

A landscape in its beauty

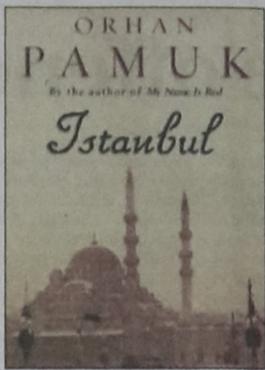
Nazma Yeasmeen Haque is all praise for a tale around a city

A huge rolled-in canvas remains suspended for how long only time can tell. But once it starts rolling out, one is face to face with a wondrous panoramic view of a great city that used to be called Constantinople, after the name of the founder of the city, the Roman Emperor Constantine, who made it his new capital that also was known as new Rome. The city later came to be known as Istanbul. That constitutes not only the background but also the prime subject of the Nobel Prize winning author Orhan Pamuk, who creates an enchanting tale on it as a memoir, judged rather unconventionally as a travelogue. While reading *Istanbul*, one wonders if one is going through the expressions in words or witnessing a vastly laid out ornamental piece of painting done most intricately. Pamuk is a painter too, a field in which he excelled in his school days that turned out to be one of his greatest joys and also a kind of escapism when in doubt and also in trouble. He remembers his encounters with his mother, whom he recalls throughout the book and who discouraged him from taking up painting as a profession because of it obviously not being a life economically reassuring and also because an artist had much less social acceptability in terms of prestige.

And how true this is, something Pamuk experiences. He rather has a rude awakening of it when his first love, with whom he was most intimate and on whom he has devoted a whole chapter, is sent away to attend school in Switzerland when

her family becomes apprehensive of his fascination for and involvement in painting. At one stage earlier in his youth, he recalls, he thought if he ever married her, he would have to become a factory owner, not an artist. Harsh realities thus stared him in the face not only for the first time but also in quick succession. He observes the dwindling business of his father, dissipating wealth that his father and uncles inherited from his grandfather, disappearance of his father from the family on this or that pretext and many others. Although he was made aware of the escapades of his father, and although he shuddered at those, even then he ascribes a distinctive meaning to his father's being elsewhere with another woman that is something like his searching for his "double, his twin..." in another place and to be with him rather than with his lover. A strange psychology worked out by introspection thus is interpreted and shields not only his father but also himself, at least in his imagination. With this emotion nestled in his heart for his father despite all his slips, it is not hard to understand his dedication of *Istanbul* to his father, Gunduz Pamuk.

As many as thirty-seven chapters, all of varying lengths, are replete with stories centering on almost every aspect of life that taken together constitute the broad spectrum that is Istanbul --- the author's city of love, joy and melancholy. In fact, the theme of melancholy or Huzun occupies a central position in this book that is perceptible in one's personal life, family settings,



Istanbul
Memories and the City
Orhan Pamuk
VINTAGE

in collective feelings, in the history of Istanbul as one observes the fall of the Ottoman empire in its ruins of palaces, gardens and mansions, revealing the secrets of the city "beneath its grand history", that is, "its living poverty". Pamuk like his predecessors, the memoirist Hisar, the poet Yahya Kemal, novelist Tanpinar and the journalist-historian Resat Ekrem Kocu has a penchant for melancholy and, strangely enough, like theirs, he keeps it living to nourish his heart, mind and soul as if he draws succor from it, however painful that may be. Under certain circumstances, pain can become a powerful stimulus for creation and, con-

versely, it can ruin one completely, however creative one may be, depending on the sensitiveness of the mind working at it.

Exactly this pathetic condition has been narrated by Pamuk as he dwells on the writings, publications and their reachability to readers and on top of all these the personal lives of these four melancholic writers whom he holds in high esteem. The narrative breaks a reader's heart as well. His memories against this backdrop of this city of Istanbul thus comprise his space in living his life. He eulogizes melancholy by quoting Ahmet Rasim, a well-known journalist of Istanbul, who said, "The beauty of a landscape resides in its melancholy." In saying so, Ahmet Rasim, who subsequently turned out to be one of Istanbul's great writers, did not tow in those writers mentioned here who kept themselves engulfed with the spirit of melancholy for a "lost golden age". Rather he kept himself confined to the present with "his love of life, his wit, and the joy he took in his craft..." At this stage Pamuk makes us familiar with other city columnists who follow suit and bring rays of optimism in life. In the same vein, he presents us with a good stock of laughter by collating "some of the most amusing pieces of advice, warnings, pearls of wisdom, and invective" that he has culled from newspaper columnists' writings over the past 130 years. A great job that mitigates the felt melancholy of a reader as one empathizes with them.

The beauty of this book lies in the fact that, however small, medium or

big the chapters are, the substantiveness of the contents tinged with emotions has given it a most animated literary style. The appeal of this non-fiction compared to a story that is contrived as good quality fiction is overwhelming. The masterly touch of Pamuk's quill associated with a pair of sensitive eyes for fine details where a reader does not fall to see the wood for the trees, an amazing memory and frankness in recapitulating things and events drawn from the long-ago past, recent past and from immediate surroundings --- all fill in the mosaic patterns constructing Pamuk's exotic Istanbul. Thus one feels that his city, which is his life, is not only woven in words but also adorned by lines, strokes and colours. A kaleidoscopic view is in full glow. Notwithstanding the odds and woes, irregularity and absurdities that are observable within the scenario of Istanbul, it remains not only his true love but also a secret love that he nurtures in his heart of hearts.

Relinquishing his desire to be a painter by profession, leaving his study of architecture, Pamuk ultimately decides to "capture the chemistry" of the Istanbul on paper and says, "I don't want to be an artist. I am going to be a writer." It is a blessing for readers. Maureen Freely's translation from the Turkish is remarkable as one feels one is reading Istanbul in its original language.

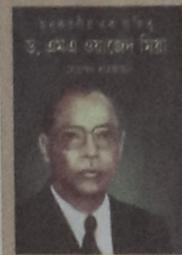
Dr. Nazma Yeasmeen Haque, a critic and hazy book reviewer, is Principal, Radiant International School.

AT A GLANCE

Homes of Bangladesh
Nazneen Haque Mimi
Journeyman



Here is a book with a difference. Not much has been written on homes or interior décor in Bangladesh, though it has to be said there has been a good rise in interest in the subject. That is what Nazneen Haque Mimi puts across, in so many words, in this work. More importantly, she gives us all an idea of the modernity which has come into our homes.



Onukoroniyi Ek Bektityo
Dr. M.A. Wazed Mia
Mohammad Shahjahan
Bangla Prakashani

There is little question that M.A. Wazed Mia was a man respected across the spectrum. Here, in this commemorative volume, Mohammad Shahjahan demonstrates the degree of devotion and honour the late scientist inspired as he interacted with people. His was a life lived intensely privately. And there was humility in him. Read the essays here.

Jamini
An International Arts Quarterly
September 2009
ICE Media Limited



Jamini has acquired a reputation for itself. In this particular issue, it draws attention to the history of cinema, especially in our part of the world. More precisely, it reminds readers of the stories which have gone into the making of movies in Bangladesh, both before liberation and after it. For a movie buff, it is like going back to old times.



The Horse and His Boy
C.S. Lewis
Harper Trophy

Interested in going back to those boyhood days? Here is C.S. Lewis again, with that old Narnia series, with the old tale of the horse and the boy. There is always a difference between reading a story first in adolescence and then in adulthood. But you cannot say that the pleasure is any different. Read this work again to find out.

The world through a quarter century

Shahid Alam has reason to reflect on some essays

25 Years of BIIS: An Anthology is a salutation to the first quarter of a century of the institution's existence. Out of some five hundred articles that have been published over the years since 1980 (BIIS was formed in 1978) in various issues of *BIIS Journal*, just thirteen were selected for inclusion in the book under review. In justifying their choice, the editors reveal the basis on which it was done: consideration of important themes like national security of Bangladesh, security and regional cooperation in South Asia, regional and international strategic environment in the post-Cold War era, and Indo-Bangladesh relations.

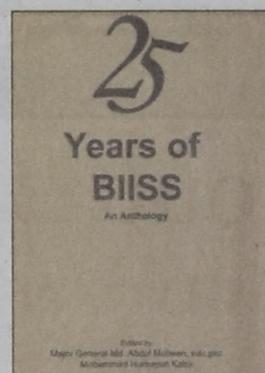
The selected pieces are fairly well spread out across the years, with one from 1986, seven from 1990 to 1994, and the remaining five from 1999 to 2001. Their quality is distinctly uneven, a little too glaring even in view of the generally expected asymmetry in an anthology, with Md. Nuruzzaman's "National Security of Bangladesh: Challenges and Options" (No.1), Abdur Rob Khan's "Interfacing Traditional and Non-Traditional Security in South Asia" (No.6), A.K.H. Morshed's "Cooperation in the Maritime Zones Among and Between the SAARC Countries" (No.9), Shireen M. Mazari's "South Asia: The Security Route to Cooperation" (No.10), and Mahendra P. Lama's "SAARC: Shallow Regionalism, Political Abstention and Economic Advocacy" (No.11) generally standing out from the rest. Not surprisingly, given the weakness in the military strength (both in personnel and sophisticated weaponry) of most of the South Asian countries relative to the major global and regional powers, including India and Pakistan, most of the authors opt on concentrating on security issues that

could be subsumed under the rubric of "low politics". Nuruzzaman lays down the framework in this regard: "The new emphasis on security through development highlights the actual security needs in the developing countries."

He, along with other authors like M. Abdul Hafiz in "New Challenges to Security Studies" (No.2), cites former World Bank president Robert McNamara in espousing the cause of security through development: "Security is development, and without development there can be no security." How ironic! After all, as defense secretary in President John F. Kennedy's cabinet, he was the architect in leading the US into the disastrous Vietnam War. Then he was an exponent of high politics, which, among other options, looks at security from a military standpoint. In Nuruzzaman's words, this approach is "based on the assumption that the principal threat to security comes from other nations. The Western literature on national security is basically dominated by this assumption." So, McNamara had a change of heart, but, for all their concerns about non-traditional security, the Western nations remain firmly rooted in the primacy of military security. The author gives a realistic assessment of Bangladesh's geo-strategic significance, and, as a logical corollary, why it should concentrate heavily on security in terms of low politics: "...except her 'nuisance value' to India, Bangladesh is strategically almost a non-influential actor both in regional and extra-regional politics."

The areas of security that Bangladesh (and other South Asian nations) should be emphasizing on, as several authors espouse, should include strengthening political institutions and making them function efficiently, economic

development, reduction of social inequalities between the rich and the poor, threat to the environment, inflow of drugs and small arms, human security issues, insurgency problems, piracy, and other such matters. Shireen Mazari, clearly arguing from a platform of high politics, focuses on the traditional security dimension in her paper. She is also very realistic in her arguments. She provides a partial, but



25 Years of BIIS: An Anthology
Major General Md. Abdul Mubeen and
Mohammad Humayun Kabir, eds.
Academic Press and Publishers
Limited, BIIS

most appropriate, answer to a question not posed to her regarding the distinctly insipid performance of SAARC in bringing about regional cooperation. Mahendra P. Lama, upset and frustrated at its below-par achievement, frames this rhetorical question about the organization in 2000: "How can this shallow regionalism of 15 years be made more robust and resilient in terms of

functions, outreach and acceptability? Does it imply and involve a paradigm shift in the mindset of India as a pivotal partner and in other six members to shed their small nation syndrome and misplaced apprehension of homogenization?"

Writing six years earlier, Mazari had come up with the explanation that should come as no surprise to anyone conversant with political realism and the history of South Asia: "...successful regional cooperation cannot take place unless there is an underlying politico-strategic commonality of interests." Specifically, "The member states of SAARC have primarily inward-oriented regional threat perceptions --- with India being the exception in that it sees its threat perception in terms of China as well. Rooted primarily in the historical legacy of the colonial and post-colonial era, and based upon territorial and ethnic disputes... (the Pakistan-India conflictual relationship... serves as an interesting case study in order to understand the continuing disunity of this region --- especially since this relationship is, in a number of ways, one of the root causes of this disunity, despite global and regional structural changes over the decades." How true!

The first great analyst of the Westphalian system, Leo Gross, had once perspicaciously remarked: "If states do not act together they will increasingly act unilaterally" (A *Collection of The Wit and Wisdom of Leo Gross*, N.C. Livingstone and Farrokh P. Jhabvala, eds., 1976). And, so, unless the key political issues between India and Pakistan are satisfactorily resolved, SAARC might well remain a forum for blowing a lot of hot air, or, in Lama's words, "an exclusive club of political leaders and bureaucrats..." Lama points out an inherent problem that undermines the organization from

becoming potent: "Ironically, though Article X (General Provisions) mentions that "bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberations", it has been the political issues which have never allowed SAARC to take off... More than that, it has been primarily India-Pakistan bilateral issues which have always taken the driving seat pushing the remaining five member states to the back-stage." High politics, after all, casts its long shadow over a region where security issues of low politics should be preponderant! Except that "should" necessarily has to take a back seat in the face of the reality of power politics played by the two major players in the region, more often than not with the other countries in tow.

Abdur Rob Khan tries to "develop an interface between traditional and non-traditional security concerns in the context of South Asia", but succeeds more in satisfactorily conceptualizing non-traditional security: territorial threats (mostly in the sense of sovereign incursions by population groups, resource extractions, fishing, diversion of waters), economic threats (demographic issues, intellectual property rights, marginalization of the geographically disadvantaged countries, financial criminals), political threats (corruption, agitation and street violence, illegal narcotics and small arms), and environmental threats (global warming, trans-boundary pollution, depleted natural resources). Surely, notwithstanding the perceived and real need for traditional security, these non-traditional security issues merit high priority for the individual countries of the region, irrespective of the status of SAARC.

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Zimbabwe's unravelling

Charles R. Larson spots colour buried in a story

IRENE Sabatini's deceptive narration in this haunting novel lures the reader in slowly, slowly coiling like a snake about to spring. By the time you realize that she's mesmerized you, it's too late. You're hooked on Sabatini's superb narrative skills and there's nothing to do but read faster and faster. The Boy Next Door is unlike any other novel that I have read about Southern Africa, let alone Zimbabwe the story's setting.

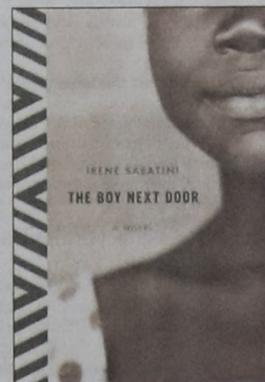
Part of the compelling narrative is Sabatini's decision to make no concessions to her readers. Her language is vibrant and colorful. Her characters speak a pastiche of Shona, British English, Zimbabwean street slang, Afrikaans all garbled together into sentences that initially seem troubling only because the so-called "foreign" words are not parenthetically explained. No problem, as the story moves on, her characters' lingo reveals itself by context. To a certain extent, Sabatini employs the same magical process in her plotting. Important details are withheld only to jolt the reader many chapters later when the real "truth" of her story can finally be pieced together. The Boy Next Door is an intellectual puzzle disguised as a detective story.

When everything is finally revealed, it's impossible not to be impressed by Sabatini's flawless first novel. Maybe she writes many more.

The cryptic beginning starts with a jolt: the murder of a white woman, set on fire in the house next to the story's main character, Lindiwe Bishop. Nothing is clear, but seventeen-year-old Ian McKenzie is accused of killing his step-mother. Soon he's in prison, and Lindiwe attempts to figure everything out. Lindiwe has a white father and an African mother. Such marriages were previously forbidden in the former Rhodesia (the setting is mostly in Bulawayo), but these are the heady years immediately after the country's 1980 independence, and many people are hopeful that the racist environment similar to apartheid will quickly fade away.

When Ian is suddenly released from prison a year or more later, Lindiwe who is slightly younger discovers that she is drawn to him, largely because of the mystery surrounding the details of the death next door. Her parents tell her never to have anything to do with Ian, almost a guarantee that the forbidden will become her obsession.

Running parallel to Lindiwe's story are the implications that



The Boy Next Door
Irene Sabatini
Little, Brown

Zimbabwe is truly Africa's success story: "a stable, economically sound democracy ruled by an intelligent Western-educated, soft-spoken liberator," Robert Mugabe. But then things begin to crumble not only in the country but also in Lindiwe's own family. Her father gets Rosanna pregnant. She's of mixed race and

hardly older than Lindiwe. Suddenly, then, Lindiwe has a much younger half sister, and her mother begins to withdraw into herself.

Color is buried throughout much of the novel. When Lindiwe eventually gets involved with Ian, much of the attraction is that he doesn't act like a Rhodesia, a white Rhodesia, but more like a black person. He's not very refined, directionless, not much concerned with what in the past (because of his white parents) would have been a given: education. Then Ian suddenly decides to go to South Africa, where he has relatives largely because of increasing skirmishes between Zimbabwe's two major ethnic groups (Shona and Ndebele) continuing their rivalry after independence. The decade was a bloody time for the country, though the West largely looked away because of the country's economic prospects.

After the lengthy opening section set in the 1980s, it's the decade that follows when Lindiwe's country and family face steady deterioration. It's almost a hundred and fifty pages before Mugabe is first mentioned and then with a fairly innocuous remark made by a minor character: "Mugabe is made at hell at Mandela for stealing the limelight, for getting

himself released."

Then, a hundred pages later, there's a comment about Mugabe's new wife: "Our new First Lady, First Shopper, the indomitable Grace Mugabe, swathed in designer chiffons and silk, the white queen, the Air Zimbabwe fleet ever happy to whisk and carry her off for fittings and excursions..."

The economy will shortly collapse; as Mugabe's government grabs the lands of the white farmers, the great unraveling begins.

There are so many surprising but believable twists of the story that would be unfair to reveal except that Ian returns to Bulawayo, much more self-controlled and motivated than earlier, and Lindiwe is attracted to him just as she was earlier when it was Ian who put the damper on their relationship. Then, Zimbabwe's decline and the two main characters impinge upon one another directly as past and present, country and nation, race and family bring this almost perfect novel to a startling and memorable conclusion.

Three cheers for Irene Sabatini.

Charles R. Larson is Professor of Literature at American University in Washington, DC.

REREADINGS

Hearts breaking

Israt Sauda goes for the meaning of love

RARE are masters in the literary world who can, with their pen and sleight of hand, paint the vignettes of life and make their readers commiserate with their characters. Rarer are those worked by such rare masters, which can give a vicarious feel of every single emotion ever defined and experienced by them. Erich Segal and his *Love Story* unequivocally qualify for such rare distinctions.

"What can you say about a twenty-five year old girl who died? That she was beautiful and brilliant. That she loved Mozart and Bach. The Beatles. And me."

These heart-rending lines open the bittersweet romantic tragedy in *Love Story*. One of the best selling novels of the 20th century, *Love Story* sold in excess of nine million copies and was translated into 20 languages. The movie based on this novel was also a box office phenomenon in 1971.

There are a few things common to fiction and incidents of life: they take unexpected turns and the climax never unwinds till you get there.

The author gives the gist of the tale in the first few lines, there are no unexpected turns, no surprises and yet, thanks to the author, this book filled with the litany of woes of the protagonist, turns out to be a bestseller; a best seller read at least half a dozen times even by non-bibliophiles. Yes, but if you have not experienced the class of Segal, it would come as a pleasant surprise as you read through.

It is the story of Oliver Barrett IV, a wealthy Harvard student and an avid ice hockey player who falls in love with Jennifer Cavilleri, the daughter of a pastry chef. Much to the horror of his aristocratic family and very much against the wishes of his snobbish father, Oliver marries the quickwitted Radcliffe girl. The two have nothing in common but their love for each other. He is cut off from the family wealth and she refuses a scholarship to study music in Paris. But they are happy and content and very much in love.

For three years, the newly married couple face financial trouble and have to work hard to make ends meet. Jennifer tries her best to make Oliver reconcile with his parents but Oliver remains stubborn and rebellious. His refusal to bend and realize his father's pain makes Jenny sad and angry but Oliver cannot bring himself to seek forgiveness or blessings from his father.

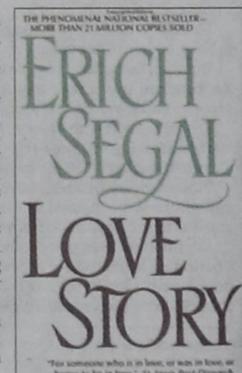
After graduation, Oliver finds a job with a respectable law firm. Things begin to improve but then tragedy strikes. Jennifer is diagnosed with a fatal disease. Oliver is forced to seek his father's help in meeting the medical bills but he does not disclose the reasons for the loan. Jennifer meanwhile tells her husband not to blame himself for the opportunities she lost. They embrace tightly before she dies in his arms.

The novel, on another stratum, explores the relationships between fathers and their offspring. Jenny adores her father Phil and he too worships the ground she walks on. They are close and support each other through good times and bad. In contrast, Oliver always tries to break away from "Barrett Traditions" but on a subconscious level he craves warmth and understanding from his father. When Mr. Barrett comes to know about Jenny's illness, he rushes to be with his son in New York. He is too late to make peace with Jenny. Oliver breaks down in his arms and thus a new relationship starts between Oliver and Mr. Barrett. Although the tale ends on a tragic note, it leaves a strong message to the readers, "Love means never having to say you are sorry."

This book is highly recommended to all romance readers out there. If you are a diehard romance fan and love to read about love, the gushes and the sadness and happiness of it all, read this book. It is too fascinating to put down once you have set your mind on reading it.

You will tend to compare this novel to the story of Romeo and Juliet. I sometimes wonder why those who love aren't allowed to exist. That is really something to think about. One is uncomfortable with unrequited love, and to read this book, about love being disallowed, is like a lump in one's throat. But love is something like life, which you have to go through even though you might be really unhappy and all.

Israt Sauda will be going abroad for higher studies.



Love Story
Erich Segal
Harper and Row