

Literary London:
Imagining the City

Drs. Christopher and Hope Hodgkins

Wednesday, May 3

Postwar & Immigrant London



V-E Day
(May 8,
1945) in
London

T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding” (concluding lines)

And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.



V-E Day in Trafalgar Square



What happens to Churchill, and to Great Britain:



“let us so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, ‘this was their finest hour.’”

The New York Times

LATE CITY EDITION

CHURCHILL IS DEFEATED IN LABOR LANDSLIDE; ATTLEE PROMISES PROSECUTION OF PACIFIC WAR; ALLIES ORDER JAPAN TO QUIT OR BE DESTROYED

SUSPENDED MAN ACCUSES WOLLEY OF INTERFERENCE

Truman Pledges Free World As He Reviews U. S. Troops

Tells Them They Fought So "We Can Live, Think and Act as We Like"—He Says He Will Follow Roosevelt's Ideas

TERMS LAID DOWN

U. S., Britain and China Plan Decampment and Occupation

DOOM THE WAR LORDS

Offer Japanese People Opportunity to Gain Democratic Rule

WINNER AND LOSER IN BRITISH ELECTIONS



ATTLEE IN FIRST TALK BACKS HARMONY WITH U.S., RUSSIA

3 JAPANESE CITIES FIRED BY 350 B-29'S

BRITISH BUSINESS IN GENERAL CALM

BRITISH TURN LEFT

War Regime Swept Out as Laborites Win 390 of 542 Seats

CHURCHILL DISGRACE

Hints of Early Peace—He Stays in House, but Many Ex-Aliis Leave

Supporters Set the Stage For Implementing Charter

BRITISH BUSINESS IN GENERAL CALM

London, late 1940s and early 1950s

Continued rationing (until 1954)



Nationalization of industry; NHS created; high employment; austerity.



“MCMXIV”

Those long uneven lines
Standing as patiently
As if they were stretched outside
The Oval or Villa Park,
The crowns of hats, the sun
On moustached archaic faces
Grinning as if it were all
An August Bank Holiday lark. . . .
Never such innocence,
Never before or since,
As changed itself to past
Without a word – the men
Leaving the gardens tidy,
The thousands of marriages,
Lasting a little while longer:
Never such innocence again.

Philip Larkin, 1960, 1964



Movement writers emphasizing negation

After the love-laced talk of art, philosophy and fate—
Just, No.

* * *

However cumbrous, puffed and stretched the pain—
To say no more than, No.

D. J. Enright, “Saying No” (ll.7-8, 11-12)

Once I am sure there’s nothing going on
I step inside. . . .

Philip Larkin, “Church Going” (ll.1-2)

“It’s not that you’ve got the qualifications, for this or any
other work. . . . You haven’t got the disqualifications,
though, and that’s much rarer.”

Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*

Barbara Pym (1913-1980)



. . . might not the experience of 'not having' be regarded as something with its own validity? (*Quartet in Autumn*).

St. Gabriel's, Warwick Square, Pimlico



British women in wartime



Wartime exigencies



Utility styles



Postwar styles



“the spinster’s natural clothing”

“I was not very well dressed that day—I had had a ‘lapse’ and was hatless and stockingless in an old cotton dress and a cardigan.”



“Just the kind of underclothes a person like me might wear . . . so there is no need to describe them.”



W. J. Gordon, *The Horse World of London* (1893)

Philip Larkin: *Excellent Women*
“is a study of the pain of being single, the unconscious hurt that the world regards as this state’s natural clothing . . . time and again one senses not only that Mildred is suffering, but that nobody can see why she shouldn’t suffer, like a Victorian cab horse.”



THE CAB STAND: ON THE BANK

Excellent Women (1952)

[A]fter all, life was like that for most of us, the small unpleasantnesses rather than the great tragedies, the little useless longings rather than the great renunciations and dramatic love affairs of history or fiction (*Excellent Women*).



Photo by Mayotte Magnus (c) The Barbara Pym Society



“What is wrong with being obsessed with trivia? . . . What are the mind of my critics filled with? What *nobler* and more worthwhile things?”

MOCK HEROIC

*South Seas magic that stays dawn-fresh...
Lips by Tattoo!*



Large size 7/6 (inc. 2/- tax)
Refills 5/- (inc. tax)
Medium size 5/- (inc. 2/- tax)
Refills 2/6 (inc. tax)

Y E S . . . now-and-always sorcery
Tattoo's tropic-treasure-trove of colour for lips!
Fiesta-gay . . . orchid-exotic magically-mysterious as a South Seas night!
Yes . . . stay-on Tattoo Lipstick
colours that spell romance . . . romance . . . romance!
CORAL, EXOTIC, HAWAIIAN — with the accent of a blazing sun!
NATURAL, TAHITI ROSE, TROPIC DAWN — flattering, secret subtlety!
PAGAN RED, BLACK MAGIC, ORCHID . . . lovely, lureful!
Yes . . . Tattoo Lipstick! It's different! It's inspired! It's *you!*

TATTOO
your lips!

ALSO TATTOO FACE POWDER • ROUGE • MASCARA • AND THE NEW NAILCOTE

‘Thank you, but I think I will have Hawaiian Fire,’ I said obstinately, savouring the ludicrous words and the full depths of my shame. . . .

All flesh is but as grass . . . I thought, watching the women working at their faces with savage concentration, opening their mouths wide, biting and licking their lips, stabbing at their noses and chins with powder-puff.

NON-SEQUITUR

Mr Napier was called Rockingham! How the bearer of such a name would hate sharing a bathroom!

‘Strong passions, isn’t it
Eating meat, you know, it says that in the Bible. Not that we get much of it now.’



IRONIC UNDOING

‘You look very nice,’ said Rockingham, smiling in such a way that he could almost have meant it.

Clergymen did not go holding people’s hands in public places unless their intentions were honourable, I told myself, hoping that I might be wrong.

‘You seem to be very nicely dressed,’ said Everard without looking.



MALE/FEMALE JABS



. . . women like me really expected very little—nothing, almost.

‘But how do you usually look? One scarcely remembers. . . .’

‘I had observed that men did not usually do things unless they liked doing them.’

“Miss Hamilton in London” (1964)

It would not be true to say she was doing nothing:
She visited several bookshops, spent an hour
In the Victoria and Albert Museum (Indian
section),
And walked carefully through the streets of
Kensington
Carrying five mushrooms in a paper bag,
A tin of black pepper, a literary magazine,
And enough money to pay the rent for two weeks.
The sky was cloudy, leaves lay on the pavements.

Nor did she lack human contacts: she spoke
To three shop assistants and a news vendor,
And returned the ‘Goodnight’ of a museum
attendant.
Arriving home, she wrote a letter to someone
In Canada, as it might be, or in New Zealand,
Listened to the news as she cooked her meal,
And conversed for five minutes with the
landlady.
The air was damp with the mist of late autumn.



A full day, and not unrewarding.

Night fell at the usual seasonal hour.

She drew the curtains, switched on the electric fire,
Washed her hair and read until it was dry,

Then went to bed; where, for the hours of darkness,

She lay pierced by thirty black spears

And felt her limbs numb, her eyes burning,

And dark rust carried along her blood.

Fleur Adcock (b. 1934)

The Empire strikes back.



Brick Lane and Spitalfields: Huguenots, Jews, Bengalis



East End history of diversity

19 Princelet Street (Museum of Immigration and Diversity)



Brick Lane Mosque (Jamme Masjid)
Umbra Sumus ("We are but shadows")



Brick Lane protests

1978



2007



Ali, Brick Lane (2003)

Monica Ali (b. 1967)



Razia: “Is it better than our own country, or is it worse?”





Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941): Bengali philosopher, poet, playwright, composer, painter, politician/reformer

National anthem of Bangladesh: 1972

Forever your skies, your air set my heart in tune

As if it were a flute.

In spring, oh mother mine, the fragrance from

Your mango groves makes me wild with joy—

Ah what thrill.

Tagore, “Golden Bengal” (1906)

Tagore bust, Gordon Square



‘Sometimes I look back and I am shocked. Every day of my life I have prepared for success, worked for it, waited for it, and you don’t notice how the days pass until nearly a lifetime has finished. Then it hits you—the thing you have been waiting for has already gone by. . . . It’s like I’ve been waiting on the wrong side of the road for a bus that was already full.’



‘Where’ve you come from, mate?’

‘Oh, just two blocks behind’, said Chanu. ‘But this is the first holiday for twenty or thirty years’.



The Bauls poetry:

The mirror of the sky

Reflects my soul.

O Baul of the road,

O Baul, my heart,

What keeps you tied

To the corner of a room?

As the storm rampages

In your crumbling hut,

The water rises to your bed.

Your tattered quilt

Floats on the flood

Your shelter is down. . . .



‘This is England You can do whatever you like.’





With all of this postwar change
afoot, still a Children's Map of
London portrays a fairy tale town:



ENGLAND

WALES

DOMINE DIRIGE NOS

SCOTLAND

N. IRELAND



THE GIANT MAGOG



THE GIANT GOG



UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



CITY OF LONDON

COUNTY OF LONDON

CINDERELLA TO THE ZOO

TO THE ZOO

The Lion and the Unicorn
were fighting for the Crown,
The Lion beat the Unicorn,
all round about the town.

TO HAMPSTEAD & THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

TO THE PIGS

TO HIGHGATE HIGHBURY AND THE NORTH

TO CAMBRIDGE & EAST ANGLIA

TO SOUTHEND & ESSEX COAST

TO THE THAMES VALLEY, WINDSOR & THE WEST COUNTRY

TO KENSINGTON & THE WEST

TO CROYDON & THE BRIGHTON ROAD

TO KENT & THE DOVER ROAD

TO THE THAMES VALLEY, WINDSOR & THE WEST COUNTRY

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TO THE THAMES VALLEY, WINDSOR & THE WEST COUNTRY



...even while, in an all-too-real city, the immigrants and their children assimilate London to themselves, and themselves to London.

If the East End
simply gives
old houses of
worship a new
purpose...

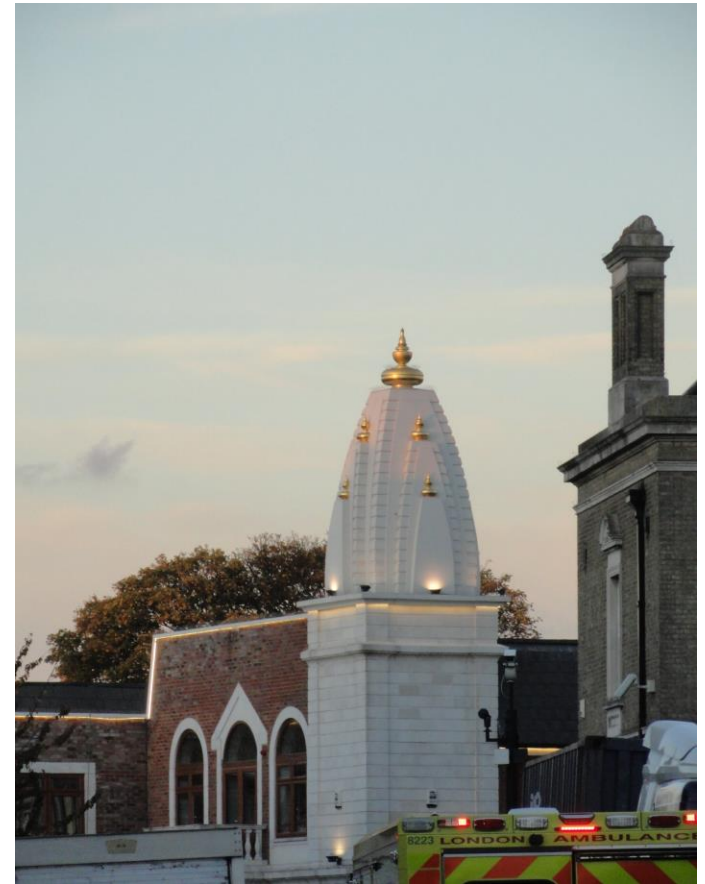


...in the West End neighborhood of Southall, the Asian majority build holy places all their own...

Sikh Gurdwara...



Hindu Temple...



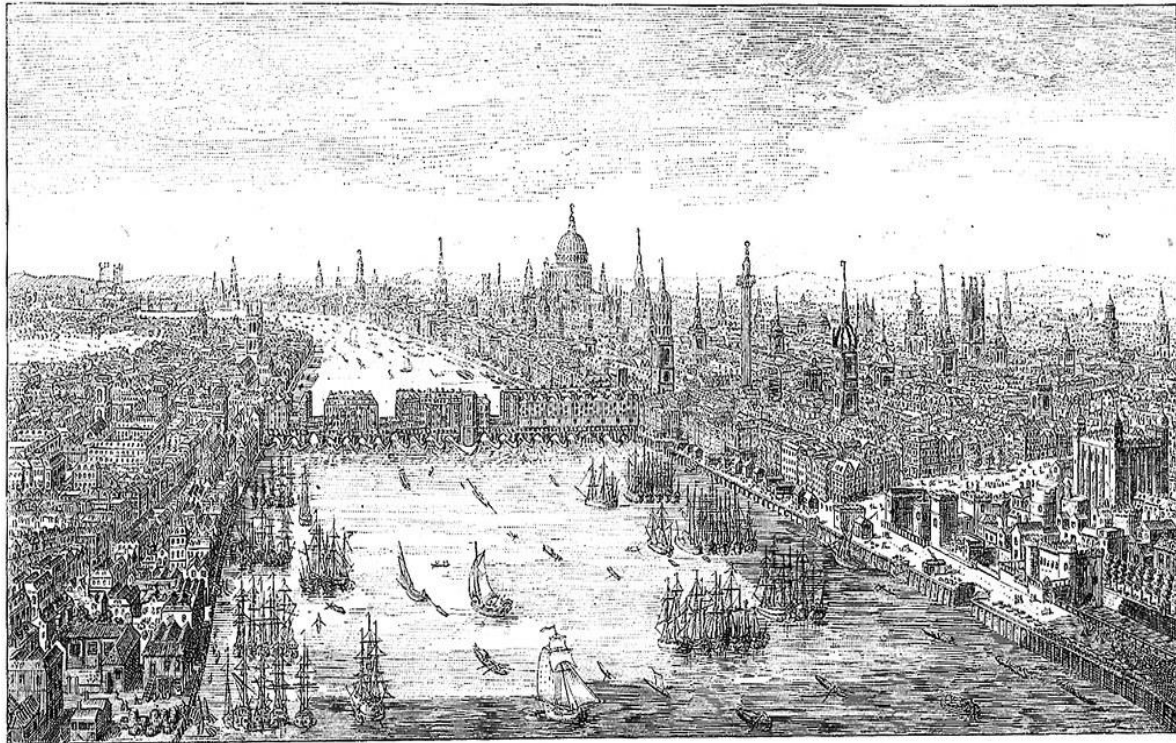


On the
Gurdwara steps
with UNCG
Literary London
class, summer
2022.

Meanwhile, just in the past generation,
London's skyline is changed, changed
utterly...

Its 1950 profile, despite the Blitz, is not much different from what it was in 1750...with St. Paul's and church-steeple dominating the skyline.

1750



1950



...and with
only a few
boxy
“lowscrapers”
going up by
1970...





...and but a few more by 1990—but count the CRANES...

BOOM!

- The skyward development explosion...



In 2000, London was home to around 30 high-rises, buildings defined as those with 20 or more floors. But between 2001 and 2018, 144 new towers were built in the city ... And the construction pace is accelerating. In its annual Tall Buildings Survey, released March 5, 2019, New London Architecture reported that 541 high-rises were in the pipeline, including 121 already under construction.

The City, its footprint largely unchanged since Roman times, and now legally limited by the suburban Green Belt, suddenly grows straight UP...

First in 2004 “The Gherkin” (30 St. Mary Axe)



...then in 2013 “The Shard” (32 London Bridge St.) at 72 stories lost in the clouds



...then in 2014
“The Cheese
Grater” (122
Leadenhall St.)

...



...followed in 2015 by “The Walkie-Talkie” at 20 Fenchurch St....



...topped by The Sky Garden



The newly towering City dwarfs the Tower in 2023 (and still more cranes)...



...five years
from now in
2028...



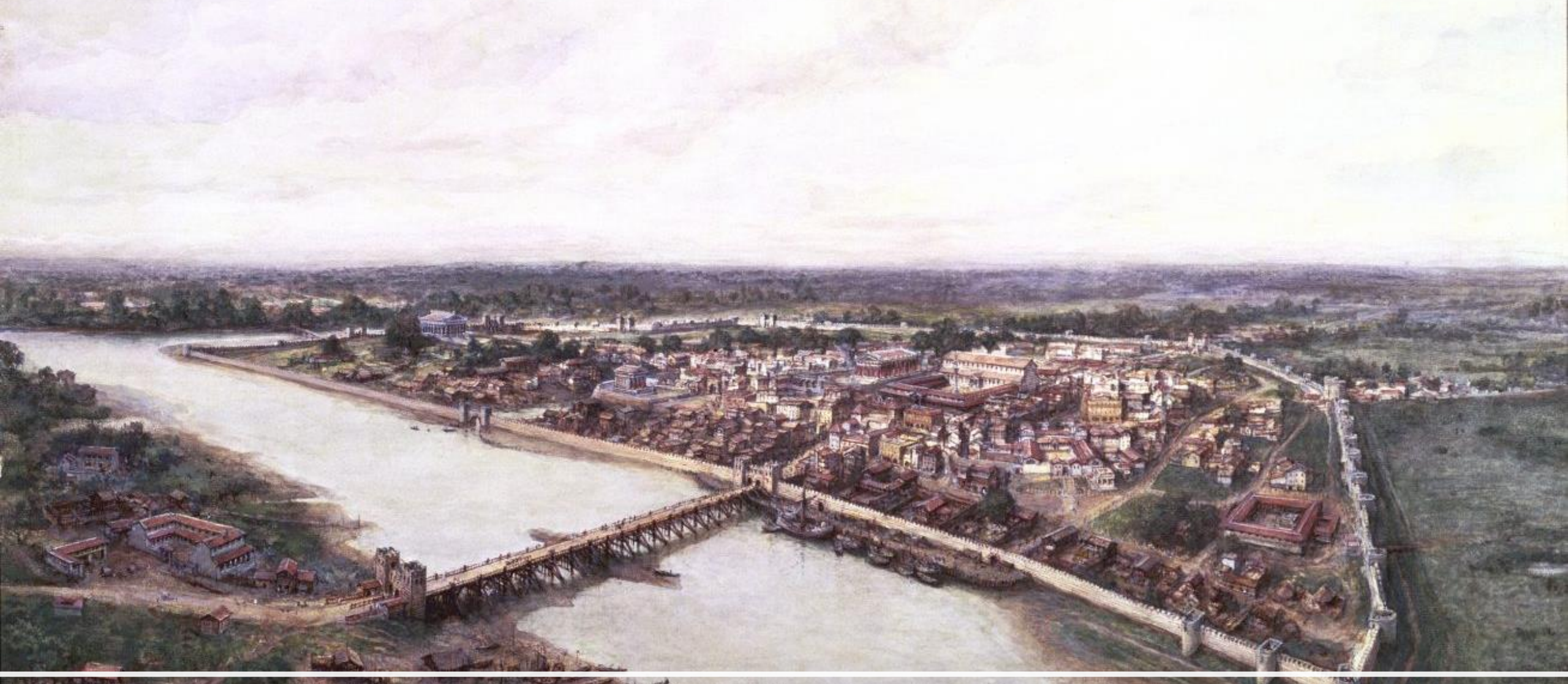


...and ten years off in 2033 (what, no flying cars?)



Yet despite all this, London in its sudden height and its multitudes is still a city on a human scale...





...and since its Roman founding...



...a meeting place of many peoples...





...including the Guyanese poet John Agard FRSL (b. 1949, who immigrated from Guyana in 1977)...

Agard's witty, sassy, musical, and compassionate verse earned him the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 2012, and his sonnets speak in a voice unbowed yet neighborly, challenging & infusing this English literary import with a new Caribbean life:



...talking sonnet to sonnet between Wordsworth and L'Ouverture...

To Toussaint L'Ouverture

Toussaint – the most unhappy of men! –
Whether the rural milkmaid by her cow
Sing in thy hearing, or though liest now
Alone in some deep dungeon's earless den,
Oh miserable Chieftain, where and when
Wilt thou find patience? Yet die not! Do thou
Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow;
Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,
Live, and take comfort! Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee – air, earth, and skies –
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee! Thou hast great allies:
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

William Wordsworth (1802, 1803)

Toussaint L'Ouverture acknowledges Wordsworth's sonnet "To Toussaint L'Ouverture"

I have never walked on Westminster Bridge
or had a close-up view of daffodils.
My childhood's roots are the Haitian hills
where runaway slaves made a freedom pledge
and scarlet poincianas flaunt their scent.
I have never walked on Westminster Bridge
or speak, like you, with Cumbrian accent.
My tongue bridges Europe to Dahomey.
Yet how sweet is the smell of liberty
when human beings share a common garment.
So, thanks brother, for your sonnet's tribute.
May it resound when the Thames' text stays mute.
And what better ground than a city's bridge
for my unchained ghost to trumpet love's decree.

John Agard (2006)

...and sometimes infusing the lilt of another English from his Guyanese coast—interweaving Afro-Caribbean lore with British history, and learning to love another shore:

Chilling Out Beside the Thames—John Agard

Summer come, mi chill-out beside the Thames.
Spend a little time with weeping willow.
Check if den Trafalgar pidgeon still salute
old one-eyed one-armed Lord Horatio.

Mi treat gaze to Gothic cathedral
Yet me cant forget how spider spiral
Is ladder aspiring to eternal truth...
Trickster Nansi spinning from Shakespeare sky.

Sudden so, mi decide to play tourist.
Tower of London high-up mi list.
Who show up but Anne Boleyn with no head on
And headless Raleigh gazing towards Devon.

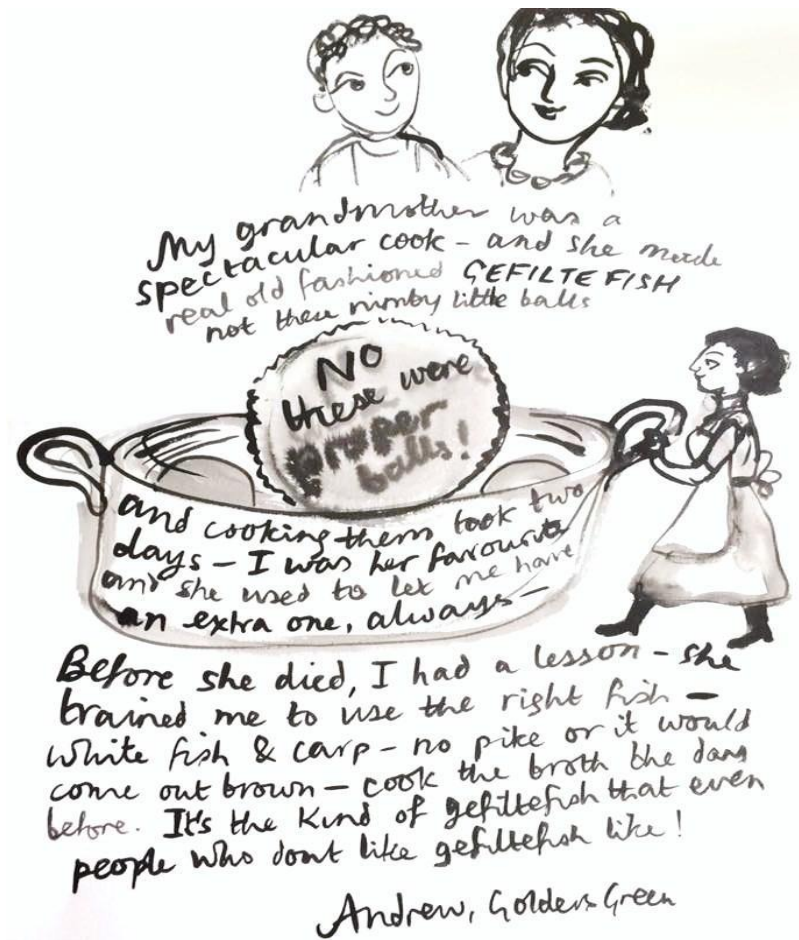
Jesus lawd, history shadow so bloody.
A-time for summer break with strawberry.

But if a descendant of plantation slaves like John Agard may naturally harbor some ambivalent attitudes to British life, many other immigrants have found in Britain, as in America, welcome refuge and freedom from waves of tyranny and oppression elsewhere and so celebrate the unique liberties and opportunities of their new home.

Sophie Herxheimer is a poet, writer, and artist who lives in Brixton, a south London neighborhood of Lambeth, and teaches at the Royal Drawing School.

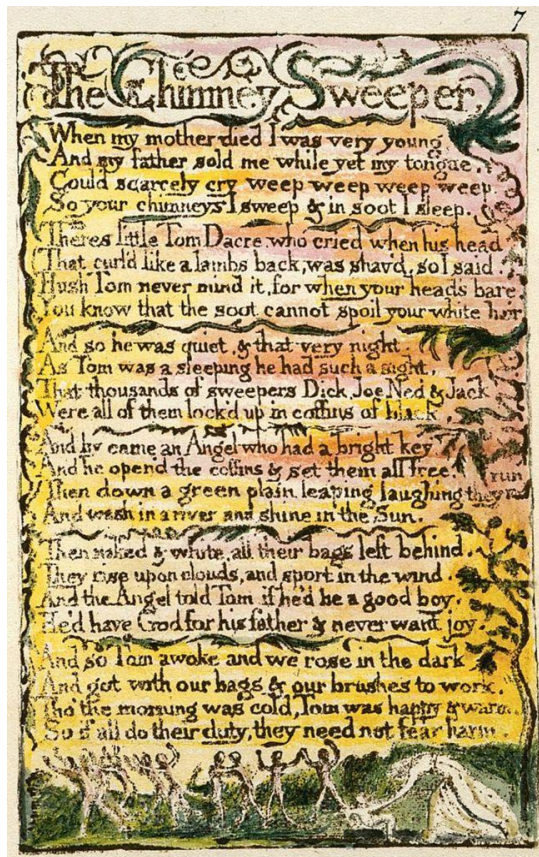


Herxheimer is a daughter and grand-daughter of Jewish refugees from Hitler's Berlin who escaped to England in 1938, ahead of the Holocaust; born in London more than two decades later, Herxheimer lives and loves to tell immigrant and migrant stories in word and image.



Her art combines images and words in a style that recalls William Blake (a major influence), her poetry Emily Dickinson (also an influence), and her figures echo those of Marc Chagall, with their eclectic combination of her culturally Jewish upbringing and a modern multicultural celebration of London life.

Blake—"The Chimney Sweeper"

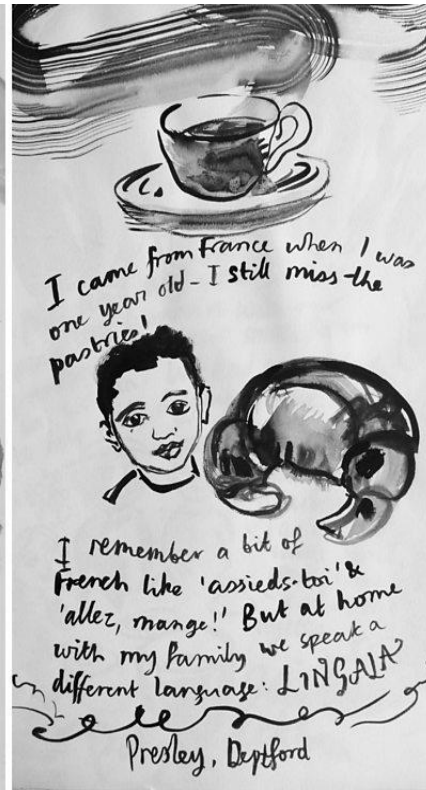
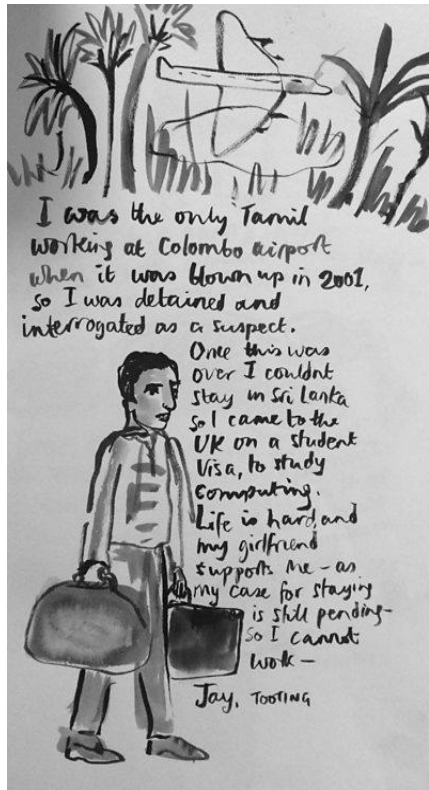


Chagall—La Pluie (Rain) on the Shtetl



One-panel stories from Sri Lanka, Syria, France...

...and Zimbabwe...



International Contemporary Writing

Wasafiri

Issue 93, Spring 2018

REFUGE

Article
Focusing on Dispersal
Karen McCarthy Wool with Bidisha

Essays
A Country of Refuge
Denim
Detention and Destitution: The Asylum Journey in the UK
From 1938 to 2016: Two Refugee Crises
Spanning History
No Place to Go
One Story by Many Authors
I Can Only Tell You What My Eyes See
London: Insularity and Inclusion

Art
Sophie Herzheimer

Fiction
Julia Bell
Selma Dabbagh
Mireille Gansel

Report
Seeking Asylum in France

Poetry
Bidisha
Hassan Blasim
Oluvide Popoola
Lisa Luzz
Saba Vasefi

Reviews
Oluvide Popoola & Annie Holmes review
Kim Schultz Three Days in Damascus: A Memoir
Rana Abdullattah Tiger and Clay:
Syria Fragments
Anna Johnson Refugees and Peacekeepers:
A Patricia Press Anthology
David Heed & Anna Pincus Refugee Tales:
Volume II
Calais Writers Voices from the 'Jungle':
Stories from the Calais Refugee Camp
Juan Tomás Avila Laurel The Garage Pledge
Hala Aliyan Solt Houses

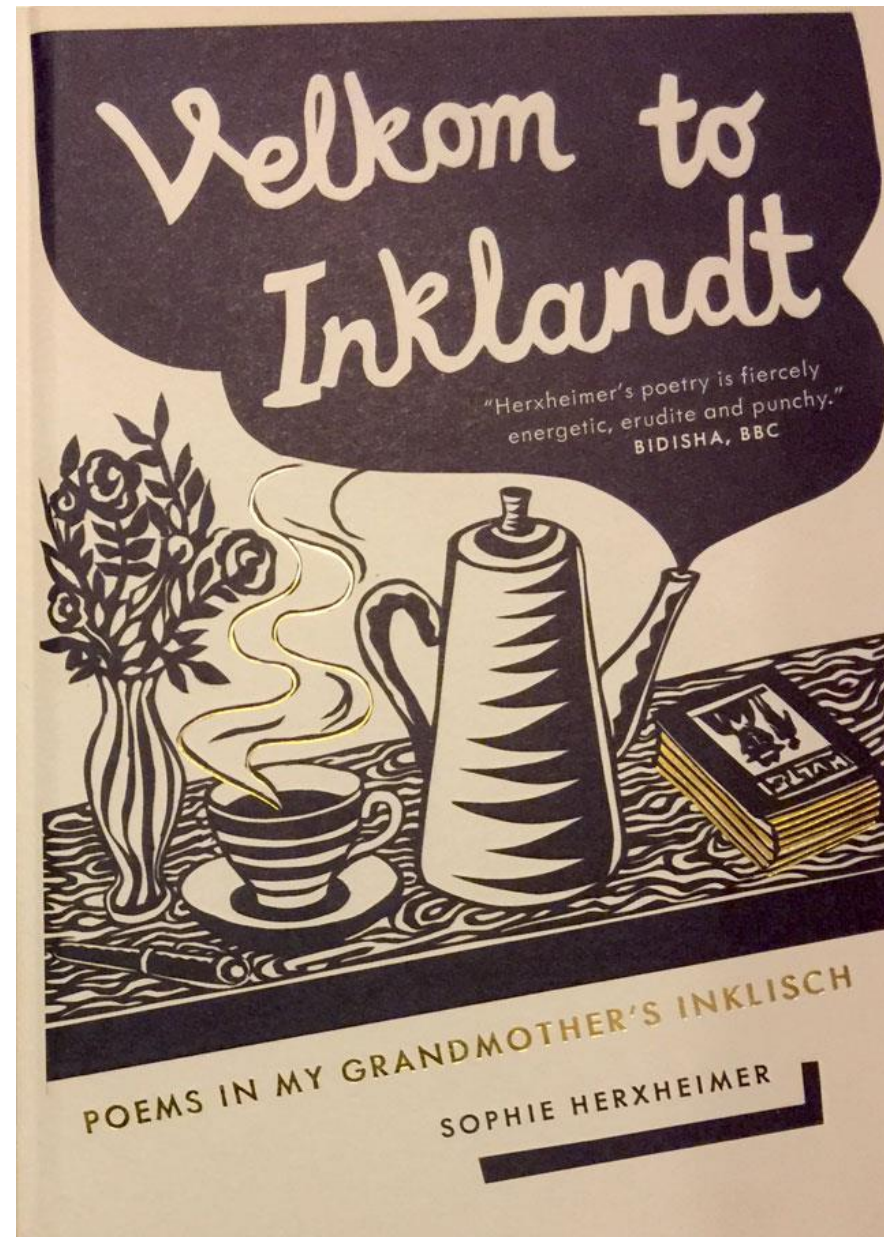
Joe, Shropshire
When I was very little we lived in Zimbabwe, and I don't remember any adults - I just remember freedom. And of course there were snakes everywhere. Once apparently I rode over a BLACK Mamba on my bicycle, but it was asleep so it didn't bite me. I love snakes, they're the first animals I go to see at the zoo.




Sophie and her room of stories...

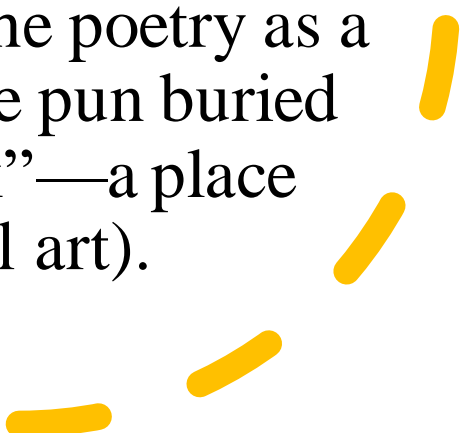



But her best-known poetry is found in her 2017 book, *Velkom to Inklandt...*



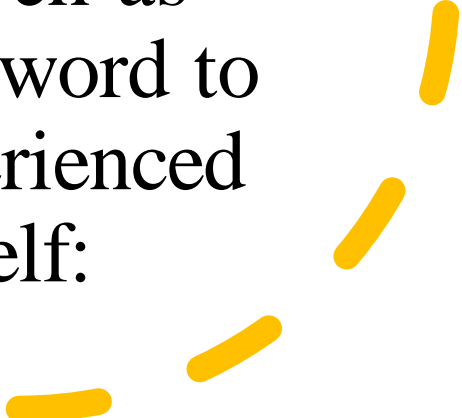


... a collection of poems that play on the difficulties of *zee Inklisch lenkvitch* (language) and *vokebulerry* (vocabulary), using phonetic spellings of words to borrow the voice of her German Jewish *Grent Muzzer* (grandmother) Liesel. Both lighthearted and deeply moving, Herxheimer virtually forces us to read aloud from her grandmother's memories (we discover her meanings coming out of our own mouths), inviting us to celebrate Leisel's unique experiential wisdom while savoring the poetry as a delightful word game—and noting the pun buried in *Inklandt* (England, “the land of Ink”—a place of great writers and writing and visual art).





Our course began with an invasion—by a conquering Roman Empire that did some good in spite of itself by founding a great city that has thrived long enough to cast off that Empire, and many others—including its own—and now, more than most cities on earth, usually manages to welcome new arrivals not as invaders but as partners and even as friends. So let us give our last word to one of those arrivals who experienced London as life, and as love itself:



Sophie Herxheimer–“London”

Not zo mainy Dais zinz ve arrivink.
Zis grey iss like Bearlin, zis same grey Day
ve hef. Zis norzern Veizzer, oont ze demp Street.
A biet off Rain voant hurt, vill help ze Treez
on zis Hempstet Heese vee see in Fekt.
Vy shootd I mind zat?

I try viz ze Busses, Herr Kondooktor eskink
me ... for vot? I don't eckzectly remempber;
Fess plees? To him, my Penny I hent ofa –
He notdz viz a keint Smile – *Fanks Luv!*
He sez. Oh! I em his Luff – turns Hentell
on Machine, out kurls a Tikett.

Zis is ven I know zat here to settle iss OK. Zis
City vill be Home, verr eefen on ze Buss is Luff.



Chill out by the Thames on the “Luff
Bus” with us while
Reading London: Town and Country
May 13-22, 2024!

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