

Edinburgh Summer School 2016 (07/08 – 21/08)

In one of our preparation meetings to this trip we were told to bring warm cloths. 'Edinburgh is a cold place. Even in summer. Expect it to rain. Expect it to be windy. Expect it to be smothered in fog.' And I must admit this had been a good piece of advice, because this city did chill our bones even at a temperature of 24°C.

During our first week we experienced most likely the same Edinburgh Robert Louis Stevenson had suffered from as a child. It was cold and damp. Edinburgh seemed impenetrable to the tourists' eyes. The city presented its shady, ungraspable nature to its visitors. Those were the nights that Deacon Brodie would have looked out for to commit his crimes, while 'carrying his head high, and wearing a more than commonly grave countenance before the public' at day. This dubious underground is where Louise Welsh's cadaverous but restless character Rilke would start investigating whether those pictures of an abused and tortured young woman were authentic or not. A darkness laid upon the city that even would have challenged John Rebus and Siobhan Clarke from St Leonhard's Police Station. One might think: *Surprise, surprise. Scottish days are short, Scottish nights are cold, Scottish crime writing hard-boiled. Voilà, Tartan Noir.* The following week, however, the city would be ablaze with light and provide us with a helluva sunburn. And when I sat down at the foot of Edinburgh Castle on a steep small meadow near Grassmarket and watched all those visitors and locals intermingle, I was thinking to myself 'maybe it had been gleaming all along, unnoticeable by a hasty gaze? Was it just the weather that had changed or was it our perception, as well?'

When we met Louise Welsh for a reading from her novel *The Cutting Room* we were quite surprised how this lovely inspiring Lady could take us on a trip to the abyss of the human soul. But she countered our arbitrary assumptions by telling us that crime writers were funny good-hearted people. They would process any disturbing event in their life by writing. 'Beware of those who write love stories' she said. She definitely taught us a lesson there. Things are not as simple as they seem to be. There is more than meets the eye and always time for some witty quips even in the darkest hour. This nonconformism and edginess does also apply to Scottish literature.

RLS' *Strange Case* is not just another Scottish crime novella. Indeed, some of us were quite disappointed how little of this text is actually about a murder. It is a story about the divide between man and society, body and soul. Or as professor Ian Campbell would put it in his brilliant talk: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde represent the Well-Known and *the Other*. And that we would all bear our own version of *the Other* in our souls. Everybody 'goes to the devil in his own way'. So by reading and analysing literature we give the unknown a name and a face and thereby make it graspable. But despite the political and psychological dimension of *Strange Case*, it also a story about friendship.

The Lawyer Mr Utterson is deeply concerned about Henry Jekyll. He thinks Jekyll is intimidated by Hyde into making his will in favour of this despicable man and offers him unconditional support, 'You know me. I am a man to be trusted. Make a clean breast of this in confidence; and I make no doubt I can get you out of it'. Our eyes had been opened, and after the first week we were able to notice and appreciate the richness of this city. Like John Rebus, we had been handed out an 'all areas pass' to the touristic Edinburgh and the city off the beaten tracks, and especially, to its throbbing prosperous cultural life. So many shows provided additional pieces to the puzzle of Edinburgh we were about to put together. For instance, when a performance of *Trainspotting* took us on a journey back to the district of Leith in the 90s. A milieu with tons of new stories to discover. And in this case, these stories are brought to us by Irvine Welsh, surprisingly a cousin of Louise Welsh. The Fringe Festival has been a home for many different stories since 1947 and together with the International Festival and Book Festival is just another example for the openness of the Scottish people.

An enormous variety of contrasts seems to be pervasive not only in Scottish literature and history but is **the** landmark in Scottish identity. From England and Scotland to day and night, death and life, oppression and freedom, studies and enjoyment, you name it. Scottish literary critic G. G. Smith would call these contrasts *Caledonian antisyzygy*. A topic is not examined one-dimensionally, but from many different perspectives with the notion of duality at the heart of it. Hazel, our literary pub tour guide, would call it 'being Scottish is being (at least) two'. Especially now, as the UK voted to leave the EU but most Scottish people voted to *remain*.

I must admit, I did not know much about Scottish literature or history before this trip. Shame on me. But this city heartily welcomes everyone who answers its call, and its people are willing to share their love for their country and its tradition with everyone who is interested in it. Hence, in the end it is the people, not Golden Boy, the statue at the top of the dome of Old College, who will enlighten even the darkest mind with the blazing torch of knowledge. I think David Hume and Walter Scott would agree with me. During this summer school we explored the factual and fictional side of Edinburgh and Scotland and both worlds merged into each other and created a hyperrealistic representation of the Scottish identity, which allowed us to start writing our own narrative of the city, the country and its people, being aware that this is just the beginning. So please forgive me when I made up the initial quote in need of a catchy opening.

We would like to thank all our supporters for making it possible to unravel those many levels of Edinburgh, to explore the contrasts in Scottish (crime) literature and life, and to build up relationships at a time when many differently motivated forces try to destroy the bonds that keep the world together.

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