



Poems from England and elsewhere

We begin with two poems which recount special moments in England, my country of birth, before moving to faraway lands, where each explores a topic derived from its own special locale. The uniqueness of this chapter of poems is formed from different happenings, in a variety of places.

A summer's night

***Red and yellow sunset fades slowly to dusk,
Orange-white lights, they cluster and glow.
Cars strobe slowly round the far side of the vale
With familiar faint noises that come and go.***

***Train rattles past, somewhere way down below.
Ah yes! There it is, along the edge of the 'Wold'
Soft two-tone toot – floats to me through the air,
Smooth journey homeward and back to the fold.***

***A fuller moon now, with intensity of light
A strong human image displayed on its face,
Voices come singing from a pub out of sight,
Drumbeat sounds from a practicing place.***

***A plane rumbles overhead with pulsating light:
Celebrating the senses of an English summer's night.***

Stroud hilltop, 9.15 to 9.45 p.m., June. 1997

An English ***Summer's night*** can provide an experience second to none. As the sun faded, behind the hilltops in a blaze of reds and yellows and moonlight took over the reins on this still, warm evening, I lay in a grassy field, a little removed from the lights of Stroud, taking it all in. There were lights from cars in the distance and sounds of a train in the valley below, then voices from a nearby pub and someone practising drums. A plane could be heard in the night sky, far above. They were magical sights and sounds to witness. Slowly, this poem began to form in my mind.

Excursions in History

*The excursions were the sweetest part
Of this sixteen-day sojourn:
Shakespeare's Stratford,
Dreaming spires of Oxford,
Sunning in the gardens on the Avon's banks at Bath.
Prepositions of place
Useful now in practice,
Translated from the classroom and so put out to work.*

*But could these tours of England's heart
Be enough to please
Young Japanese ladies,
Keen to find the delicacies
In those High Street castles, such as 'Next' and 'Gap'.
For whom the 'Alice Shop'
And 'Peter Rabbit's Place'
Meant so much more than two thousand years
Of history, on view from Roman times in Bath.
... Mostly not.*

*But there were a few – a glorious few,
Who could see beyond the tourist hordes,
To glimpse a past of majesty and meaning
That reflected back
To make the tours worth doing.*

England 2001

Excursions in History (above) is a story that could be told by thousands of English language teachers who rule the classrooms of the summer schools in the heart of England, through July and August, each year. Then as punctuation marks in an English language short course, teachers escort their molly-coddled charges around some of England's most historical sights. With my yearly class of 15-year-old Japanese girls, I always did a circuit including Stratford-Upon-Avon, Oxford and Bath.

The excursions came as a welcome break to the classroom and though there were written tests on topics such as Shakespeare's Stratford, the Romans in Bath, or Alice in Wonderland story, invariably the majority of young ladies headed for the High Street fashion shops. On occasions however – quite rare occasions - I was pleasantly surprised to find a student who wanted to know more about the heritage that had made these places famous. I remember one wanting to know more about Lewis Carrol: "Did he 'rearry' use drugs?" she asked. For me, this was like unearthing a diamond in a coalmine: a shining gem amongst many, which made those excursion days so worthwhile.

Green

***A sea of green rolls out before the eye,
From the deep green shades of palm oil fronds,
To the golden lime of the broad banana leaf:
Manufactured greens, but nature non-the-less.***

***Greens brought together in one tumultuous rage,
When we catch upon the self-created forest:
From plants at the base, then so high up above,
Densely interwoven – an awe-inspiring sight!***

***This man-made nature is a clinical affair:
One-dimension viewing: no substance down below.
True nature's form: an explosion of green,
Multi-directional, yet balanced, top to toe.***

Southern Malaysia, 1996

This poem (above) considers different qualities of **Green**. Just as the wheat fields in the hinterland of Australia can stretch to the sky, so I discovered it is much the same in Southern Malaysia, where uncountable acres of palm oil trees monopolize the hot, tropical, agricultural landscape. And monopolise is perhaps the right word, for the greens in this view are one-dimensional and rather monotonous, compared to the layered, multi-dimensional and much more varied greens that one can see in the Malaysia's natural forests (or natural forests in any other country for that matter).

Skywagon Terminal

***Different shades, but the same scene:
Safe haven on a neutral plain.
Varying faces on familiar screen,
Intent on reaching particular goals.***

***Novices rush with insecure haste:
Check-in to customs and duty-free drag.
Veterans stroll with a look of distaste
Paper to read and home before tea.***

Fumancino Airport, Rome
September 1999

Skywagon Terminal (above) - Airports are ubiquitous creatures: variations on the same theme, whether large or small, new or old. Often, they can provide a place of familiarity and safety, so that one might come off the hot, sweaty streets of Mumbai to pass directly into an extreme of air conditioned, *Westo-Indian* luxury, with every mod-con on tap. Airports can also be invigorating, or they can equally be soul-destroying ... or for some, they can just be simply run-of-the-mill: par for the course. Much of this depends on who is involved and what are their circumstances of involvement: is it a once-a-week thing, or once-in-a-lifetime experience?