

## Introduction

In writing this Introduction for *Crossings*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Fall 2009, I happily note that faculties from many different tertiary institutions of Bangladesh, and also two faculties from India, have sent their papers for publication, which we take as a great source of encouragement for us, and believe that such cooperation we will continue to get in future. While many of the papers are going in this issue, many aren't, while some recommended articles had to be stored for future issues because of want of space. For an academic journal all this is much satisfying and we'd like to graciously thank the contributors for choosing *Crossings* to publish their articles.

This issue has nineteen essays and five book reviews. The essays have been put into five sections in accordance with their thematic similarities. The sections are named as "Literatures Interfacing," "Postcolonial Literature," "Diasporic Literature," "Imperialistic Legacies," and "Language: Theory, Practice and Mechanics" respectively.

In the first section, there are five essays each of which deals with some aspect of interfacing between literatures, cultures and theories.

To introduce them is to begin with Professor Fakrul Alam's essay on Tagore. Alam, whose reputation as a Tagore translator is by now well-established even across the border, has argued that Tagore's non-fictional prose writings in English have signs of permanence not only in their themes, but also in the language matured by Tagore. While Tagore, as Alam informs us, took up writing English prose after he crossed fifty and was very diffident about his competence in that language, he applied himself more and more to pruning his style and with years of practice he finally achieved a remarkable standard in English prose. Alam's essay is particularly interesting as when he points out features from Tagore's prose where he (Tagore) could liberate himself from the constraints of foreign-language infelicities and use English with the ease of a native speaker, allowing his imagination a free play. His choice of words and phrases—as exemplified by Alam—becomes bold and refreshing, and in such essays as "The Religion of Man" Tagore combines thought and sensibility well manicured through the right choice of words.

The next essay in this section is by Kazi Anis Ahmed, which is a short but brilliant critique of the reductive view upheld by such globally reputed scholars as Gayatri Spivak, who had formulated the idea—an idea which after reading Ahmed's essay will seem to be rather strangely concocted—that some literatures of the world—and Bangladesh Literature is one of them—do fail to achieve international readership because writers in these literatures are non-experimental by nature and thereby remain localized. Ahmed strongly protests against this



argument saying that it is a myopic view in the name of globality, and by doing a close analysis of Shahidul Jahir's novel *সে রাতে পূর্ণিমা ছিল* (Night of the Full Moon), Ahmed vindicates that Jahir has employed precisely a far advanced craftsmanship in his tale comparable to that applied by authors in Gayatri's preferred bag, but unfortunately the high-profile critics haven't evolved any schemata to take cognizance of such experimentation taking place 'locally'.

Ruhul Asfia has drawn a comparative profile between Tagore's novel *Gora* and Kipling's *Kim* and says that while the latter's novel smacks of inborn racism, Tagore's novel goes beyond the narrow bounds of racism and highlights a genuine sense of humanism.

In the same group, the fourth essay is by Sheikh Mehedi Hasan and he has written an essay on our foremost English-language poet Kaiser Haq saying that he has evolved (as much as Alam said Tagore having done) a style of his own by which he can stand at par with the likes of Larkin. Those familiar with Haq's poems know that his major forte lies in evoking images humorously double-edged, always extracting pleasure by satirizing the Babu English, and exposing at the same time the pains of a lacerated heart caught in—to borrow a phrase from Harish Trivedi—the 'double bind'. Hasan has supplied enough quotes from Haq's poems to make his paper a heartening one to read.

In the last essay of this section, Rajyashree Khushu-Lahiri and Shweta Rao have interestingly told us that the diasporic female writers have foregrounded food and the culinary world in their fiction both as a way of challenging the male hegemony and as a means to assert the ethnic independence in a foreign setting. As much as Jhumpa Lahiri shows Ashima creating a liminal space for herself in her novel, *The Namesake*, so do Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (living in the U. S.) in *The Mistress of Spices*, Amulya Malladi (in Denmark) in *Serving Crazy with Curry* and Esther David (in India) in *Book of Rachel* show that the culinary world has emerged as a recognizable creative act and that the craft of writing is fertilised by this culinary sense in women writers.

Though the above essay could've comfortably gone with the "Diasporic" group, we've included it here because it speaks more about interfacing than about adjustment or acclimatization, the basic features of diasporic life.

The second section, named "Postcolonial Literature," contains three essays, the first of which is by Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam, a front-line intellectual and noted author of the country. Islam discusses the Guyanese poet David Dabydeen's book of poems, titled *Slave Song*, written in Creole, as to point out how the body of the slave becomes the field of resistance against colonization. When under extreme physical torture the slave becomes ungendered, he or she takes recourse to sexual fantasizing—involving the male slave having physical relation with the white woman—as the only way out to assert their



unencumbered independence. Through this phantasmagoria, Islam says, Dabydeen shows that the body is liberated and becomes decolonized. Of course, all postcolonial studies have to start with *The Tempest* and Islam rightly finds that it is the Caliban-figure that has been reinstated by Dabydeen in the form of the Caribbean canecutter, while Ariel is represented as a mulatto.

While Islam's argument might remind one of Richard Wright's main thesis in his novel, *Native Son*, where Thomas Bigger, the central character, argues that the only time he ever felt free was when he killed (though by accident) the white girl, Mary Dalton, one may note that the next essay, discussing Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* is written with the same perception. Shahidul Islam Chowdhury argues in this essay that Mary, the white colonialist at heart, finally succumbs to the call of the body, forcing herself not only to establish illicit relationship with the black boy, Moses, her houseboy, but also to lose her life in his hands. Chowdhury argues that this is how in a postcolonial age the colonizer-colonized relationship stands on a reverse mode.

Nasrin Islam's essay on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* argues that the much-ignored female characters of the novel, Ekwefi and Ezinma, deserve more concentrated critical attention than is done. She finds them potentially individualistic as to conform to the idea of the feminist defined by Elaine Showalter and others. Islam's interpretation opens up a refreshing vista.

Professor Kaiser Haq, on whose poetry there has already been an essay that we commented upon, has a paper on Nirad C. Chaudhury, the controversial iconoclast, to start this section on "Diasporic Literature."

Haq maintains that though there had been intensely-conceived superciliousness in Chaudhury's pose as an imperialist-loyalist, there's, however, a surprising amount of honesty in his idea of the entropy that he predicted would follow the collapse of the Empire. Resentful of Chaudhury as much as he is, Haq may still appear to be sympathetic to this icon on not very ill-founded grounds.

The next two essays by Naveera Ahmed and Musarrat Shameem respectively are on the same author—Jhumpa Lahiri, and while Ahmed explores the dualities, ambiguities and uncertainties of the diasporic population, Shameem points out the feminist r/evolution taking place in Ashima; the way she learns to become self-dependent in an alien culture, which Ahmed explains as liminality, the quality that sustains a diaspora in a foreign strand is the way to rebuild a home away from home.

My essay on Shakespeare's imperial dimension attempts to show how the idea of the empire was conceived by the Greeks through a hypothetical process named as 'poetic geography', and how through the Romans the concept of the poetic geography came to the English, who likewise imagined an empire before it was formed, and while they (the English) used Shakespeare to further their imperial

cause, in their turn, however, the colonized used Shakespeare as an archetypal figure for resistance.

The last group containing seven essays deals with the perennial problems of establishing English learning in Bangladesh on a sound pedagogical base.

Mahmuda Nasrin speaks about the contention between Phillipson and Pennycook regarding the linguistic imperialism of English. She sanely suggests that while it is not possible to be as deterministic as Phillipson to castigate English as responsible for global inequalities, it's not possible either to welcome the aggressive ELT modules supplied by the west. In Bangladesh, we've to be wary as not to fall a victim to ELT neo-imperialism. We certainly have to find out the median.

Zakia Ahmad deals with Lev S. Vygotsky's theory that language learning is determined by a child's formative years, where his/her culture and society create a permanent impact on the child.

Muhammad Shariar Haque's essay on plagiarism is a timely contribution because with the advent of online technology, cut-and-paste and unacknowledged borrowing has become a regular practice with many dishonest and uninitiated faculties. In an upcoming society nothing is more harmful than intellectual dishonesty. We hope, Haque's essay will wake up the concerned authorities to be more watchful about this happening.

Similarly Mohammed Humayun Kabir lets us know through his investigative essay that examination scripts of English at H. S. C. and S. S. C. levels are not properly examined, and he suggests that unless there's a uniform training provided to testers/raters, anomalies in marking will remain a big problem.

Mili Saha and Nadia Rahman, in their respective essays, speak about the reasons responsible for English not being well learnt. Traditionally in Bangladesh the reading and writing skills are emphasized but Saha stresses the need for the listening skill to be taught and Rahman the speaking skill to be developed through removing the psychological fear of speaking. Both of them recommend certain measures to improve the teaching of these two skills.

The last essay in this group by S. M. Ariful Islam provides a fascinating account of the factors inhibiting the learning of English. Islam's essay is unique in the sense that not going through a blame game he adopts a fact-finding approach and discovers that because of latent differences in syntax and phonemes between Bengali and English languages, it becomes difficult for Bangladeshi students to remain free from the L1 influence in an L2 learning situation.

Syed Badrul Ahsan, the Literary Editor of the Daily Star and Shafiqul Islam, a senior bureaucrat, deserve our heartfelt thanks for contributing book reviews by taking away time from their busy schedules. Thanks also are due to Rajyashree Khushu-Lahiri for her review of *The White Tiger*.



Mr. Kazi Shahed Ahmed, President of BoG, ULAB, whose vision for a modern Bangladesh is the prime motive in everything done at ULAB, deserves our heartfelt thanks and deepest regards for patronizing us.

Professor Dr. Rafiqul Islam, V. C. of ULAB deserves thanks for his advice, and Mr. Kazi Nabil Ahmed, Treasurer of ULAB is also thanked hereby for encouraging all kinds of intellectual pursuits at Department of English and Humanities (DEH), and Professor Imran Rahman, Pro V. C. has always been positively helpful. Thanks to him as well.

Dr. Kazi Anis Ahmed, Vice President of ULAB and Director of Academic Affairs, deserves our deepest regards and gratitude not only for conceiving the idea of this journal but also for, with an excellent blending of fine scholarship and virtuous pragmatism, guiding and encouraging us at every vital step in publishing the journal.

I would also like to thank my two junior editors, Zakia Ahmad, Assistant Professor and Shahnewaz Kabir, Senior Lecturer of DEH for doing the needful, while thanks must go to Professor Dr. Jahirul Haque, Deputy Director of Academic Affairs, for being so cooperative in fine-tuning the official procedures.

Mr Rahat of Papyrus has once again proved his commitment to us by redesigning the cover. Thanks galore to him.

All concerned and related to the publication stages of this journal at ULAB are also heartily thanked.

The reviewers of papers are immensely thanked. They did an excellent job by arduously copy-editing most of the articles sent to them. We earnestly bank on their support in future too.

Before ending, I must say that despite our careful editing, errors may still be found. While our apologies go in advance, we also request our readers to advise us on everything about *Crossings*.

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