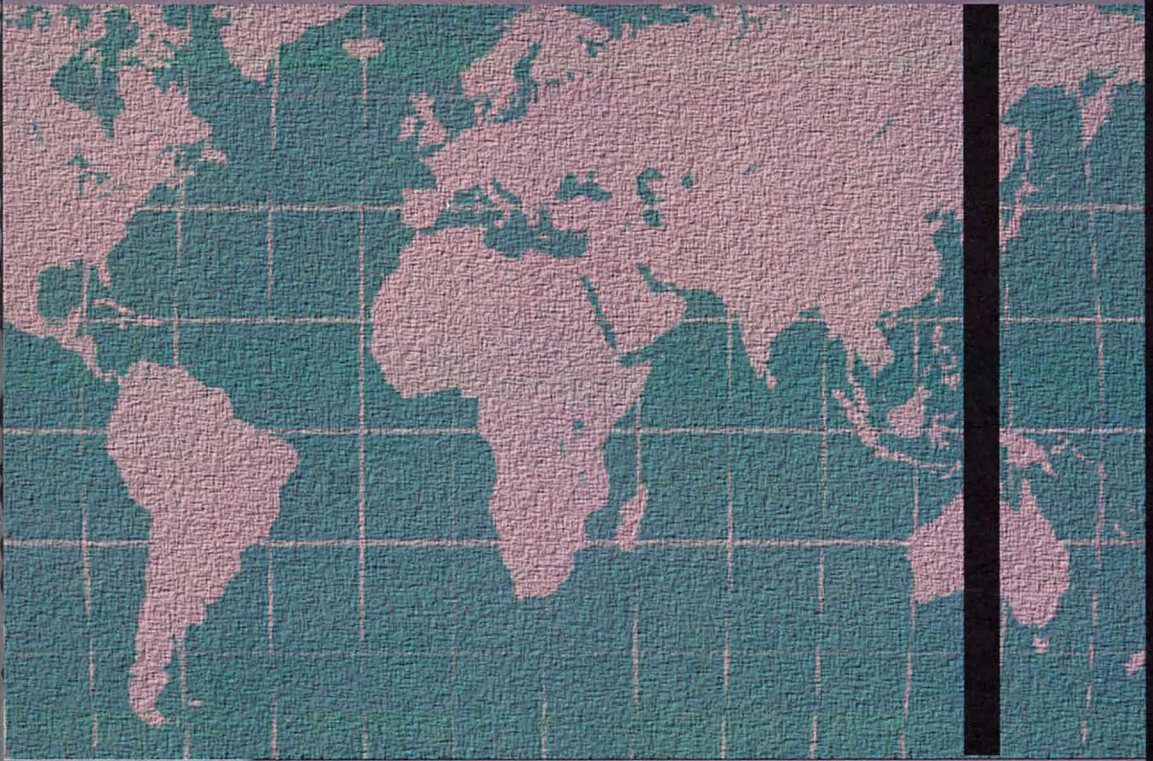


CROSSING BOUNDARIES



**Musings on Language, Literature
and Culture**



IIUM Press

Edited by Md. Mahmudul Hasan

Crossing Boundaries

Musings on Language, Literature and Culture

Edited By

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IIUM Press

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CHAPTER 9

“Why Poetry?” Why Not: Relevant-sing Poetry at IIUM

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The politician wants men to know how to die courageously; the poet wants men to live courageously. (Salvatore Quasimodo)

Abstract: This essay attempts to resuscitate the curiosity of poetry’s place in society and questions the importance of relevantising poetry studies in the tertiary classroom. Several questions will be revisited in light of poetry studies. For example: Why poetry? What are the roles of the poet? What is the function of poetry in society? And how do such definitions relate to the importance of teaching poetry or any humanities related subject as a whole? Thus, the paper will not deal with poetry qua poetry, but rather the way these critical issues are involved in the study of poetry and detach poetry from its intended audience. The article concludes by exploring the literary and cultural ramifications of relevantising poetry.

Keywords: poetry, relevantisation, tertiary classroom, humanities, education

Introduction

In the present times, published poems have a greater chance of collecting dusts in book stores compared to other genres of literature. Poets’ fates are brighter if their poems are selected for an anthology of poetry. The sublime written word is now a niche within the existing niche of literature, which is often synonymous with the word ‘expensive’ or ‘pricey.’ Give a consumer the option between a novel and a book of poems, he will either take the one that is ‘worth the buck’ or wait for the film adaptation of the novel to be screened. In a world where values are measured by accessibility, functionality and relevance, poetry mysteriously continues to slowly spiral out of the picture. The inconvenient truth is that poetry is dying and we are its reluctant witnesses. Why so?

A plausible answer lies in an intense debate sparked by Bruce Wexler’s article in *Newsweek* entitled “Poetry is Dead. Does Anybody Really Care?” (2003). The debate that ensued was clearly confined to those who care about poetry whose voices were gradually silenced by the relative indifference showed by the rest of society. This, ironically, laid weight to the gist of Wexler’s argument that “poetry is designed for an era when people valued the written word and had the time and inclination to possess it in the highest form.” The onslaught of information and images provided by the television and the Internet has created a generation that craves for an influx of information yet possesses a shorter attention span. As poetry often requests one to read and contemplate on the words that resonate within a poem, Freedman (1995) wonders if the future would be a time, in the words of the fellow