



three poems by Nuzhat Amin Mannan

A Love Song

Will you wait for me?
before the afternoons crush
and the evenings make a mistake
before the shadows curl like a
cruel grin and the windows become shut
against a short smileless date?

I can't go out into the streets
now, or cross the broken lives and the
unmeasured lines of creased lanes,
I follow the cat that slides away
in the roasted luminosity
of street lights, a grimy home here and there
a grimy towel here and there — a bit awry,
a clutch of flowers, a sprig of green,
thrown in, lets say, for the sake of frivolity.

I tiptoed, a long trip as far as
one can go from an apartment balcony
into an untroubled sky—
I hear every day the twitter of men and women
as they plant a kiss or change a bulb
or plant a bulb or exchange a kiss.
Chronic spring, chrome pleasures, unaltered scenes
I can't go out into the streets
you know again.

I parceled between my fingers
the quietly soaking, the gently boating newspaper—
here its insides are scrawled
with black fringes like endless eyelashes,
too false, so tearful, so treasured with hollow, shallow
seduction!

I can't holler anymore you know
my lungs are in a leash
I have twisted my sprained palms
into a knot. I've calmly read my
palms, lines and lanes lost to me,
looking like streets that I can't walk
you know, again.

I've grown accustomed to these single
afternoons spread like cheddar
across my being. Little crumbs
of me freckle the seat I sit on,
I slurp on my tea timidly
anxious my afternoons are not,
that really, done.



I am not Prufrock. I wasn't ever
to be Ophelia either
I know I won't linger forever. I know
I can't bear to drown by myself alone.

As time slips through as under
a buzzing office shredder,
I fly home to ask you
will you wait for me, love?



Photo Session: After Chemo

Sorrow skin punished eyes
protest from sockets
lined with shadows
of you and your uncomfortable bones
of your and your uncomfortable bald
of you and your uncomfortable breast

You look
emaciated. No, patient. You look real patient
those searching, counting eyes
take the breath away
Unreliable breath. Always unreliable.
Your head is thrown back in the frame
loudly, proudly, unbelongingly
something made the twitch
across the lower cheek side, otherwise
death doesn't seem to have crossed your mind.
You are so thin, I can see your soul
like that souvenir from a friend
from a holocaust museum store
which sits on my window
its a tiny glass, clear as ice
in which a tiny white candle sits soulfully
unabashedly intact inside.

You sit there reclining and resisting—
like a glass spilling shadows
flustered by the shock of white light and barbed wire



flustered by the shock of white light and barbed wire
waiting nailed for the picture to be taken.

Chemoed, you're stuck in nowhere
photographed — you're morphed — but
unlike life or life-after-chemo or glass
you've made it — there —
into something that lasts just a bit longer.



Stopping by the Dissection Room

I sleep on a high table
My strength is all gone
Or else maybe I could have
asked something about
where I am and why?
I started from home
and ended on this high table.
I hear voices droning about my insides,
Dark as asphalt
I am likely to become nibbles for the fish
I feel like a sculptor's model —
with absorbed gazes on me all around
Not shy, not inviting —
They don't mean to intrude
or bother me as I feel human
painlessly.
No name. No clothes. No defences.
Male, corpse, model, pile of flesh
It's a matter of opinion
or maybe just a very bad joke.

obituary

Fall of A Giant

by A Z M Haider

ALL deaths are painful because they mark the termination of mortal existence. But a death is not an end of life as it is commonly understood. It is only an end of a phase of life which is eternal and everlasting. When a man dies, he ceases to exist in this mortal world of ours and passes into eternity. Nonetheless, death is poignant because it take one away from us.

Professor Syed Ali Ashraf, a profound scholar on English and literature and a noted thinker on modern Islamic education has shuffled off his mortal coil on the 6th of this month and passed into eternity. The news of his sad and sudden demise was received in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country by his professional colleagues, comrades, close kins, friends, students, admirers with deep shock and surprise. The icy hand of death took him away when he was at the height of his intellectual ability and could contribute more to the pool of knowledge. He was only 74 when he breathed his last in deep sleep at his Cambridge University apartment. His beloved wife who is in a state of coma at a clinic in Dhaka does not know that her husband is no more. Man is mortal.

Well-versed in English literature, Professor Ali Ashraf thought modern English education should be synchronized with Islamic ideology. Darul Ihsan, set up by Professor Ali Ashraf, sought to bring about a revolutionary change in the mode of teaching and tried to set a standard equal to that of Al-Azhar university.

Every one has to round off his mileage and reach his journeys end. But it would have been better if a man of his standing and stature, erudition and intellectual attainment had lived 10 years more.

Born in an illustrious Muslim family of Bangladesh, he had his education at Dhaka and Cambridge. He obtained his honours and master degree in English literature from Dhaka University in 1945 and 1946 respectively with first classes at both the examinations. In the forties when communal feeling was at its height and Dhaka University used to be dominated by Hindu teachers, it was inordinately difficult for a Muslim student to score first class and that too in a subject like English. Later in early fifties Professor Ali Ashraf obtained tripos degree from Cambridge University. He obtained PhD degree on "English poetry and audience" in mid sixties from the same university.

He taught English literature at Rajshahi, Dhaka, Karachi, Riyadh and Cambridge universities.

He has innumerable students at home and abroad to remember him for his outstanding teaching capability, profound wisdom and range of study. He has set up a few years before his death a university at Savar popularly known as Darul Ihsan. He has set up this institution at purely his own initiative to synthesise Islamic studies with modern scientific education. Set up on his own land stretching over 30 bighas, this university is designed to contribute to the enrichment of mind, edification of soul and to impart modern scientific and technological education.

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change in the mode of teaching and tried to set a standard equal to that of Al-Azhar university.

Darul Ihsan is now running courses on BBA, MBA, BA Honours in English. It is also running MA course in Islamic studies and a professor from Al-Azhar university is heading this department. Darul Ihsan is also running a Dental College the principal of which is an FRCS. He has donated about 12 crore taka in cash and kind to the setting up of and running this university, the treasurer of this university Shahabuddin Mehtab confided this to this columnist. If he had lived little longer, Darul Ihsan would have grown into a big centre of learning. The responsibility of running this university has fallen on the shoulder of his elder brother Professor Ali Ahsan.

There is hardly anyone like him in this country who has committed his whole life to the spread of education and

Islamic teaching. We often hear of Haji Mohammed Mohsin who gave everything he inherited for the spread of education and welfare of man. Professor Ali Ashraf did not inherit anything from any source. He gave away everything he earned for the welfare of man. A great humanist, he dedicated his whole life to the welfare of man.

Back home from Cambridge after obtaining tripos degree in English, he went to Rajshahi to head the Department of English, Rajshahi University. Dressed in half-sleeve printed bush shirt, trouser and Oxford boot he would be seen quite often riding on rickshaw and walking along Shahib Bazar Road during his stay at Rajshahi. His long flowing beard and Jannah cap were in queer juxtaposition with his informal English wears. He used to be seen saying prayer in Shahib Bazar Mosque. Coming out, he used to be seen talking to students, friends, and acquaintances in

English with flawless Cambridge accent. He was fond of Milton and Tennyson. But he was not averse to John Donne and Browning.

This antipodal aspect of his character and personality perceptibly gave way to a harmony in twilight years of his life. Wearing Sherwani, Pajama and white cap on head he was teaching Shakespeare, Shelley, Yeats and TS Eliot etc at Cambridge. His long flowing white beard, which looked like that of George Bernard Shaw, lent dignity and grace to his personality. The mental metamorphosis he underwent during his years between Riyadh and Cambridge only reflected the fact that he was at peace with himself and with everything around him. That mental peace found adequate reflection in Darul Ihsan which he set up with everything he earned during his chequered scholarly life. A noble soul, Professor Ali Ashraf turned into a savant who dedicated his everything to the establishment of this university. In other words, he committed himself to the dissemination of knowledge for the enlightenment of human soul. Let me conclude my obituary reference to Professor Ali Ashraf with a prayer for divine benediction on the departed soul.

profile

Kingsley Amis: A Very Prominent English Writer of Postwar Period

by A S M Nurunnabi

RECIPIENT of prestigious Booker prize and the Maugham award, Amis is considered as one of the most prominent English writers of postwar period. He has so far to his credit 18 works of fiction. In 1954 when 'Lucky Jim' was published, it brought him immediate acclaim and thereafter his success story continued.

For a wide and loyal readership, Amis is the preeminent comic English novelist of today. The group of his accessible and readable novels, which are recognisably and traditionally skilled in characterisation, plotting, and nar-

rative, and which convey a wryly accurate view of contemporary life, are quite notable. But his very reputation as a novelist for comedy, combined with his almost vaunted traditionalism of form and his consistently explicit disdain for experiment and all things modernist, hampered or delayed serious appreciation of his work. This delayed appreciation of his work may be due to the reason that Amis is often seen only as an alert social observer who sometimes exercised his talents for mimicry and parody in brilliant efforts at various kinds of fiction. As a result, his skilled linguistic craftsmanship and non-experimental verbal artistry of a high order were never properly appreciated.

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Another factor also worked against willing and general critical approval of Amis's work. According to some literary critics, perhaps no contemporary British novelist had been so regularly taken as making his fiction of a piece with his life as Amis. Whether as an "angry Young man" or as a mid-career critic of the youthful and the contemporary, Amis had been taken throughout his career as a writer whose novels ex-

press, without qualification or other allowance, the exact views of the real-world personality who wrote them. Amis was, therefore, seen as a writer of fiction with social messages rather than of straight-forward contemporary comedies.

The artistic case that demands to be made for Amis's fiction — apart from his grand standing as a comic writer — is one firmly based in language, and in

his skilled and enviable awareness of the resources made available to the novelist by natural language in its most ordinary usages. This linguistic awareness, without being fully explicit in a technical obtrusive way, was central to Amis's sense of what concerned him as a writer.

The significance of the formal and linguistic character of Amis's work could be seen as increasing as his career developed. While technical adroitness, distinctive language, and representational comedy were there from the start in 'Lucky Jim', and markedly more prominent in 'That Uncertain Feeling' and 'I Like it here', it was in the middle period of Amis's career, from the late

1960s to the early 1970s that his most technically works first appeared, in particular 'The Green Man', 'Girl 20' and 'Ending Up'. And after that, in the late 1970s and 1980s, what some people saw as the late renaissance of Amis's career was marked by the appearance of at least three constructional masterpieces: 'Jake's Thing', 'Stanley and the Women', and 'The Old Devils'.

Amis's success as novelist also turned him towards poetry. His poetry has been considered fine and accomplished. It had varying affinities with Houseman, Auden, Graves and Betje-man and draws easily on a keenly personal awareness of the popular English verse tradition.