

# THE AIM OF YOUTH

POET KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM

TRANSLATED FROM THE BENGALI: PROFESSOR NASHID KAMAL

My dear younger brothers!  
I do not know what prompted you to choose me, a most humble person, to be the chairman of your meeting? During the duress of the nation, I have had no courage or qualification to lead the youth, who are the life and strength of the nation. I am not a leader, I only serve the nation. Although, I would say that my love for the country is not an iota less than those of the patriots. If insults and sacrifices are the yardsticks of patriotism, I should be considered a pigmy in comparison to them. However, I have also sacrificed in my own way, and if I haven't been of any good, at least I have not nurtured harmful thoughts, nor have I been a thorn to obstruct those who work for the

habit of singing. I sing in spite of anyone's like or dislike. When the black drongo comes after the singing bird, pursues it with its long, sharp, beak then he shifts from one branch to another, but does not stop singing. His happiness is in singing, sadness is in singing too. He sings according to his own wish, it is just coincidental if his song awakens someone from his languorous sleep. I have not finished walking the path of youth, so the song that I sing pertains to youth. In the hay time of youth, if my songs have brought the tide, then it has happened by chance. The moon is capable of bringing new waves in the sea, but perhaps it is not aware of its own power.

I am not a speaker at all, in fact I am in league with those who speak less. Like Bakhtiar Khilji, those who rank first in speeches, I don't know how they are able to bring their soldiers into their sentences in such a short time. Like Lalkman Sen, we are overwhelmed by those speeches. Their messages come across like the incessant rain, for the poets, their messages are feeble and they appear like weak, slim waterfalls. He is more bent on making rhymes and attributing tunes to the words. I am surely way behind those, whose words travel fast like Padma or Bhagirothi river.

My only strength is my tremendous love for the youth. From the day that I have learnt singing, I have respected youth and its zest. In my songs and poems I have tried my best to speak about its victory, sing its praises.

Like the first human being who spotted the early sun in its full radiant glory and offered his respects, in the same way I offer my deepest respect to the youth, I have sung their praises. Youth has the same ability as the sun, it clears the darkness of the night and becomes the God of light. He emerges playing the games of colour and departs through spreading a variety of colours. Where the sun (of youth) sets, that is the exact premises where the dark hair of the night is spread.

If, on account of being a fan of youth, you have chosen me as the central flower of your garland, then I shall lodge no complaint. I accept it in all graciousness. Not as a leader, but I am happy to be in your group and participate as a team mate. In our team, there is no team leader, we are all branching out in hundred directions and hundreds of youth today blossom as thousands of flowers. We all wish to have the same vision and mission in mind as we blossom.

Today, after coming to Serajganj, I miss the presence of a very humane leader, the pioneer of young Muslims of Bengal, the one who hoists the flag of youth, Moulana Ismail Hossain Seraji. The lamp of Seraj of Bengal has died down with the Seraji from Serajganj. We shall never listen to those words again, the fiery words that had created great



impact on the clouded sky of the Bengalis and had enabled them to be stirred in great madness. The bird of heaven has flown back to its nest in heaven. I am not only speaking about the colossal loss of this nation, I am also speaking about my personal loss. When I first entered the garden of literature, I was very cautious and guarded in each step—just a black drongo, (afraid of all eagle birds) and fearful of even speaking in full ardour, was sometimes stung by peaked beaks, when I suddenly received a money order with taka ten in it! The coupon read thus, 'I have read your works and being pleased, I send you this money, if I had ten thousand, I would send you so, please do not return the money'. My eyes became wet as I repeatedly read these loving lines. I touched my forehead with the ten taka note. I had still not met him, only had read his writings with rapt attention, reading, memorising and paying respect to this great soul—Ismail Hossain Seraji. That day I was able to see a jovial picture of this poet in my mind, I gave flowers to this portrait, both at his feet and in his neck. Later, in Faridpur Provincial Conference, I was able to meet him personally. I touched his feet

and felt blessed. He pulled me to his bosom and personally offered me some sweets. It was like a father finding his long lost son in his arms. After arriving in Serajganj, I am repeatedly reminded of this poetic and patriotic great man. It seems like coming to perform Hajj without making a visit to the Kaa'ba. I think his soul is somewhere around this area, giving us inspiration as the youth have assembled in the Arafat Maidan of youth today. My heart is filled with respect and honour for this person and I seek blessings from him.

My entire being is humbled by the respect and ovation you have showered on me. The pitcher of my heart has been filled to the brim with the water of love. The fulfilled pitcher is unable to deliver any expression of respect or thankfulness. Please accept the unexpressed respect and love from the fulfilled and sated heart of mine. I do not wish to shower anyone with hailstones of advises. I will only speak on what is absolutely necessary and I shall be short.

Firstly, I wish to say that this Muslim Youth Conference will have no significance if we are not able to fully armor ourselves and wage a fight

against the old and decaying. With the world 'old' I mean those values which adhere to lies and death. Old people are those who are not only a burden on the soft-hearted, glittering journey of the new human beings, but they are also deterrents. Those who do not know how to march past with the rhythm of the century, they are living beings but actually dead. They are clinging to the old values piled up like mountains. Old are those who have noted the advent of the new sun but are afraid to open doors in fear of disturbing their sleep. Those who are irritated by the din, created by happy, playful children, those who are deeply submerged in the volumes of old testaments, those who have turned into skeletons due to the weight of their knowledge, they are the old ones. Their religion is 'old age'. Old is not always defined by the age of the person. I have met many young men, who have the skeletons of the old covered by the garb of youth. On the other hand, I have met many elderly people who are weighed down by age but beneath the cloud there lies the glorious sun of youth. The crown of youth glorifies only those whose strength is unending, speed is like the tornado, his aptitude is like the raging storm of the monsoon afternoon, whose hopes are enormous, whose lust for life is tireless, whose generosity is exemplary, whose fire of life is limitless, whose thirst for knowledge is deep, and for whom death is contained in his fist. I have seen 'youth' among the Bedouins of Arab, among the soldiers waging war, in the weapons of Kalapahar and the strength of Kamal, Karim, Zaglul, Sanayyat and Lenin. I have seen 'youth' in the form of 'pilots' who are seeking the wonders of infinity in the sky and losing their lives in that pursuit; among those who travel the world with the aim of discovery and never return; those who aim to climb to the top of the white peak of the Himalayan range and are embedded in snow; those who dive deep into the blue of the endless Atlantic and accept death; those who are determined to travel to the Mars and the moon and lose their way; those who want to go forward with the highest velocity; those who want to discover new planets and are not afraid to give up their lives, I have observed 'youth' amongst these forerunners. I have watched the motherly instinct in the 'youth' when he bears the coffin to the burial premises; when he distributes food in the graveyard for the hungry people struck by flood and famine; when he sits next to an ailing, forlorn friend and looks after him; when he turns himself into a beggar and sings in the streets to raise funds for the stricken; when he stands next to the weak, providing him with strength and hope.

(To be concluded in the next issue)



country. I did have the honour of being marked on my forehead with national insults, which too has been erased over time. I have no right to be proud of those past experiences.

I have no hesitation in saying, that today I am in league with those who are not workers, they are meditators. Those who improve the lives of others with their work and services, they are simply great, but those who inspire the greats, they are also great or at least they are not any less. They work behind the force, they provide the same that water and soil provide for the flower. I am a poet, like the bird in the forest I have a

## A TRUE MAN OF LETTERS: BERNARD BERGONZI (1929-2016)

KAISER HAQ

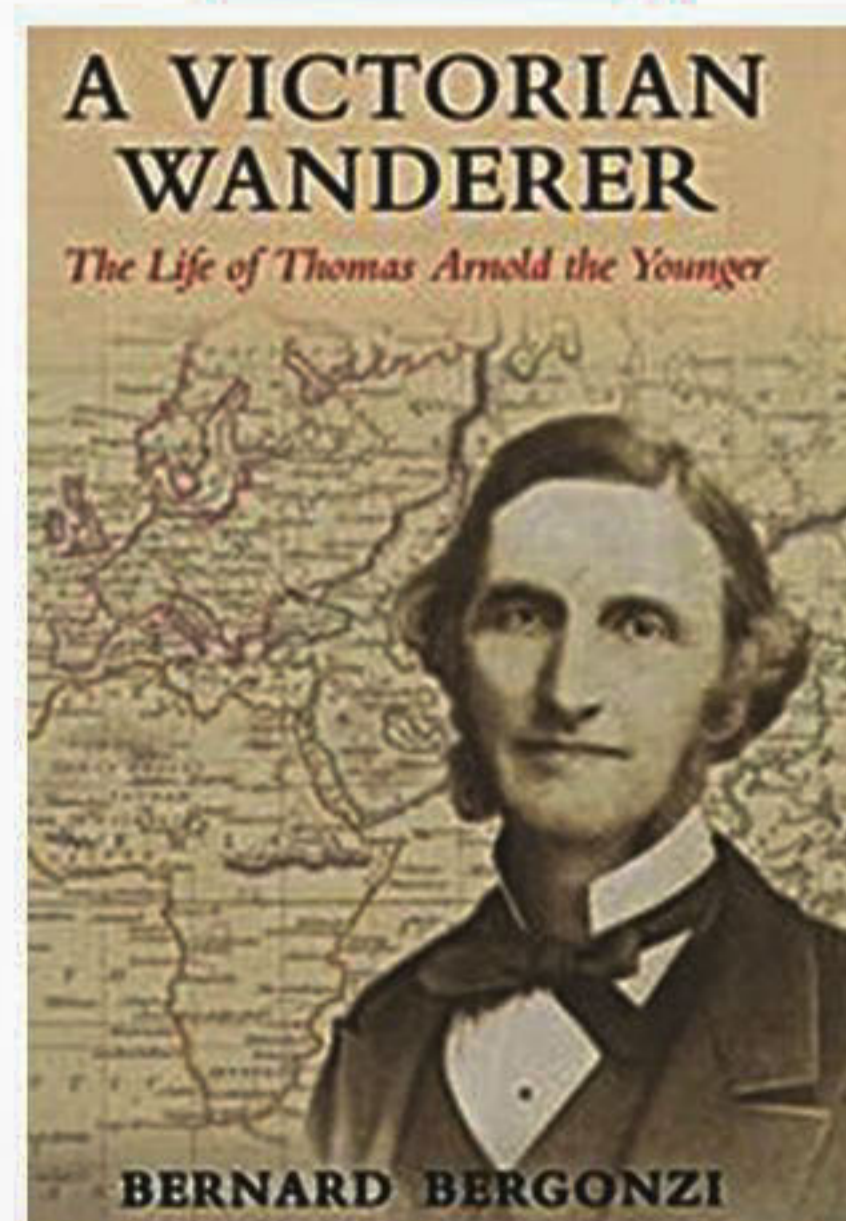
Bernard Bergonzi, poet, literary critic and novelist, died on 20 September at the age of 87. He was born in the Southeast London suburb of Lewisham into a lower middle-class family, and after a childhood bedeviled by illness, began working as a clerk while pursuing his literary interests. A year at Newbattle Abbey, an adult education centre, then run by the poet Edwin Muir, helped him make up for missed schooling. He made a promising debut as a poet with *Descartes and the Animals* (1954), a collection in a cool, Movement style, before going up to Oxford on a scholarship as a mature student. He read English at Wadham College, where his tutor was the legendary F. W. Bateson.

Seduced by John Wain's example of combining literary creativity with an academic life, he went on to take a research degree (B.Litt.) and embark on a career as a university teacher of English literature, first at Manchester University and then at Warwick. Generations of students benefited from his genial guidance and lightly worn scholarship until he opted for the mantle of Emeritus Professor. I remember going up to Warwick University with rather inchoate ideas about Great War Literature and being gently nudged into taking a close at the sadly neglected Frederic Manning, on whom I then completed a PhD comfortably within a scholarship-

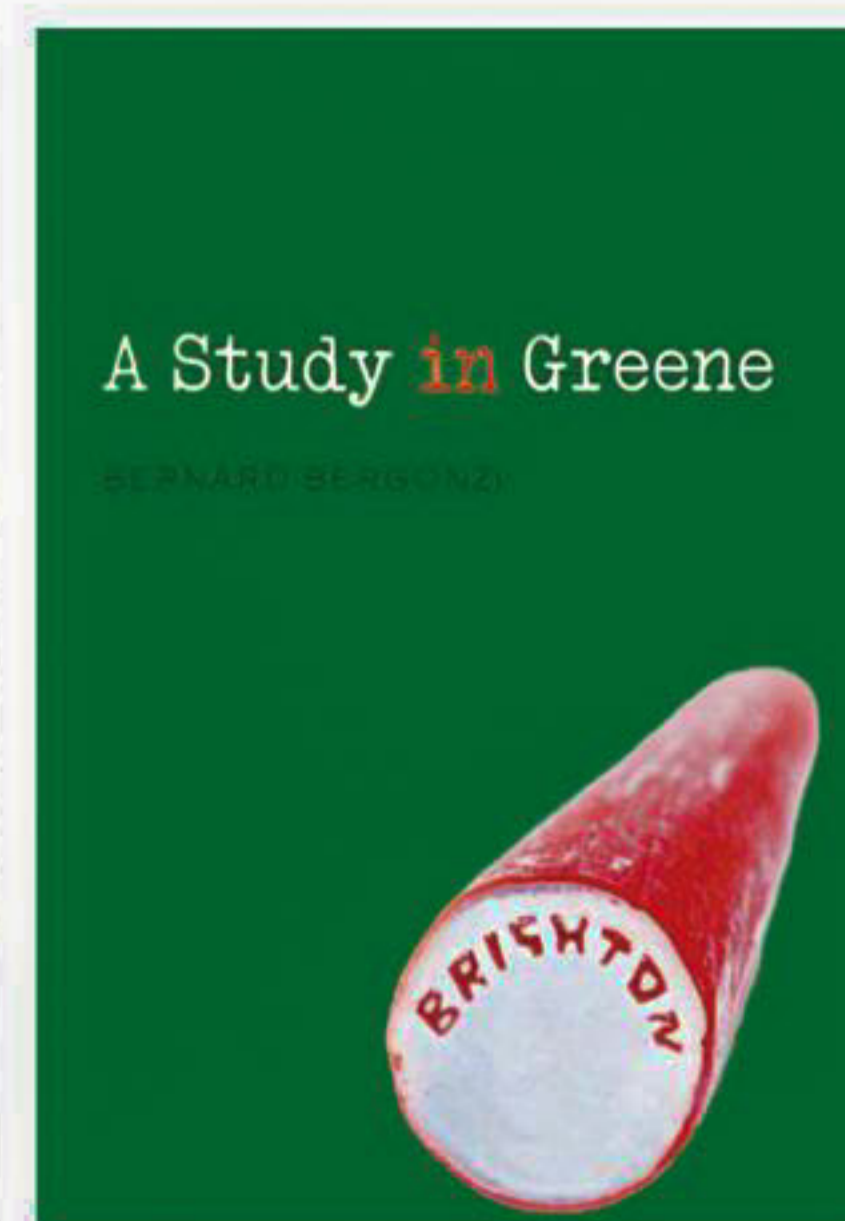
imposed deadline. We kept in touch, became friends, and I too adopted the first-name form of address – at Bernard's nudging.

While in academia Bernard published a couple of interesting poetry chapbooks and a novel that deserves to be better known: *The Roman Persuasion* (1979), centred on a Catholic family caught up in the ideological conflicts of the Spanish Civil War. But it is as a critic that he rose to eminence, reviewers often mentioning him alongside Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge as being representative of a very English brand of modern criticism.

Writers, major and minor, and poets and novelists in particular, from those of the fin-de-siecle to those of, roughly, his generation have been the focus of his studies, which, it has been rightly pointed out, add up to an engaging critical history of modern literature. Bernard's graduate dissertation became *The Early H. G. Wells* (1961), a study of the author's scientific romances, followed four years later by *Heroes' Twilight*, a pioneering study of the literature of the First World War; years later it was supplemented by *War Poets and Other Subjects* (1999); and in *Wartime and Aftermath: English Literature and its Background 1939-60* he took in the Second World War and what followed. Reading the *Thirties* (1978) studies the varied aspects of the



decade, including popular culture, in a way that at least one reviewer has dubbed 'structuralist'; the appellation isn't quite accurate since the book owes more to Raymond Williams and his notion of 'structures of feeling' than to anyone across the English Channel. *The Situation of the Novel* (1970) takes a wryly detached look at the fiction of a much-hyped decade. *The Turn of a Century* (1973) includes essays on late Victorian and modern literature, an area further explored in the essays in *The Myth of Modernism and Twentieth century Literature*



(1986), which includes a note on *Sons and Lovers* first published in *Form: A Magazine of the Arts*, with which I was associated.

Bernard published a number of studies of individual authors, Eliot, Hopkins, David Lodge and Graham Greene, and a biography of Thomas Arnold the Younger, brother of the poet-critic Matthew Arnold. He is perhaps at his critical best in *Exploding English: Criticism, Theory, Culture* (1990), where he takes a dispassionate look at the Humanistic discipline of English, which was under threat from

various forms of Critical Theory. The threat has diminished as Theory itself has fragmented, though the damage that has been done may well be irreparable. In the heyday of Theory Bernard might have seemed defensive in describing his method as a revisionist form of New Critical close reading, complemented with historical awareness (and biographical illumination, one might add) but such a method is still eminently serviceable, as his work as well as those of his peers, Kermode, Lodge, Bradbury, illustrates.

The last time I saw Bernard was in 2003. My wife and I visited the Warwick campus and Stratford, and stayed with Bernard and Anne, his psychotherapist wife. They pointed proudly at the spread on the dinner table and said all the vegetables were from their back garden. Knowing this made them taste more delicious.

As the last century was drawing to a close Bernard computer-printed and ring-bound an autobiography for distribution among friends. I helped place a chapter with *London Magazine* ('Friends from the Fifties'), and another, ('Oxford Days') with *Six Seasons Review*, of which I was an editorial board member. Reading his memoir and his criticism one realizes how well he exemplified the classic man of letters, and cannot help wondering if it is a critically endangered species.