

## London 2015

In June 2015 a small group of students and Kati Voigt could hear “London calling!”, inviting us to mix business with pleasure. The excursion took place in connection to the seminar “From Fact to Fiction: Tony Blair's Politics in Contemporary Literature” (summer term 2015) and gave us the unique opportunity to get a taste of British politics and to trace Tony Blair's legacy. Whereas the seminar laid down the theoretical basis, for instance Tony Blair's (and New Labour's) central political goals as well as their fictional representation in contemporary novels, we were now able to marvel at the Houses of Parliament in London and to see one representation, namely the play *The Audience*.

Our trip started with a surprise: Kati Voigt had booked tickets for Sky Garden for Friday morning. The top floors of a skyscraper have been transformed into a beautiful garden (and café) where one can enjoy a breathtaking view over London. Fortunately, the English weather was better than its reputation and we could see many skyscrapers, but also the Tower of London quite clearly. Afterwards, the entire group travelled to the British Museum which is regarded as one of the largest and most comprehensive museums of the world, exhibiting various cultural and historical artefacts. The museum is structured into several departments, for instance Ancient Egypt, Greek and Roman Antiquity, but also Africa, Oceania and the Americas in order to discuss the British imperial past. This way, we were able to engage with many topics that we knew through our studies in more detail. In the evening, we went to see *The Audience* and admired Kristin Scott Thomas as Elizabeth II. *The Audience* describes the relationship between Queen Elizabeth II and her various Prime Ministers by recreating their weekly meetings. Since Tony Blair did not actually feature in the original version from 2013, there was much to discuss in Peter Morgan's new and revised version: The scene in which the fictional Tony Blair enters the stage links the Suez Crisis from 1956 with the more recent British-American war in Iraq, thus adopting a fairly critical attitude towards the United Kingdom's post imperial position. Blair's policies also played an important part in several other scenes for instance in the Queen's conversations with both Gordon Brown and David Cameron. Therefore, our visit to the theatre allowed us to return to our seminar topic once more. For instance, we noticed that throughout the entire play, Tony Blair is generally shown in a negative light as the Queen and his two successors as Prime Minister, Gordon Brown and David Cameron, frequently make fun of him. During breakfast on the next day we were still discussing Blair's political legacy as well as his popular image.

On Saturday, we went to visit the British Parliament. We had booked a special tour and our lovely and very competent tour guide provided us with lots of interesting and useful information while showing us round the House of Lords and the House of Commons. We were not allowed to actually sit down in the rather elegant House of Lords, yet we were able to admire the Queen's place of honour when officially opening Parliament. We could also meet numerous British kings – or at least their portraits – in various hallways and rooms, for example William of Orange and his wife Mary Stuart signing the Bill of Rights. They did not look particularly happy about having to yield many of their royal rights and prerogatives to the British Parliament. In the House of Commons, finally, we could briefly sit down on the benches and we could even walk down the same corridor the Members of Parliament have to take when a vote has to be cast. Our usually rather theoretical knowledge about British politics was thus transformed into reality (or, as close as it could get). After our guided tour

through the Houses of Parliament we took the bus to Portobello Market. We tried a variety of typically British baked goods at this huge street market, for instance some lovely cake, homemade scones and doughnuts, making our already fabulous day even better. In the evening, some of us once again met for a visit to the theatre: This time, we saw *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, originally a novel by Mark Haddon that had been turned into a play. It tells the story of a boy with Asperger syndrome whose experience of the world is very different from everyone else's, who loves prime numbers and who tries to solve the mysterious case of a murdered dog in his neighbourhood. The actors, the stage design and the creative lighting designs thrilled us and we hugely enjoyed having another drama and performance analysis after *The Audience*. We spent our last evening in London in a restaurant in Chinatown, eating fried duck and fried rice with vegetables whilst looking back at many wonderful experiences during our excursion.

Eva Kirbach

