

## Introduction

*Crossings: ULAB Journal of English Studies* is a yearly literary-critical peer-reviewed journal of the Department of English and Humanities (DEH), University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh. This is the first issue, and it has eighteen articles and one Book Review section.

As one goes through the articles, one will observe that the articles can be divided into three groups by their thematic concerns. The essays that belong to the first group are interfacing in both linguistic and cultural senses, those dealing with the application of the English Language in our educational institutions, exploring the problems in doing so and also suggesting solutions, and those interfacing the dominant elite culture defined by English with the indigenous cultures of the erstwhile colonized countries that threaten and question the imposition. The second group of essays is those written from a feminist angle, and the third group of essays consists of independent readings of some scattered texts. The essays, however, are not published group wise, but are serialized according to the authors' ranks—from senior to junior.

The first group of essays comes in justification of the title of the journal, that is *Crossings*, thus embracing the theme of interfacing. And the journal fittingly starts with an essay from Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam, a noted man-of-letters of the country, who, fearing that English Departments at Bangladesh universities are going to lose students for English studies against the rising demand for the language/linguistics courses, suggests that there better be two clearly independent departments: Literature and Language. From a structural perspective he also speaks about the necessity of down-sizing the number of students for each class, which, however, he admits to be an impossibility in the context of the present over-sized student enrollment.

While Islam, like the West Indian writer George Lamming, who said, "English ... today, among other things, [is] a West Indian language,"<sup>1</sup> prefers to see English as a globally enfranchised lingua-franca, Dr Maniruzzaman and M. Mamunur Rahman, in their essay on R. K. Narayan, conclude that he (Narayan) also chose to retain English, not the English English, but the Indian English as the lingua-franca for India. So Indian English should be considered enfranchised.

Mahmuda Nasrin's essay on the state of English in Singapore and Hong Kong provides facts and figures which, as is expected, are not dissimilar to what we see fundamentally problematizing the use of English in Bangladesh, both in formulating a language policy and in fixing up an all-purpose serving pedagogy.

---

<sup>1</sup> George Lamming. "The Occasion for Speaking." *The post-colonial studies reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995; Rpt. 1997. 16.

The problem centres around the bifurcating dilemma about how to minimize the intrusion of the English Language in our national curriculum, speech register and social behaviour on the one hand, and how to appropriate its influence on the other. The demarcating line between intrusion and appropriation is as tenuous in Singapore and Hong Kong as it is in Bangladesh.

The next essay on English-Bangla interfacing is by Zakia Ahmad, which argues that the reason for English still thriving in Bangladesh as a colonial language is not linguistic but political and global. She opines that major political decisions regarding the use of English in this country have been taken either in conformity with the colonial objectives of the past or, going against the wind, in utter resentment of whatever is English. Neither approach, Ahmad concludes, has favoured an objectively sustainable growth of English in the country.

In an interesting fact-finding essay, Dr Muhammad Shahriar Haque has studied the online recruitment advertisements seeking to recruit faculties by many private universities of Bangladesh and come to point out that the language and requirement-descriptions of these advertisements looking for candidates with, primarily, North American PhDs or, secondarily, European PhDs amply suggest that these universities do not care for merit and expertise, experience and scholarship of the candidates, but only search for people with foreign degrees to uplift their market profile, thus discouraging locally educated persons of competent level from applying. Haque further points out that they want Bangladeshi teachers with North American or British/Australian degrees not because they really want to employ Bangladeshi teachers, but because they can't afford native-English speaking faculties. Thus, Haque rightly argues that these universities' recruitment policy is highly discriminatory and exclusionary.

The next essayist Zafor Mohammad Mahmud has shown the result of his survey of ULAB classroom situations and finds that the traditional way of correcting students' scripts is counter-productive. The students lose confidence and are discouraged. He finds that grammar correction doesn't help the students if their contents remain faulty. So he recommends self-correcting approach for the students while the teacher should act only from a distance.

From the cultural interfacing perspectives *Crossings* has been fortunate in getting submissions from such writers as Professor Kaiser Haq, the internationally known poet from Bangladesh writing in English, Dr Kazi Anis Ahmed, a noted English short-story writer of Bangladesh, and Dr Arran Stibbe of the University of Gloucestershire, a globally recognized activist for sustainable development and a prolific writer in his own right, who was kind enough to contribute his article on ecological poetics to *Crossings*.

Professor Kaiser Haq's paper is on Tagore's philosophy of life, and he asserts that Tagore's thinking on both truth and nationhood was far more comprehensive than either Einstein's or Nietzsche's. While he shows why Tagore's view of truth

and beauty was more humanistic than Einstein's scientific and instrumental view, he at the same time discredits Nietzsche on his idea of nationhood, which he believes has given birth to Eurocentric nationalism that led to two world wars in the modern time. On the other hand, Tagore's view of the nation, coupled with a similar vision by Mahatma Gandhi, has preferred a holistic approach in which every nation is defined by a humane urge, not by a political or terrestrial motive.

Dr Kazi Anis Ahmed has taken up the formidable novel *Ulysses* by James Joyce for discussion and worked toward removing the wrong notions about Joyce's stand on the question of the independence of Ireland from the British. By studying the "Cyclopes" episode closely, Ahmed, in his flowing language, has taken to task the traditional line of criticism which is happy to conclude that Joyce has denounced the Citizen in absolute terms. Ahmed asserts that the truth is just the opposite, as Joyce rather, as the text gives evidence, surreptitiously undercuts the episode with subtle praise, often opportunistically ignored by the traditionalists, for the resistance shown by the Citizen. Ahmed concludes that Joyce's sense of patriotism is fuller and more substantial than is often perceived.

Dr Arran Stibbe's article on the Japanese Haiku has been propelled from the feeling that the language of most of the classical literature, if deconstructed, will painfully reveal that most of it has gone against nature and more-than-the-human world. Hence, literature, unknown to itself, has often encouraged the destruction of ecology. As the threat of the global warming is looming large, Stibbe, in order to arouse our ecological consciousness, pursues a (re)-reading of literature (presently the Haiku) to construct a poetics that, as opposed to the language of literature encouraging destruction of ecology, will go in favour of preserving the green, the animal, the other natural elements, and, in short, inspire a discourse to ensure a better co-existence between the human and the more-than-the-human worlds. This exciting poetics will, hopefully, not fail to find adherents in Bangladesh.

Dr Shamsad Mortuza's paper on two (Red) Indian writers speaks also about an interfacing between the English Language and the native languages of the American Indians. While Mortuza agrees that the said writers, Momaday and Silko respectively, were taught English at school and could not but choose to write in English, but they were careful in taking away the demonizing aspects that the non-native writers have laden their cultures with.

Abdullah Al Mamun's essay on Forster's classic *A Passage to India* has not been shy of accusing the British for their overbearing colonial attitude, and, thereby, becoming responsible for not allowing the friendship between Dr Aziz and Fielding to mature.

Among the four articles addressing the feminine issues, the noted essayist and translator Professor Fakrul Alam in his essay is unambiguous in claiming that in R. K. Narayan's novels the male characters are shown to be suffering from all

sorts of sexual aberrations and fantasies, while the female characters are more organized, goal oriented, and less given to sexuality. The men ogle at the women in Narayan's novels, but the women resent it. Thus, Alam asserts Narayan's novels are a strong critique of the patriarchal hegemony still very much a reality in the sub-continental life.

My paper on the daughters in Shakespeare's plays is also a humble attempt to portray the disadvantaged position of women of his time which Shakespeare has analysed and questioned but seems to have fallen short of violating the status quo.

Zareen Choudhury's fascinating article on witch trials in New England and their bearing on *The Scarlet Letter* complements the above two articles in the sense that while women are shown to be suffering in those essays as the dependent gender, from Choudhury's paper we get to know about the extreme limit such marginalization can lead to: nothing less than burning women at the stake.

Tahmina Zaman's paper on Ibsen's *A Doll's House* establishes the point that the play isn't a feminist text, but one celebrating the individual's freedom from social ethos. So at the end of the play Nora emerges not as a liberated wife but as a strong individualist, neutral to gender identity, proving Ibsen's own dictum that "He is the strongest, who stands most alone."

Many will be thrilled by a touch of novelty by reading Shahnewaz Kabir's study of the idea of Kitsch as employed by Milan Kundera in his novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, while many more will find Nasrin Islam's argument in her essay on Camus's *The Outsider* that Meursault, the protagonist of the novel, is actually more responsive to his surroundings than it is made plain. Musarrat Shamim takes a reader-based approach in her essay on Donne and explicates three key poems by him to prove how they invite the readers to go for gap-filling and counter-creating.

I'm very grateful to all contributors, whose papers we've published and whose papers we couldn't, unfortunately, publish, for their cooperation, and, needless to say, we want from them and also from others whose writings we'll publish in future, the same cooperation. It may go unsaid that without their help *Crossings* wouldn't have seen the daylight. The same thing can be said about the valuable reviewers, who helped us most sincerely in assessing the merit of the essays.

I would also like to acknowledge my deep gratitude to the Board of Governors of the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh for their whole-hearted support in realizing this venture. Mr Kazi Shahed Ahmed, President of BoG, a man of great vision and a strong believer in the dissemination of knowledge, has always been an inspiring figure behind everything positive taking place at ULAB. Thanks also go to Professor Rafiqul Islam, VC, and Professor Imran Rahman, Pro-VC for their roles in guarding and flourishing the academic interests of the university.

But my particular gratitude and regards must be kept for Dr Kazi Anis Ahmed, Vice President, BoG, ULAB, and Director of Academic Affairs and also an associate professor of DEH, for his dashing leadership quality, youthful charms, and pragmatic vision and dynamism, and, it may be mentioned here that without his continuous encouragement and advice and support, I probably couldn't even have conceived the idea of this journal in the first place. Incidentally, he has suggested the name *Crossings* for the journal.

I also want to thank my three junior editors Zakia Ahmad, an assistant professor of DEH, ULAB, Rumana Siddiqui, an assistant professor of English at the University of Dhaka and Shahnewaz Kabir, Senior Lecturer, DEH, ULAB for doing the needful.

My thanks also go to Mr Nuruddin of Momin Offset Press for composing and making up the articles according to a set standard.

I also greatly want to thank Mr Rahat of Papyrus who has done the cover.

At last, every section of ULAB and every person who had helped me this way or that way for bringing the journal to its publication mode deserves my whole-hearted thanks.

The science of bibliography says that the ideal text never exists. Therefore, it's possibly impossible to avoid typos, syntactical infelicities, and perceptual lapses in publishing an academic journal, and I'm sure that there might be many a fault like this to annoy a sensitive reader. My only pleading to that reader when such an occurrence catches his/her eyesight is to consider that it was either unintentional or, as Samuel Johnson once said when a friend pointed out a mistake in his writing, that it was due to pure ignorance. I would like to earnestly invite all readers and well wishers to forward suggestions of improvement so that our next issue will become reasonably closer to the ideal text.

Let me finish this introduction with the Shakespearean adage that all is well that ends well.

Mohit Ul Alam, PhD

Editor, *Crossings: ULAB Journal of English Studies*

Professor and Head

Department of English and Humanities (DEH)