities, I live in one place and work in another, but both places mysteriously have the same address. It's like leaving home in the morning to arrive knocking on your own front door.

Perhaps this is why it's so reassuring when, on a good day, work includes some appointment in London – seeing an editor, going down to the BBC, having tea with my agent. Then, living in N6 pays off. I get up early and drive euphorically down to the centre; everywhere south of Camden Town takes on the air of a party to which one is lucky enough to have received an invitation. The girl at the reception desk is suddenly beautiful, the liftman friendly, the corridors welcoming. It'd be awful if it were possible just to drop in from round the corner; the distance of N6 sustains all the best illusions of W1 and WC2.

But on the bad days, when the telephone's dead and the post dull, N6 feels like a debtor's spunging house. If nothing will go, I walk round Waterlow Park, a few hundred yards away, on the far side of Highgate Hill. There girls mind people's children, calling, 'Johnnie, where's your other gumboot?' across the ornamental lake whose bank is carpeted with duckshit. Serious-looking men read the Radio Times on benches, and retired ladies read Ruby M. Ayres up by the tennis courts. Tramps in raggy overcoats talk to the squirrels – an amazingly insolent and unafraid lot – and demented women carry religious literature across the grass in string bags. Below us all, London falls away behind the cemetery, a promise that didn't quite work out. ♦



## Cycling in London

by *Andrew Gimson*

With the strenuousness, and faint desire for risk, that so often afflict the middle aged, I decided to become a bicyclist. My London became the streets between Gospel Oak and the Palace of Westminster. Each morning I rode off with mingled boldness and timidity. My children laughed at the old-fashioned way in which I flung my leg over the saddle. Because of my inexperience it was hard to tell whether I could fit through the narrow space between other vehicles and the kerb. Sometimes I would hang back behind a bus, too frightened to pull out and conduct the grand outflanking manoeuvre on the other side of the road which would win me my freedom. The bus drivers treated me with consideration. They behaved as if they did not wish to run me over. The people who shocked me were the other bicyclists. They seemed to think they had a right to dash about all over the road and pavement, and that everyone else must give way to them. It did not worry me that they broke the law. What annoyed me was their bad manners.

My first accident was with another bicyclist who tried at high speed to overtake me. He clipped my back wheel and fell off. It was a shock to turn round and see him lying in the road. To my relief, he was able to stand up. None of his bones was broken, but he was badly shaken. He said he thought I was going to turn left down Endell Street. I said on the contrary, I had signalled that I was going to continue into Shaftesbury Avenue. He said he had not seen my signal, and in any case I should have been further over. I offered to buy him a brandy. He declined my offer.

Before long, London's bicyclists ceased to alarm me. Perhaps this meant I had become one of them. I discovered that once you know how to do it, jiggling in and out of the traffic is reasonable behaviour. Soon I was enjoying the sense of extended range which a bicycle confers on someone used to walking. The wearisome tracts of Bloomsbury, the parts which London University seems to have sterilised, were soon traversed, and even these possess their charms. In Taverton Street I admired the intricate, almost exotic symmetry of the brick-built UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies, opened in 2005. Sometimes I spared a thought for Hugh Price Hughes (1847-1902), Methodist Preacher and defender of the Nonconformist Conscience, who is commemorated by a blue plaque. In Malet Street, where the University of London Union maintains a subterranean swimming pool, I might

think with affection of Peter Cooper, the sergeant-majorly figure who taught our oldest child how to swim and had a genius for keeping the mothers of north London under control. At the back of the British Museum, I would feel a twinge of pity for the dutiful tourists as they consulted their maps, and would wonder if the new extension to the museum is going to be any good. Emerging into Bedford Square, I would resolve to find out more about Lord Eldon (1751-1838), staunch opponent of reform.

Seven Dials, St Martin's Lane, Trafalgar Square and Whitehall brought growing numbers of tourists in search of London, and perhaps a Chinese honeymoon couple taking each other's picture in front of Big Ben. As I waited at the lights at the edge of Parliament Square, I removed my Palace of Westminster pass from my shirt, so that it could hang freely round my neck on its metal chain. One day I saw a junior minister, a Tory, walking slowly across the road in front of me. He was smoking a cigarette and looked glum. He thought that by now he would be a senior minister. When the lights changed, I coasted to the gates of New Palace Yard, signalling my intention to ride through them. 'Mind the bike,' a friendly police officer shouted, and I rang my bell, and the tourists who were having their pictures taken with the police officers parted to allow me, thanks to my pass, onto parliamentary territory. I rode on past the Catalpa trees, bumping over the security

apparatus where cars are searched, and parked my bike in the racks on Speaker's Green.

The Palace of Westminster is full of disappointed men and women. They have taken great trouble to get there, only to find on arrival that they do not matter. But the building itself is sublime. This is London in its glory as the seat of Parliament. To someone like myself who believes our liberties are ancient liberties, which we have inherited, and from which no jack in office can disinherit us, it provides mid-nineteenth-century reassurance. From 2004 to 2011 I was lucky enough to work here as the Daily Telegraph's sketchwriter. I have now returned as a contributing editor to ConservativeHome, and feel even more pleased to be back than I expected. Perhaps the possession of a parliamentary pass encourages a not quite healthy feeling that one is an insider, a member of the club. But it is to me a delightful club, where one bumps into people one would actually like to talk to. I am so devoted to it that I even enjoy listening from the press gallery to the debates. The only thing that upsets me is the glass screen which shuts off the public gallery at the other end of the Chamber. It was installed after a panic about chemical warfare, but did not prevent a man from gaining access to another gallery and throwing a flour-filled condom which hit Tony Blair on the shoulder. Our ancient right to throw things at the Prime Minister cannot long be denied.

On coming home in the evening, I pass up Tottenham Court Road, a dreary throughfare. Once I bumped into Boris Johnson, and once, stupefied, I saw a beautiful girl ride up the street, not heeding the red lights, but watching her own reflection in the windows.

My second bicycle accident occurred on another route to north London, Royal College Street, and involved another bicyclist. My wife Sally and I had been at one party and were on our way to another. She was a few yards ahead of me. As we approached the major junction with Camden Road, overshadowed by a massive railway bridge and notorious for accidents, we heard a siren. From somewhere away to our right, an emergency vehicle was getting nearer. It sounded as if we had time to cross Camden Road. We put on speed. Anxious not to trail behind, I applied maximum power and was only a foot or two behind Sally when she saw a police car was almost upon us. She braked sharply and I crashed into the back of her and fell to the ground. Perhaps because of the wine I had taken, I seemed not to fall too heavily. As I scrambled to my feet, giving thanks not to have been hit by the police car, and picked up my bike, she said in a fury: 'You broke my mudguard.' ♦

## South London

by *Christopher Reid*

I came to London for want of any more compelling alternative. I'd spent the previous three years in Oxford, recovering from my education and learning to write poems. A legacy of £500 from my godfather, plus rent-free accommodation for two of those years, had enabled me to live very cheaply. But you can't be the eternal student forever! My godfather's money was running out and the free bedroom arrangement had terminated. So, where to go now? London, to which I'd been sending my raw poems and from which all but one had been returned, seemed the obvious, or the inevitable, place.

It was not entirely unknown territory even then. I had already spent a few weeks there, rehearsing and performing in a forgettable show – a university review got up to look like a play – called Retrogrim's Pilgrimage, at the Bush Theatre (I was Retrogrim, a non-speaking role). Nights, I crashed on the studio floor of an artist friend. So Shepherd's Bush and the Edgware Road were familiar ground, as were the different ways of

travelling between them. The way I preferred, not just because of poverty, was on foot: infinitely variable, I found, and infinitely entertaining, especially when I got lost.

Oxford, of course, had been a city to be walked, but the patch I trod there was narrowly circumscribed and, for all its beauty, easily exhausted of surprises. (Oh, there's Magdalen Tower again! Doesn't it look very... crenellated today!) By contrast, London was a random and slovenly sprawl redeemed only by incidental felicities. More than that, in the early/mid 1970s, the time I'm speaking of, it was conspicuously grimy, not with the excremental, underfoot filth that Shakespeare, Pepys, Johnson and Dickens would have known, but in a more insidiously permeating manner – the airborne gift of an age of industry, coal fires and noxious fogs, now ingrained in the brickwork and other surfaces. The Swinging Sixties had tried and failed to disguise this with a flippant lick of paint; it took the scouring and sandblasting of the next two or three decades to clean up properly.

Through a temp agency, I acquired a job with an oil-refinery supplies firm on Finsbury Circus. A friend with a house in Tooting offered an affordable room. This meant rush-hour travel: not a way to get to know either London or Londoners. I shared an office with about thirty filing-clerks, mostly young women not long out of school, and the atmosphere was both monotonous

and mutinous. It didn't surprise me at all when I witnessed my first fight, with hair-pulling and obscenity-screaming, between desk neighbours. After a couple of weeks I was already planning escape. One of my few male colleagues had a second job, backstage at the Victoria Palace Theatre, and he told me I could get one there too just by turning up and telling them I was an experienced flyman. It was indeed as easy as that. So I gave up my day job and became a night worker, which left me my own daylight hours to write poems and be idle in.

Idleness took the form mainly of long, aimless walks. Because it was where I lived, I explored South London first, in wider and wider forays, but tending more to the north than to the south. I already knew I would never fall in love with the suburban drabness of my immediate neighbourhood. Tooting was yet to become the concentrated, aromatic Little India that it is now. Balham, Gateway to the South: the Peter Sellers sketch seemed to me to have caught the low spirits of the place with 100% accuracy. Wandsworth Common was an unalluring, possibly dangerous, sub-rural patch that the train to Victoria haughtily skirted. Clapham's sole purpose was evidently to serve as a funnel for motor traffic. Not much to like around here, and yet, for a young man with time on his hands and no spending money in his pockets, plenty to keep him amused.

What I had no idea I was doing at the time was

cultivating a lifelong habit of walking for the sake of walking. A curious feature of the habit, in my case, is that it's non-transferrable to the countryside; it remains stubbornly an urban affair and seems to require a strong ingredient of the unlovely to make it satisfying. So when anybody suggests a country walk I may fall in with it, but I do so half-heartedly, never quite convinced of the point. A landscape by Samuel Palmer or an orchestral piece by Vaughan Williams gives me all I need of that. Unmediated countryside means next to nothing to me. The value of the urban scene, by contrast, is that it's all mediated, man-made, humanly specific and eloquent – especially those aspects of it that are rough or worn.

Another curious feature is the need for solitude: I can't easily share a city ramble; there has to be the freedom to improvise, to be whimsical, to decide on abrupt and experimental changes of direction, to forgo, or at least to postpone for as long as possible, any notion of a goal. If the business of a walk is simply to get from A to B as efficiently as possible, then you're welcome to join me, but with the kind I'm talking about the company of even the most intuitively compatible friend would be a nuisance. Sorry!

The reason is that from my earliest London days these walks were, and have continued to be, voyages of accidental discovery, informal and piecemeal mapping expeditions. The never-complete map of the city that

every Londoner carries around in his or her head is an asset unique to the individual. I am sometimes astounded by the entire postal districts of ignorance that render other people's maps next-to-useless – as when a friend who had spent most of her childhood in South London asked me if I could tell her how to get from Bloomsbury to Leicester Square – but it must be admitted that my own has defects in plenty. Even while I may know adjacent districts well, there is often, when I want to travel from one to the other, the far-from-automatic labour of bringing them into correct alignment in my mind's eye. This can be an embarrassingly slow and unwieldy operation if, off my guard, I'm asked for directions in the street, though the pleasure of being able to give an immediate and clear answer is correspondingly sweet. The legendary 'London Knowledge' that the brains of our taxi drivers are supposed to have absorbed will, however, always be beyond my capacity, dilettante that I am.

Discoverers are, it strikes me, essentially solitary or autocratic types, careless of safety or reward as they enter the unknown, ready to waste vast stretches of time being taken in circles or meeting brick walls, engaged in an activity that defies any strict accounting. London's railways are a particular problem for the walker: cropping up at hazard as they slash this way and that through the boroughs, they enforce retreats and detours, prolonging inordinately what may have

been envisaged at the outset as an entirely straightforward journey, while making the task of holding cartographical connections in your head yet more difficult. You must be patient, though. If you can't bear these setbacks, if you don't appreciate the comedy of having your journey time doubled, then it's clearly not something you should try. A positive relish for getting lost is also a basic requirement.

In many respects, a walk through some unfamiliar district of London, or a new route ventured to test one's acquaintance with a supposedly familiar one, has much in common with the process of writing a poem. Both activities involve speculative enquiry, uncertainty of outcome, obliqueness and perseverance. Many a poet has sworn to the efficacy of walking as an aid to composition, and it's surely not far-fetched to see how a regular trudge and the measured progress of a piece of verse might be related; but there's more to it than that. Vitally, these are both things best done alone. A walk even in a crowded part of town – perhaps especially there – is an expression of the condition of solitude, the mind of the walker sharply conscious of its otherness in respect of all passing, external phenomena. Isn't that why the lonely wayfarer has been such a figure of fascination to writers as different as Wordsworth and Beckett, standing – or should I say moving? – as he does for some tenacious or doggedly driven strain in the human spirit?

Whether or not the argument bears close scrutiny, I for my part strongly associate my own metropolitan saunters with the career I have obstinately pursued, involving as it has done long periods without salaried employment, when I've been able to decide at any minute to step out of the front door and bash off in this direction or that for a walk of unprogrammed duration, with no purpose other than eventually to return home. When I worked in publishing, I used to walk to the office in Bloomsbury. The first half of the journey was down York Way, which in those pre-development times had high brick walls on either side, so that the inexorable motor traffic felt especially close and menacing. No pastoral ramble, then, but it helped keep my spirits alive just to have chosen that liberty in preference to either a bus or a tube journey. For those first thirty-five minutes of the day I was my own man and, if I was lucky, there might even be a poem forming secretly in my head. ♦

## A London Childhood

by *Anne Chisholm*

London has always been my true home. The house where I was born, early in World War Two, is a tall grey house by a church on the eastern edge of Regent's Park. These days I often drive past it and while not consciously thinking of her am always aware of my very young mother, awaiting my birth as the battle of Britain was won and the blitz arrived, walking heavily, so she told me, across the road and into the park and across to the Rose Garden, happy, apprehensive, occasionally afraid. When I was a few months old the house was badly shaken by a bomb falling nearby; apparently we were all sheltering in a cupboard under the stairs – my father on leave from the army – but the blast blew the door in and I sustained a scratch on the end of my nose. It left no scar. Soon after this my mother and I left for her parent's house well away from London.

My earliest memories – more impressions or emotions than concrete recollections – all concern the war, for we moved back before it was over to my

grandmother's house in Belsize Grove where, perhaps coincidentally, perhaps not, I still live now, although in a block of flats rather than the small white 1830s villa I can just see across the road from my bedroom window. In my building, built in the early 1930s around communal gardens and a swimming pool (long filled in) as the latest fashion in urban living, with a doorman and a restaurant in the basement which would send up meals to order (long defunct, though the former hatch in the wall by my front door is still discernible) there still live one or two very old residents, given to zimmer frames and furs, who arrived from Germany after Hitler took over. One, who gave me coffee and cake after I helped her carry her shopping, remembered firewatching parties on the roof and bombs falling. I think I recall people sleeping in the tube station just across Haverstock Hill; I definitely remember hearing the air raid warning sirens, and being frightened when I was told about the buzzing doodlebugs, which would go silent, cut out and fall abruptly to earth. Ever since, a sudden noise in the sky can make me think of death.

After the war, when we moved to a large red victorian house in Gainsborough Gardens on the edge of Hampstead Heath, Mr Wilmot, the gardener, a stout man in a cloth cap, would take me into his shed and show me a twisted piece of metal he said came from a downed German bomber. I spent hours with Mr Wilmot grubbing around in the bushes. He was a kind man

and those were less suspicious times.

Not that my childhood was in the least shadowed by the aftermath of war. I grew up in a comfortable, intellectually inclined, leftish (although my father was always one of nature's Tories and not pleased when I made friends with a Labour MP's family) and confidently middle class Hampstead not yet colonized by the very rich or sprinkled with expensive boutiques. By the time I was nine or ten I was walking alone to school, a long trek to a Catholic convent some way away, chosen by my parents not on religious grounds but because they were told the nuns took girls education seriously. And indeed they did – I owe a lot to the fierce, powerful, clever women who taught me to love Latin (that did not last) and Shakespeare (that did) and made no attempt to convert me, indeed just humoured me when I announced I wanted to be a nun myself and probably in due course a saint.

I would walk back on dark autumn evenings dreaming of sanctity and kicking piles of huge yellow and bronze leaves from the plane trees along the gutters. Each lamppost seemed to have a tall black spear of shadow piercing the foggy darkness above, and the streets smelled of wood smoke and coal dust. There were very few cars about. When I got home I would go round to the back door of our house and often find our charlady, as cleaners were still allowed to be called, cleaning silver at the kitchen table and complaining

companionably to my mother about men. I would eat bread and dripping and wonder what they were on about. Sometimes Mrs Wheatley would bring her fatherless son Patrick with her, a solid redfaced boy older than me who would try to squeeze against me on the back stairs. After I mentioned this he did not appear again.

The house was a stone's throw from the Heath, which was familiar territory, with long family walks to Kenwood on Sundays and, eventually, expeditions with friends on bikes or alone with the dog. Once, a pale figure in a raincoat reared up out of the long grass and flashed at me, his limp grey body more pathetic than threatening. Even so I clipped on the dog's lead and ran home with my heart pounding expecting to be the heroine of a drama, to find I was late for lunch, my father was already carving and no-one much interested. 'Don't worry darling' said my mother vaguely, 'That's all they ever want to do.' But later, in my teens, I heard a grim story of a girl who had not got off so lightly.

By that time, though, I was at boarding school in Dorset, where I was happy enough to be one of the relatively few Londoners; most of my friends lived in the country, which then as now struck me as wonderful to visit but no place to settle down. They were all very keen to come to stay with me in the holidays. Home, after the spartan dormitories and bleak communal



bathrooms, was heaven, even though in winter I had to jump from bed with my teeth chattering and light the gas fire in my bedroom at the top of the house and jump back before the room warmed up enough for me to face getting dressed. But I could see the dome of St Paul's through chestnut tree branches from my ice-rimmed window (the ice on the inside) and felt all London belonged to me. Teenage life in Hampstead in the late 1950s meant discovering foreign films at the Everyman, hanging around in the one and only Coffee Cup (both still going strong) taking the tube to the West End for a film or a musical (Salad Days, The Boyfriend) or my father's favourite, a Gilbert and Sullivan opera at the Savoy. As for parties, we put on our shortened bridesmaid's dresses in pastel brocade or taffeta for staid dance in church halls or drawing rooms with parquet floors, with reluctant public schoolboys stuffed into dinner jackets attempting the quickstep. As for sex, even when we were sixteen or seventeen our anxious mothers would ring each other up if anyone was out after midnight, though we went in for nothing more than holding hands and kissing under trees on the Heath, tentatively discovering first love, astonishingly innocent, clumsy and sweet.

Then it was on to university, first journeys to Italy and Greece, my first proper job (after a brief stint on the young *Private Eye*) in New York where one day after about two years my mother, on the phone from

Hampstead, asked tentatively if I thought would ever come back to London. I felt a shock of indignation that was almost painful. There was never any doubt in my mind that I would always return to London where I belonged, and when later I found other cities to love – after New York there came Tokyo, Calcutta, Melbourne and Sydney – it was always partly because they reminded me of London, with their endless variety, their secrets, their opportunities, the freedom they offered for reinvention and anonymity, random encounters, privacy in a crowd.

Now, although I am lucky enough to be able to retreat to the country whenever I wish, I recognize that I have no desire to grow old in a village, no matter how peaceful and beguiling, where I would be dependent on the car and observed by kind neighbours. I am best off back home, across the street from the house where my grandmother lived, my sister was born and where I first decorated a Christmas tree as the war came to an end nearly seventy years ago. ♦

## An Aussie in London

by *Caroline Moorehead*

**M**y father, the Australian writer Alan Moorehead, arrived in London in May 1936. He was twenty-five, and had been working in Melbourne for the Herald. It had taken him many months to save up the five hundred pounds he needed for a passage on a ship. ‘I yearned to go abroad’, he wrote, ‘to get to the centre of things and events ... the centre of the world instead of being on the periphery’. London was where he and his contemporaries wanted – needed – to be. In a very different way, it would become my need as well.

As a war correspondent for the Express, my father did not stay in London long. He went to the French border with Spain, to write about the refugees from the Civil War crossing over the Pyrenees. For five years, he covered the fighting in Europe and the war in North Africa, and for a while he and my mother lived in Cairo, where my brother John was born. But the end of the war saw him in a three storey box-like terrace house in Primrose Hill, bought cheaply because nearby bombing had caused cracks across its facade. It was

now that I was born. But the long Italian campaign and his close friendship with Alex Clifford, the journalist with whom he had travelled for most of the war, had given him a longing for the light and art of Italy, and it was to Fiesole, in the hills above Florence, that we moved in 1948.

My London of those years yields just one memory. I have whooping cough and I am in my bedroom at the top of the house. Far below, in the nursery, nanny and our cook are having supper. I stumble down, clutching on to the wooden bannisters, whooping. They are eating kippers, and a warm, fishy smell greets me as I open the door. Nanny takes me on to her lap and gives me a large, fat slice of crusty white bread, on which she has spread butter and marmalade.

After two years in the Villa Diana in Fiesole I feel more Italian than English. John and I sometimes speak to each other in Italian. There is a formal garden, with distinctive smelling box hedges, and in the summer there are zinneas, their many different colours bright against the dull dark green box. We have two Boxers, one of which eats my brother’s new baby pet rabbit. We also have a duck called Luigi, given to us by the journalist Luigi Barzini when he comes to have lunch. The Villa Diana has a ghost, that of the poet Poliziano murdered in a top room, and one night it brushes over me in my cot, a slow, soft wind which makes me stop breathing with fear.

But the writing is not going well for my father. With several successful histories of the war behind him, he had hoped to turn to fiction. One novel has been rejected; a second has received poor reviews. A short book about the Villa Diana has won critical acclaim but sold badly. We are running out of money, and my father reluctantly takes a job in the publicity department of the War Office back in London. The night my mother, John and I leave for England ahead of him, my father is served Luigi for dinner. This is a horrible misunderstanding, Enrichetta the cook having taken his long running joke literally. He feels terrible and it is many years before he tells us.

Now begins the real London of my childhood, though it does not last very long. The Channel is rough and I am sick and miserable when we catch the Pullman train from Dover to Victoria. Sitting at a table in the dining car, with the little red lamps on the table, I look out across the pale fields and the grey houses and wonder why it looks so sad. We have taken rooms in a hotel in Knightsbridge and its long corridors have dark red flock wallpaper and dark red patterned carpets. No one speaks. When we have breakfast, in a dining room full of silent people and much white starched linen, we are offered porridge and sausages and bacon and triangles of toast, wrapped up in napkins, and it is all unutterably alien. As are the rainy streets, the absence of yellow sunshine, the peculiar smells, the hurrying

people. When my brother leaves for boarding school, I think the end of my world has come. I am given a Siamese kitten to cheer me up.

Soon, I am sent to Miss Ironside's, in Queen's Gate. I do not mind the lessons, thought many are incomprehensible to me. What I do mind is the food. One day I am faced with a slinky pink patch of blancmange and am sick all over the table. I spend the rest of the afternoon alone in the dining room, in the growing dark, among the smells of cabbage and bacon and wet socks.

The house in Primrose Hill having been let, we live for a while in a rented house off Hyde Park corner and do not move back into it until the end of 1950. The bombed house opposite has not yet been rebuilt, and with my friend Stefanie, the daughter of a well-known boxer whose face looks to me very squashed, we play in its ruined rooms, picking our way through the rubble and weeds and bushes in search of plunder. Occasionally we make small fires and cook potatoes in a frying pan stolen from our kitchen. When it is windy we take our roller skates and use towels as sails to blow us down the steep nearby mews. I am taken ice skating at Queensway and for my birthday given a red flared skating skirt in velvet and a white top; the instructor, serious and in black, teaches me to waltz. I read Noel Streatfield's *Skating Boots* and plan for a future on ice. A stately matron in a long flowing beige

dress, with black button boots and smelling sweetly of powder, tries to teach me the fox trot. On Saturday mornings, I got to the children's film programme at the Classic in Baker Street, and Stefanie and I eat orange ice lollies, which are square, with transparent paper wrappings and taste not unpleasantly of metal.

In the holidays, John and I take our bicycles and go on rides around St John's Wood until the day when I swerve and knock myself out, and John, terrified, carries me home across Primrose Hill. To please him, I play many games of garages, in which he has the shiny new garage set with an internal lift and little pumps, given to him for Christmas, and I am the dreary customer. To please me, we drape sheets and blankets over the furniture in the nursery and crouch inside, like cavemen. Sometimes I force him to come with me into the park to shoot my bow and arrow, for I have decided I would prefer to be a boy, and have persuaded my mother to let me cut my hair very short. Once a week, we cross the hill to Regent's Park Road, where we spend our sweet rations; I ask for the boiled lemon sweets, with sherbet inside, and strawberry chews, each in their own wrapping. On Wednesday evenings, Nanny and I listen to *Journey into Space*. There is a gas fire, which gives out a comforting splutter.

Miss Ironside's is replaced by St Mary's Town and Country in the Adelaide Road, where I am bullied by two older girls who take my new pencil case, with its

neat little rubber, projector, ruler and crayons and give me an apple instead. When I reach eight I am sent to the French Lycée in Kensington and my London is now a time of long bus journeys, down Baker Street to Marble Arch and Hyde Park Corner, and along Knightsbridge. Standing in the bay window of the house in Primrose Hill, nanny watches me and waves until I reach the bus stop. My father is now making money from his books and we buy a car, a Rover with the number plate NGW31, soon known as Never Good Weather. One day the fog is so bad that my father walks in front of the car to show the way while my mother drives.

It was the weather that brought our London life to a close. My father yearned for the sun of his childhood, the particular yellow light of our Fiesole years. My mother, who was English, wanted to stay in London. They made a bargain: we would spend one summer in a cottage in the countryside and the weather would decide. It was the famous wet summer of 1956. Day after day it rained, and the more the water dripped dismally through the soft green woods that surrounded the cottage, the more cheerful my father became. At the end of the year we moved to the Alban Hills outside Rome, to a house once lived in by Aubrey Hepburn, where there was a swimming pool and the terraces were planted with olive trees and cherries, but where in the winter the cold was ferocious.

London was my home, and I mourned it. The stories that John brought back in the holidays were all about friends and escapades; he had a secret life and a secret language and I felt excluded. Like my father in Melbourne in the 1930s, I longed for the ‘centre and not the periphery’. The friends I made at the French Lycée in Rome were pale shadows of the ones I knew awaited me in London. And I was right. But it took me six more years to get back there. But even though London became, and remained, my home, the question of where I really belong never quite went away. Like my father, I am never quite sure where I fit in. ♦

## Move Around in London

by *John Tusa*

I would have been six or seven at the time, towards the end of the war. We lived in a village in south Essex. On many a Saturday, my parents had their weekly treat in a night out in London. Late that evening, after midnight of course, my mother would slip into the bedroom to tuck me up. I remember her perfume, the smell of her furs, then the soft rustle of her reticule as she took out two or three *petit fours* saved from the restaurant table, sometimes the Savoy. I did not eat them there and then but saved them for the morning. But they, my parents’ regular trips to London, carried a single message – London was the place to be. It has stayed that way ever since.

When in the late 1940s, we started to make the easy hour-long journey to the West End, it was usually to see variety shows at the Hippodrome or Prince of Wales theatres. If the show did not include jugglers who kept a dozen plates spinning on a dozen poles, it was a poor night. The road home to Essex took us either along the Commercial Road or more daringly along Cable Street

'known' to be the home of desperate dives peopled by lascar seamen. I had no real idea of who or what a lascar was but traversing those streets even in the safety of a car lent a late night frisson to an evening of pleasure. We probably passed Hawksmoor's magnificent St James's, Shadwell but I knew nothing of that until much later. But the message of each outing was also clear – if you wanted theatre as I did, the place was London.

On leaving Cambridge in 1960, I was going to the BBC, my wife to Penguin's. We both knew it was London for us, but where? At the time, an enlightened and shrewd property developer named Francis Wenham – his company was Royd's – bought up large swathes of what was semi-derelict and wholly neglected Pimlico – Islington too for that matter. Wenham's company sold only after his builders restored every property to a common standard – though buyers could choose their own colours. It was a wonderful start to life in London, just twenty-five minutes from the theatres, opera houses and concert halls of the centre.

The house, charming as it was, had no garden or open space of its own. The arrival of children put a huge strain on my wife. Living as we did in the shadow of the impressive and elegant Churchill Gardens Estate, there was a (concrete) playground across the road from us. The council tenants largely shunned it;

for us it was the nearest to an immediate escape on our doorstep that we had. Battersea Park meant a lengthy walk across the lovely bridge with pram or pushchair. It never ingratiated itself. Ranelagh Gardens, the leafy part of the Royal Hospital grounds, was also a lengthy push away; once there it was warm and secluded but peopled almost entirely even then by uniformed nannies.

We had to move. Was our move determined by the No.24 bus which had one terminus close to us in Pimlico and the other at South End Green in Hampstead? We followed it northwards. By determinedly ringing the estate agent every Saturday morning, Ann got us first viewing of a terraced family house in Hampstead just off East Heath Road. The elderly owner took a fancy to her, we bought the same week and lived there for thirty-four years.

Our sons were brought up on the Heath, the Sunday morning extended walk-cum-exploration ending at Kenwood being an almost unbreakable ritual. We made the Heath our own, giving its paths, woods, meadows, landmarks our own names, creating a private geography and a special sense of location, our space. In thirty-four years, the Heath never palled, changing with the seasons, showing a different face with the vagaries of the weather and climate.

But forty years ago, Hampstead gave us another gift – our neighbours. Not everyone liked everyone else

equally but most felt that the sense of neighbourhood in the street was worth having. It wasn't just the big occasions like the cheerfully communal fireworks party which famously once burned our common fence down. It wasn't only the little moments like observing the moths clustering in the bright lights of the moth trap on summer nights which an older neighbour delighted in, or saving an owlet which had fallen from its nest in the huge plane tree nearby and which a teenage neighbour looked after, fed and then engineered a reunion with its distraught parent.

No, the truly rich moments used to come on Sunday afternoons, usually in spring or autumn and not always every Sunday. The gardens of our terraced houses ended in a common access lane. Sweeping up leaves and twigs and lighting a small fire – it was legal then – proved a signal for doors to open, friends and children to emerge, followed by cups of tea, sometimes baked potatoes and often enough by bottles of wine. It was informal, spontaneous, generous, convivial and a precious part of our life.

The scene was changing in the 1990s; we and our neighbours were journalists, publishers, doctors, architects, academics, the 'un-moneyed' middle classes. A jerry-built 1870 terrace was very affordable for the likes of us. Soon it became 'desirable' a notion with noughts attached. As money moved in, community and conviviality weakened.

In any case these thirty-four years had been rus in urbe, precious, cherished but remote from the city. Hampstead is cut off from London by the Northern Line, a tube link fraught with confusion, complexity and distance. It was time to downsize, de-clutter and change perspective even though most Hampstead friends thought – think – we were mad. Islington proved the answer, a heavily modernised 1910 redbrick bay-fronted end of terrace house whose exterior belies its inner heart and soul.

There is green here; my study looks south down the gardens filled with trees that once belonged to the historic Canonbury Park. Beyond them, the lights of Canary Wharf and the Shard glow excitingly in winter evenings. Community too if built on a very different base from our former experience. Here it turns around a small group of shops – fag and mag, hairdresser, cafe (run by a neighbour's son), dry cleaner. In a non-nosey way, they know who is who, what is going on and mediate the daily interaction of lives and people. It is close but not intrusive.

Shops matter, they matter a lot. Not a quarter of a mile away, on Essex Road, side by side shops include a butcher, greengrocer and fishmonger. Some steps further on you come to one of Islington's two bakers; their character speaks volumes about the twin spirits of the borough. Raab's on Essex Road – which used to be called 'Lower Street' – is pure trad Islington, staffed

by, used by, filled with real north Londoners. They always ask if you want your bread sliced?

On Upper Street, the baker of choice is 'Euphorium', double the price, a smart cafe, a key stopping point in Upper Street cafe culture and the weekend 'passagietto'. These are two of Islington's varied faces, resisting facile homogenisation but keeping local identity and variety.

We had moved to Islington soon after I went to run the Barbican. From home to concert hall or theatre was just twelve minutes, a boon though that wasn't why we moved. At the Barbican, I continued a lifelong set of encounters with large, familiar and probably iconic buildings which are all part of London's scene.

The first in the 1960s was Bush House, that American-built, commercial development from 1910 at the bottom in Kingsway and dominating Aldwych. It became the unlikely home of the (then) BBC External Services.

Skirting around the lavish marble staircases and lobbies of the original building, impoverished BBC external broadcasters filled its spaces with frosted glass and wood partitions that rattled to passing footsteps. In offices reeking of newsprint and coffee, an amazing gathering of world journalists, writers, ex-politicians, permanent philosophers met, talked, smoked, played chess (if you were in the Russian Service) and kept the world accurately informed in

some of its darkest C 20 days. Best of all was the basement canteen which everybody used and where the famous 'Bush telegraph' method of rumour and communication held sway. But working at Bush House had an added appeal; we were on the edge of Covent Garden, lively, varied, original, quirky in the years before it became captured by corporate retail and catering.

The experience of the Barbican from 1995 onwards could hardly have been more different. Take its surroundings. Twenty years ago, Barbican was an isolated island – or fortress – of culture surrounded by nothing very much. Clerkenwell was the eccentric home of bookbinders, clock repairers, small architects. It was uncertain of itself, not sure if demolition beckoned or renewal. Hoxton was definitely edgy, Shoreditch a distant name and postcode. Now London's drang nach ost has enveloped these districts in the new world of the creative industries. The Barbican now sits at its very centre. Moving from isolation, remoteness and exclusion to a position of centrality in growing London was invigorating.

And the Barbican had to change too, both as a building and as an institution, learning to welcome people, believing it could lead the arts not follow them, standing comfortably as one of the City of London's physical and intellectual landmarks. Is it a lovable complex? Probably not but as Isaiah Berlin once



observed: 'You will not make the Barbican loved, but you can make it admired.'

At the University of the Arts, the transformation of Cubitt's great Granary building north of Kings Cross and its associated railway receiving sheds into a dynamic new home for Central Saint Martins did more than just realise something new out of the old. It has created a new sense of urban space, a place where people gather, a new part of the city scene, an added dimension of living. I love that.

Now I count myself very fortunate to work in another great historic building that has found a new role in life – Somerset House. Walking through its Strand gateway on a spring morning – or leaving on a summer night – when the courtyard is empty and the building's lines and proportions speak calmly and gracefully is one of the greatest experiences of London.

My London has been shaped by closeness to the footprint of some great buildings. But the embrace of the local, of friends, of people, of small places is what has mattered most. ♦

## Canadian London

by *Holly Luhning*

Canadian writer Aritha van Herk says 'home is a movement.' In her book, *No Fixed Address*, she investigates the idea of identity and geography in the Canadian Prairies. When I first read Van Herk's definition of 'home', I felt relief. There was a name for, and an understanding of the necessity (and privilege) of my immigrant past, and future.

I did not have the opportunity to meet my maternal-maternal set of great grandparents before they passed away, but I had the benefit of hearing my mother's stories about them. In his twenties, my great-grandfather Isaac left Manchester to work on the railway in Canada. His brother Harry went with him and opened a sweet shop in British Columbia. Harry and his wife weren't up to managing a farm, but Isaac took land (as provided by the rail company) near Kyle, Saskatchewan. During his thirties, Isaac's mother became ill, and he travelled back to England. He fell in love with the woman who was nursing his mother. At age thirty-six, my great-grandparents married and

went back to Canada. When they had children (my grandmother, Hilda, and my Great-Auntie Alice) they journeyed back to England once more. But after a year, they returned to Canada, and resumed their careers as farmers.

My grandma Hilda married a Norwegian – Norman – they lived on a quarter section of land in southern Saskatchewan. When WWII started, my grandfather joined the army. He landed at Juno Beach on D-Day. He stayed in England before and after, often with my grandmother's extended family. After the war, he returned to Canada and was reunited with my grandmother and his daughter, my Auntie Peggy, then a two-year old girl.

My grandparents went on to have more children: six daughters. My mother was a middle child. I was interested in my English and Norwegian heritage (on my paternal side I had German and Hungarian/Bulgarian backgrounds as well), but I started to develop a particular interest in England, and indeed, in London.

One of my formative impressions of London is: Andrew and Fergie's wedding. On TV, I saw the Duke and Duchess waving and kissing on the balcony of Buckingham Palace. It looked like being a Duchess was a pretty good gig, so I decided that I, too, would like to be a Duchess. As I was six years old, and lived on a grain farm in rural Saskatchewan, Canada, this plan

was highly unlikely to work out. Still, I would like to think that if my six year-old self knew that I would eventually end up living in the city – even though not as a Duchess – she would have been quite pleased.

Throughout my childhood and adolescence I maintained a strong desire to travel. When my family asked me about my career plans, I informed them I planned to waitress around the world, and after I had 'life experiences' I would write a book. My parents advised me this might not be the best life plan. But, when I was seventeen I won a place in an international Canadian concert/jazz band, and my parents had agreed I could join the European tour. It wasn't quite waitressing, but London was our last stop. My friend Jill and I got lost near the Serpentine Lake in Hyde Park; we were seventeen, among the youngest of the band members, and were refused entry to a bar that most of the rest of the band went to that night. She and I wandered through gorgeous flowers. (Turned out, we arrived home before the rest of the band!)

I didn't return to the city until about eight years later. It was the summer before I started my PhD, and I was en route to Eastern Europe, where I planned to backpack and do some research for a series of poems I thought I was writing; this project later turned out to be my first novel. I stayed in a hostel in Shepherd's Bush. I didn't know it at the time, but this was the start of my creative relationship with London. As the

poetry project evolved into the novel, it was clear that a large part of the narrative needed to be set in London. It was the only place I knew where my diverse set of characters might pass through and cross paths; plus the overall chaos, glamour, and vague threat of the city supported the overall aims of the story.

I embarked on a PhD in eighteenth-century literature whilst continuing to work on the novel. My area of study was London and the explosion of print culture in the eighteenth century. I ended up travelling to London a lot to research my dissertation; also, I used many of these research trips to inform the writing of my first novel. London became a major setting in my novel. The pace and the uncertainty of the city were paramount to the story. My family wondered why I went to London so often: one of my aunts thought I was involved in a secret romance – I guess in a way I was, but with a city, not a person.

I had the chance to do a second post-doc, but this time in England. When I applied, it was a longshot, but I got it. There was something odd about the few months before I left Toronto for England. Part of me was excited, part of me was reluctant. I had every single intention of returning to Toronto at the end of the year, but several people made comments along the line of:

‘See you when you get back ... IF you decide to come back.’

‘Oh, I’ll be back!’ I said.

These comments struck me as odd, because every time I’d left to go someplace before, even as long as a year, no one to my recollection said anything to this effect. Or maybe they did, and I just didn’t register it, but this time, it struck some sort of chord. I was a bit indignant: ‘Of course, I’m coming back!’

Long story short, I didn’t come back. I took a job in Creative Writing at the University of Surrey. I moved to south London. This job meant I was moving to London for the foreseeable future. I missed Toronto. But there also seemed a certain sense of inevitability about moving to London, too. I had felt this before my friends’ comments; not perhaps as far back as when I was on the Duchess career path, but still – I felt London was properly in my future. Perhaps it was just wishful thinking that I then made into reality, but it is strange how our unconsciousness drives us to make decisions that lead to the actualization of our hunches and predictions for our futures.

Living in London was exciting. And troublesome. The commute was difficult. I came home to find my front door smashed in one day. I got to know the neighbourhood and moved to a ‘better’ part of it. I learned that trains were late and always crowded. That no one is supposed to look at each other let alone speak on public transit. Everything closes at 11pm. Overt displays of emotion make people uncomfortable, just as direct communication is discouraged.

But, also: I could go to my favourite places in the city any time I liked. There were walks available throughout the year. I met lots of people. For a few (brief) months, I loved my job so much I thought I would probably do it for free. In short, I was in the haze of infatuation with my new city.

As much as I loved London, I slowly had to admit to myself that there were a lot of things I really didn't like about this place. I had a crisis of confidence regarding my ability to become a Londoner. I thought that maybe everything was better back in Canada and I entertained quite seriously the possibility of handing in my resignation and moving back to Toronto and picking up the 'waitressing around the world' career path once more.

This of course was very myopic thinking. So, I didn't like some things about the city. So, there was always something about every place I've lived that I didn't like. There's always something not to like, period. I'm sure if I were in Toronto I wouldn't have liked that they had snow on the ground until April this year. I had to fall out of my infatuation with London, to get over the novelty of it, to start actually, to live in it.

If I hadn't moved to London, I wouldn't have travelled half as much as I have in the past two years. I'm actually in Crete as I write this, because I had a week leave and decided two days before I left I wanted to go. As much as trains are late and you see your

fellow humans very up close and personally on the tube during rush hour, London's perpetual movement is freeing. You can go anywhere. Anyone can (and does, often surprisingly) come to you. It is a place that meanders and allows for meandering; you don't have to choose between being still and having an adventure. In the history and shape of its streets, there are no straight lines, no one true narrative. There is a layering, a network of stories; there is the chance you will take the long way or get lost, or end up exactly where you need to be, and sometimes all of these things are the same.

American philosopher Jeffner Allen talks about a theory of sinuosity. The idea that a straight line, if broken, has difficulty recovering. The ebb and flow of a seeded and swathed field will push and pull back. A curved line is unbreakable; the comings and goings of our relatives, their choices, their past cities, supports us. London pulses, and is never predictable. ♦

## Londoni napló, 2011

*Tárnok Attila*

**Z**aj, hangoskodás a mólón. Mit keresek itt? Nemcsak a brightoni zajongáshoz nincs közöm. Nem találok rokonságot más örült világokkal sem. A harsogó, globális élvezetkultusz elvét követő összes életformához, magatartáshoz semmi közöm. Rendkívül költséges elfoglaltság a dél-angliai tengerparton ülni és Rousseau-t olvasni. Ezt megtehetném ingyen és kényelmesebben otthon, fotelban. Vagy ha kényelmetlenségre vágyom, az erdőszélen egy kidőlt fa rönkjén ülve. De most dobjam el a könyvet, amit magammal hoztam, és vessem bele magam a forgatagba, amely taszít? Talán az az üzenete ennek a helyhez nem köthető helyzetnek, hogy a keregett utat nem a külső környezetben kell megtalálnom. Magányos olvasó, az írásain töprengő alkotó ugyanígy lehetnék Sümegen, Esztergomban vagy Kolozsváron. Órák hosszat ülök a parton és figyelem a járókelők karaktertípusait. A nők szépek, alulöltözöttek. Kisütött a nap és megőrültek, oda akarják adni bőrüket a szellőnek. De a sok szép, fiatalos nő között egy sincs, akivel szeretnék megismerkedni vagy akár csak szót váltani.

Ha minden kommunikáció nélkül föllapozhatnék egy képzeletbeli könyvet, amiből megismerhetném egyikük-másikuk háttérét, még ilyen olcsón sem érdekelne. És nem a házastársi elkötelezettség okán. Egyszerűen nem vagyok nyitott senkire. Férfi sem sétált el előttem, akire intellektuálisan kíváncsi lennék.

Vasárnap végtelenül szerény, de szinte már makulátlanul profi zenészekkel találkoztunk a *pubban*. Közelebbről ők sem érdekelnek. Alaptípusok, s mint ilyenek könnyen kiismerhetők. Elég volt a zenéjük, több nem kell belőlük.

Egy kisebb csoport mentálisan sérült öregasszony vonul el előttem, látszólag kísérő nélkül. Megannyi Veronika, vagy mint az *Ulenspiegel*ben a vakok. Épphogy egymás kezét nem fogják. Egyikük a mutatóujjával lelövi a város fölött áthúzó helikoptert. Egy másik minden oszlopban megkapaszkodik, az oszlopok között a kézitáskáját magától eltartva úgy szorítja, mint egy oszlopot.

Vigyázz! Nehogy ezeket az összefüggéstelen benyomásokat jelekként értelmezd! Ne keress semmi mélyebb szimbolizmust, a részletek egymást kiegészítő, megerősítő logikáját. Az ember hajlamos az automatizmusra. A világ, a körülöttem zajló közélet folyamatosan közvetít ilyen összefüggéstelen benyomás-sorozatokot, de nincs bennük rendszer, nem látok bele semmit, ami önmagán túlmutatna. Úgy csavargok a városban, mint az idős nyugdíjas, akinek már minden mindegy,

lényegtelen a világ folyása. Útját megjárta, a fegyvert, a lantot, a tollat letette. Hozzáadott valamennyit az összképhez, többet már nem mondhat, csak a nyugalmas véget várja. Negyvennyolc éves vagyok.

Rendkívüli és folyamatos zaj vesz körül, a nyelvek bábeli zűrzavara. Néha magyar beszéd üti meg a fülemet. Nem tudják, hogy értem őket. De ezzel a megértéssel egy lépést sem tettem előre. Ugyanannyit jelent csupán, mint amikor egy ismeretlen nyelven társalgó csoport halad el mellettem. Ugyanígy nincs mit kezdenem az angol szavakkal. Értem őket és kész. A jelentésüket nem értelmezem. Nem érdekel, mi hangzott el előtte és hogy mi fogja követni a rövid beszédfoszlányt, ami hozzám elért.

Úgy tűnik, a tengerparton előszezonban sem lehet mást tenni, mint nyáron. Napozni, élvezni a sós szellőt, figyelni a hullámokat, hallgatni a sirályok vijjogását. A helyszín tétlenségre ösztönöz.

Több mint egy órán át egy spanyol vagy portugál turista ücsörgött tőlem néhány méterre, magányosan. Az emberek tömege átmenő forgalomban haladt el előttünk. Csak mi ketten ültünk hosszan, tétlenül. Nem olvastunk, nem csináltunk semmit. Nézelődtünk. Elhatároztam, hogy megkérem, készítsen rólam egy fényképet. De ekkor jegyzetpapírt vett elő és lázasan írni kezdett. Néhány perc múlva felállt és távozott. Kiléte homályban maradt és talán jobb így. Nem kell mindent tisztán látni, mindenkit kiismerni.

Minden utazás, még a rossz vagy felemás út is – élmény: kiszakít a hétköznapiokból. Az utazó folyamatosan azzal van elfoglalva, hogy behelyezkedjen az új környezetbe. Ez az elfoglaltság, ha a befogadó kultúra az utazót megnyeri, egy-két héten át kellemes időtöltés. Azon túl kezd az utazás hétköznappá válni, az utazóból letelepedő emigráns lesz, aki a beilleszkedés adminisztratív és lelki gondjaival küszködik. Kezdi érzékelni a befogadó társadalom visszasságait, ahogy a társadalom is kezdi őt kihívó félként kezelni, olyanként, aki nem csupán a pénzét itt elköltő turista, hanem az álláshelyekből és a közös élettérből részesedést követelő versenytárs. Mennyi ideig lézenghetek Londonban, hogy a közvetlen környezetem ne tekintsen versenytársnak?

Kezdetben London minden szögletét közel éreztem magamhoz. Egy idő után azonban úgy alakult, hogy a jókora átfedéssel négy részre tagolt várostérképből mindig csak az észak-nyugati használtam. Mostanra már ezen a térképen is be tudom szűkíteni azt a területet, ahol a legszívesebben mozgok. Ladbroke Grove, Notting Hill, Kensington, Shepherd's Bush, Hammersmith, Fulham, Chiswick.

Azon töprengtem, ha londoni alkalmi ismerkedéseim során megkérdezik, mi a foglalkozásom, mondhatom-e, hogy író vagyok? Ó, igen? És miket ír? Erre mit válaszolhatnék? Vagy arra, hogy min dolgozom éppen? Mondhatnám azt, hogy *I'm not a commercial writer*,

nem vagyok kommersz, azaz megélhetési író. Mondhatnám, hogy a gesztáció stádiumában nyögök, csakhát hogy min vajúdok, milyen mű megírására készülök éppen, magam sem tudom. Vagy meghatározhatnám magam, mint műfordító, bár ez angolul egyszerűen fordítónak hangzik, olyanokat jelöl, akik kommersz fordítók: üzleti levelek, hivatalos iratok fordítói. A megjelölésből az irodalmi mű teljességgel hiányzik. Mondhatnám, hogy foglalkozásszerű olvasó vagyok, de ilyen kijelentést követően beszélgetőtársam nem venne komolyan. Tanár, ezzel tudna mit kezdeni, de azzal a szereppel egyre kevésbé azonosulok. Ám minden töprengés hiábavaló. A hetek során még egyetlen alkalmi, spontán ismerős sem kérdezett a foglalkozásom felől.

Brightont ugyanúgy nem szeretem, ahogy nem szeretem a Balatont. Előzőnlík a turisták, a turizmus ipari, nagyüzemi méreteket ölt. Az ilyen helyek a képlékenységtől terhesek. A folyamatosan fluktuáló tömeg minden újonnan érkező tagja megkísérli birtokba venni, más szóval felfedezni a nevezetességeket. Jövevények népesítik be a kulcsfontosságú pozíciókat, kilátóhelyet, strandot, étkezésre lehetőséget nyújtó pontokat. A helyi lakosság az új érkezők fogadására rendezkedett be, jószerével ez adja megélhetését. A viszonyok, a territóriumok, a jogosultságok folyamatos és állandó újrakonfigurálása jellemzi a népszerű turista célpontokat. Ennek az elviselhetetlen képlékenységnek az ellensúlyozására találták ki a falusi turizmust. Talán egyszer

majd megjelenik a magány-turizmus, a remete-turizmus is, ahol paradox módon a turista egyedülként lesz jövevény, mindenki más őslakos. Nem lesz olcsó szórakozás.

Fel nem foghatom, hogy lehetséges ennyiféle és számú embert úgy organizálni, hogy ne ugorjanak egymásnak. S még olyan uniform életforma sincs itt, mint New York-ban. Itt mindenki más, mint a többi, mindenki egzotikum. Hogy egyeztethető össze ennyi különböző világlátás, értékrend? Talán a minden mögött meghúzódó jogkövetés, a *rule of law*, a konzervatív *decorum*, az emberi méltóság tisztelete és a neoliberalizmus mára mindenütt inherens megengedő, elfogadó jelenléte. Talán ez a rend alapja.

A megfigyelői álláspont csak egyedül lehetséges, ahogy az alkotás is magányt feltételez. Händel soha nem kötött házasságot, pedig állítólag magas, erős, jóképű férfi volt; Naipaul tudatosan nem vállalt gyereket; Rousseau a magáét lelenházba adta – a sor folytatható. A legfelületesebb figyelem a közvetlenül jelen levő társ felé rögtön elvon az alkotástól és a megfigyeléstől. A társas utazó csak felszínesen vegyül bele az idegen társadalomba, nem észlel apró jeleket, mert részben a saját társasága köti le a figyelmét. Kell-e meggyőzőbb érv, mint az a tény, hogy társasággal az erdőt járva nem találkozunk állatokkal, csupán ha egyedül barangolunk.

Ha nem lennének azok az apró ügyletek, amelyeket öreg szállásadónómmal intézek, s amelyek okán nap mint nap egyeztetünk, kommentálunk, elszámolunk, beszélgetünk, nem tudom, közlésvágyam kielégülést nyerne-e a városi portyázások során felmerülő rövid párbeszédekben. Ma például egy *cabby*vel váltottam néhány szót, no nem ültem taxiba, csak útbaigazítást kértem. Vagy melegen dicsértem a Händel-ház csemballistájának játékát és a hangszeret. Elmondása szerint ez az egyik legjobb csemballó Londonban és ezt nem hivatali kötelezettségből, t.i. a múzeum alkalmazottja, hanem meggyőződésből állította.

Tagnap a St. Martin-in-the-Fields *doorman*jével társalogtam röviden. Néha az árusokhoz intézek szót, néha hozzám hasonló turistákhoz.

Az antikváriumokban különös módon félszeg vagyok. Rossz volt a bemutatkozás néhány éve, félszégem azóta tart. Pedig Pordes úr a Charing Cross Roadon ismerősként bölint felém, jöllehet szinte soha nem veszek nála könyvet. Londonban csak böngészek, antikvár könyvet Edinburgh-ben a Grassmarketen vagy Brightonban veszek. Ez utóbbi egész Anglia legtöbb érdekességet rejtő antikváriuma.

Hogy érezném magam, ha nem beszélgetnék minden este az öreg Etussal? Mizantróp állapot.

Kanadában küldetéssel töltöttem el csaknem egy évtizedet. Amint küldetésem lejárt, az egyetemen letettem az utolsó vizsgát, összepakoltam és hazautaztam

Magyarországra. Skóciában küldetéssel éltem meg egy szemesztert, de amint a doktori kutatómunka elkészült, idő előtt hazarepültem. A fiam egy éves volt, látni akartam. Brightonban napokig lézengtem dologtalanul és nem éreztem jól magam. Ezzel szemben heteket töltök Londonban küldetés nélkül, de ez itt nem zavar, mert itt el tudom képzelni az életem. Magányos lennék, semmi kétség, de itt annyi mindenhez lehet hozzáfogni, olyan sokféle elindulni. London organikus képződmény. Fluktuál, változik, befogad, megtart, magáévá tesz. Ám barátságom a várossal viszonylagos. Azért és addig tart, mert és ameddig van visszatérés haza. Mivel itt nem menekült státuszban vagyok, addig maradok, ameddig akarok. Mivel utazó vagyok, nem jelentek fenyegetettséget a helyiek megélhetésére, nem tartok igényt szociális támogatásra. De amint nem lenne visszatérés, kényszeres görcsök jelentkeznének: kitaszítotttság, mizéria, fásultság, elnémulás, gondolattalan sívár hangulat.

London óriási. Egy ilyen városban élnie kell néhány hozzám hasonló sorsú társnak. Ha itt nem létezik hasonmásom, sehol sem létezik, csupán könyvek lapjain, kétszáz évvel ezelőtt.

Az Earl's Court Roadon néhány percig egy idős asszony mögött lépdeltem. Áradt belőle a naftalinszag. Utoljára Ila néni szobájában éreztem ilyen illatot, így karakterhez, életfilozófiához kötöm. De jó lenne, ha Terezváros is megmaradt volna olyannak, mint South



Kensington! És lehet ma még Budapesten naftalint kapni?

Történelmi párhuzamok azzal az élvezet-kultusszal, ami a nyugati társadalmakban eluralkodott. A késő római kor hedonizmusa Róma bukásához vezetett. A késő középkori állati örület és babona a reneszánszhoz. A késő reneszánsz fénye vesztő csillogása, életszeretete egy szárazabb, racionális korhoz. A múlt század utolsó harmadában kirobbanó neoliberalizmus a jelen információs társadalmához. Későinek fogunk fel egy kort, amely befutotta pályáját és magában hordja a hanyatlás jeleit, késszé válik átadni a helyét egy vele szemben megfogalmazódó és felálló újabb kornak. Londonban, Brightonban és Edinburgh-ban ugyanúgy, mint Hamburgban, New Yorkban, Párizsban vagy Lisszabonban állandó party-hangulat uralkodik. Az emberek, és nemcsak a fiatalok, olyan szenvedélyességgel vetik magukat az élvezetekbe, mint akik attól tartanak, ez az utolsó esélyük, hogy kiszórakozzák magukat. Mintha holnaptól itt lenne a világ vége, pedig a World's End (bookshop) Chelsea-ben van. Ezek a jelek akkor vezetnek a kor bukásához, amikor sokak számára válik elviselhetetlenné az örökös életélvezet.

Az Old Brompton-temetőben írok. Bizarr. De ennél sokkal abszurdabb, hogy a temetőkert, melyet felver a gaz és ahol a legfrissebb síremlék is legalább ötven éves, egyfajta közparkká válik. Az egyik padon egy hajléktalan, egy másikon üzletember, mindkettő újságot

olvas. Mások az ösvényeken kutyát sétáltatnak vagy kocognak. Turistacsoportok vonulnak. Az ápolatlan sírokon nincs virág, gyertya, koszorú, a kertész hiánya szembetűnő. Mi a város terve ezzel a hatalmas területtel? A mókusok és a madarak erdőnek tekintik, pedig az egész park élettelen, az enyészeté. A nagyközönség számára nyitva áll.

Új, Kensal Rise-i szállásadónóm akár Sashalmon vagy Árpádföldön is lakhatna. Angolul még annyit sem tud, mint Etus. Csak magyarokat szobáztat és látszólag ez itt még nagyobb vállalkozás, mint a korábbi lakhelyem. Etelka néni szerint azért, mert Marika még fiatal, alig múlt hetven éves. A *sitting room*ban hárman ücsörögnek naphosszat, a nyolcvan fölött járó János bácsi, 48-as emigráns, Ausztráliából visszaházasodott volt tengerész, napszemüvegben, egyedül egy bőrfotelben és Marika néni, göcsörtös lábú kutyájával a kanapén. A kutya ölbe nem kéredzkedhet, csak a saját helyéről nézheti a plazmatévét.

Egy ekkora városban az egyén jelenléte vagy hiánya nem oszt, nem szoroz. Ahogy érkezésem, úgy távozásom is észrevétlen marad. Az ember születését és halálát is csak a szűkebb közösség ünnepli és gyászolja. Egy kis közösségben maradandó nyomot hátrahagyni viszonylag sokaknak megadatik, de egy London méretű városban ehhez Churchillnek kell születni.

Imre az édesanyjával már csak angolul beszél, gyönyörű dialektusban, erős orgánummal. Ömlik róla a

magabiztosság, mégis, amikor hozzám magyarul szól, félszegnek, nyuszinak hangzik. A szobámban van egy kép a gyerekekről. Imre göcsörtös térdekkel, rövid nadrágban áll, mellette Irén magyar népviseletben, de olyanban, amelyik egyik vidékre sem jellemző, mert mindenhol kölcsonöz motívumokat. Ettől válik műnépiessé. A fején gyöngyből font diadém, bár a népi kultúrában ezt nyilván nem így hívják. A képen szereplő kisfiú a nyuszi Imre. A valóságban Emery egészen más. London iskoláit elárasztják a különböző kultúrákból származó kis imrék és irénkék. Külsejükön viselik öröklött hagyományaik jeleit, de ha megszólalnak és az ember nem fordul hátra a buszon – ami itt eleve illetlen –, azt hihetné, két srác becsavargott a városba Harrow-ból vagy Etonból, mert ahogy és amiről beszélnek, kizárólag és precízen *London talk*. Göcsörtös térdű fél-emberek, akikből mégis egészséges felnőttek lesznek, csak a szülők hervadnak el kiteljesedés nélkül. Csak magunkat soha ki nem tenni ilyen átalakulásnak, megáláztatásnak! Megmaradni visszalátogató turistának!

Végül ráleltem annak a Pieter de Hooch festménynek az eredetijére (*A Maid and a Servant in a Yard*), amely az előterünk falát díszíti otthon. Évek óta felkeresem miatta (is) a *National Gallery* termeit, de mindig kölcsönben van. Most először van a kép Londonban, a Wellcome Trust kiállításán, 183 Euston Road, néhány méterre a *British Library*től, ahol amúgy is mindennap

megfordulok. Ingyenesen megtekinthető, boldog vagyok, hogy utolértem.

Minden londoni utam kerek, egész. Tartózkodásom végére minden felmerülő kérdésre választ kapok, valahogy minden megkezdett kis ügy lezárul, tisztázódik valami nyelvi probléma. Következő utamon újabb kérdések merülnek föl, de a jelenlegiekre mindig fény derül haza utazásom előtt.

Utolsó nap további antikváriumok a Gloucester Roadon és a King's Roadon. Egyik sem éri el a brightoni színvonalát. A Múzeum körúton is található ennyi érdekes könyvet. Nem csak a csomag túlsúlya miatt tartózkodom a vásárlástól.

Utolsó éjszaka kivételesen nyugtalanul alszom, többször felébredek, felkelek. A reggeli hazaindulás nyugtalanít? Riaszt és egyben felelőssé tesz, hogy ha esetleg valami történik velem, ez a fekete notesz marad utánam, fésületlenül. De bármikor ragad is magához a Mindenható, mindig marad utánam fésületlen, félkész szöveg, az éppen akkori friss fogalmazvány. Boldog az a szerző, aki munkájának végére pontot tett, és úgy zárja le a szemét. Korábban elmélkedtem azon, miért mondja az ima, hogy a készületlen haláltól ments meg, Uram, Isten. És mit takar, a „készült” halál? Ha az elfogadást, beleegyezést, akár beletörődést, a hit letisztulását, a távozásra való készenlétet, akkor nekem is szól. ♦