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RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Selected Poems

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The poems of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) are among the most haunting and tender in Indian and in world literature, expressing a profound and passionate human yearning. His ceaselessly inventive works deal with such subjects as the interplay between God and the world, the eternal and transient, and with the paradox of an endlessly changing universe that is in tune with unchanging harmonies. Poems such as 'Earth' and 'In the Eyes of a Peacock' present a picture of natural processes unaffected by human concerns, while others, as in 'Recovery - 14', convey the poet's bewilderment about his place in the world. And exuberant works such as 'New Rain' and 'Grandfather's Holiday' describe Tagore's sheer joy at the glories of nature or simply in watching a grandchild play.

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Teresa says

Acreditava piamente que ia gostar da poesia de Tagore, pois o seu romance *A Casa e o Mundo* está no monte dos meus 100 livros favoritos. Afinal, não...

Religião é o tema de quase todos os poemas. Reconheço que são bonitos, mas não me dou bem com "orações"...

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"O bosque seria muito triste se só cantassem os pássaros que cantam melhor."

— **Rabindranath Tagore**

Rabindranath Tagore nasceu em Calcutá, **Índia**, no dia 7 de Maio de 1861 e morreu em Calcutá, Índia, no dia 7 de Agosto de 1941. Foi poeta, romancista, músico e dramaturgo. Em 1913 foi-lhe atribuído o Prémio Nobel da Literatura *"pela sua poesia profundamente sensível, fresca, e bela, pela qual, com consumada perícia, ele fez do seu pensamento poético uma parte da literatura do ocidente."*

Brian Denton says

This isn't a bad collection of poetry. I'm happy I read it because there are a few terrific poems like "Flying Man," "Flute-Music," Shah Jahan," and "Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva." For the most part though I didn't feel any real connection with the works. I understand Tagore's importance in world literature so the fault is probably mine, a combination of something being lost in translation and my own near total ignorance of the culture that produced the poetry. Still, I found it worth reading.

Simona says

poems in the vein or Rumi and Hafiz, subtly political. lyrical.

Laura says

Queue up Rising Appalachia's *Oh Death*. That's what *Death-wedding*, one of my favorite poems from this collection reminded me of. The poems as a whole had a dreamy ethereal feel to them that created gorgeous imagery and were quite lovely to spend time with.

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Why do you speak so softly, Death, Death,

Creep upon me, watch me so stealthily?  
This is not how a lover should behave.  
When evening flowers droop upon their tired  
Stems, when cattle are brought in from the fields  
After a whole day's grazing, you, Death,  
Death, approach me with such gentle steps,  
Settle yourself immovably by my side.  
I cannot understand the things you say.

~from *Death-wedding*

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Rather,  
When you have leisure,  
Wander idly through my garden in spring  
And let an unknown, hidden flower's scent startle you  
Into sudden wondering—  
Let that displaced moment be my gift.  
Or if, as you peer down a shady avenue,  
Suddenly, spilled  
From the thick gathered tresses of evening  
A single shivering fleck of sunset-light stops you,  
Turns your daydreams to gold,  
Let that light be an innocent  
Gift.

~from *Gift*

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Wildly you roamed through the woods with your pulsing dances,  
To whose rhythm and tempo I constantly matched my tunes —  
Dancing beside you.  
In my eyes there were dreams of paradise, moonlit by your brow;  
The ever-renewing force of your *!?**l?* filled my heart.  
I saw it in smiles, at its point of escape into the heart of beauty;  
I saw it in shyness, at its point of hesitant switching to delight

~from *The Wakening of ?iva*

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What great weapon for the fighting of evil  
Have you placed in the quiver, bound to the waist  
Of the young warrior?  
Will you, perhaps, where a tide of blood besmirches your path,  
Where there is malice and discord,  
Construct a dam of peace,  
A place of meeting and pilgrimage?  
~from *New Birth*

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A careering crane's-wing-flap of joy, tuned to the music

Of the heart-rending sighs of the shadow-cast rains,  
Flies to ever-far heaven  
Along with his longing;  
A high beauty forever accompanies his deep pain.  
~from *Yak?a*

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Other favorites were *Railway Station*, *Unending Love*, and *Guest*.

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### **Chris says**

Books of poetry are the most difficult rate. Not only are poems more abstract than stories and novels, but they are shorter, so you can fit more of them into a single volume, causing a conflict of interest when comparing higher-quality poems to lesser ones. There's also the problem of translation: poems translated into English are often written better in their original language, which should be no surprise to anyone.

These poems of Tagore were originally written in Bengali. I have no doubt the book would get five stars if I'd read it without the corruption of a translation. That's no fault of Tagore's or the translator: just an unfair necessity when rating a book of foreign poetry. Two of the best poems in this volume were *Unending Love* and *Earth*, probably because there were no identifiable rhyme schemes. Both poems are sufficient enough to make one realize that Tagore was an incredible poet, even if some of what he tried to say was lost in translation.

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### **Dragana says**

Ve? odavno je Tagore jedan od mojih omiljenih pisaca. Šta je to što ga ?ini posebnim? Ne postoji jednostavan odgovor, postoje pokušaji da se do?ara lepota i svezremenost njegovih stihova. Posebnom lepotom zra?e ljubavni stihovi: nemametljivi, puni poštovanja i obzira prema vrhuncu stvarala?ke mo?i koju je Bog pokazao: ženi. Ali nikako ne treba misliti da je za njega žena apstrakcija, platonska ljubav, bi?e nedodirljivo, naprotiv. Ona je slika ?ulnosti ali opisane delikatno, sa poštovanjem, eroti?no, zavodljivo, zagrnutu velom a dovoljno otkrivena da se nazre sve što krije njena lepota. Slika kojoj se pisac najpre divi a potom razjašnjava sve njene boje, poteze. Potom je oživljava izvode?i je sa platna koje se zove život da bi je uzdigao svojom ljubavlju na mnogo ve?e platno nego što je slikarsko: nebesko. Može li se na lepši na?in odati po?ast ženi koja se voli?

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### **Hannah says**

Books of poetry are never really finished. You finish your initial reading, yes, close it for the first time, certainly, but when you return to it, it will meet you as the person you have become since yesterday. Tagore reminded me of this and I know that when I slip this book back on the shelf at home, it will only be a temporary farewell until the time I am ready to read the same words with a different mind. As my time in India draws to a close, only six days remaining, I am glad that I had the incredible opportunity to read some of his work while here. Tagore's beloved jungle and bustling cities have changed a great deal. The modern world caught up with both peacock and mountain-side, but as I finish this, the sun swims with that lamp-warm yellow color and disappears behind the towers of Delhi. Leaves float waxen and green, girls still sway, bangled arms around each others shoulders, and all things go.

"The sonorous rhythm/  
Of Life's liturgy in all its pain and elation,/br/>Gloom and light./br/>Over the ruins of hundreds of empires,/br/>The people work."

Tagore would be glad to know that they continue to do so. Beyond my window, a vendor pushes his livelihood home through the steaming, shadowed streets and I feel Tagore in slow step with him and supporting every aching knee and shoulder joint in the entire nation.

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### **Shefali says**

Selected Poems by Rabindranath Tagore

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### **Heidi Burkhart says**

It took me over two months to get through this slim volume. Tagore's poetry is beautiful, quite extravagant, and unusual, but very complex. Luckily in this Penguin Classics volume there was an extensive section of notes at the back of the book which was fairly helpful.

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### **Jennifer says**

The problem with reading Tagore is that, if you know anything about the man, it's difficult to raise your face from a prostrated we're-not-worthy position long enough to make sense of what's on the page. The first non-Western winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Tagore was a polymath: painter, poet, political theorist, physicist. This is a dude who chatted it up with Einstein. That's an awful lot of impressed to bring to any reading of verse, particularly one rendered in translation.

From what little I've read on the subject, it seems Tagore's own translation of his work from Bengali to

English were less than successful, hence William Radice trying his hand at it here. The results are mixed.

Radice's introduction and extremely thorough afternotes (which both explicate the poems and discuss why he chose certain phrases, noting any deviations from the strictly faithful translation) are both interesting and helpful. The poetry itself fares slightly less well, though the strength of the images wins through more often than not. But those same marvelous afternotes reveal the sometimes extensive liberties Radice takes, which leaves one wondering just whom one is truly reading. Interesting, but unlikely to inflame those new to Tagore.

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### **Joseph says**

Tagore may have been the greatest poet ever. His work was originally done in Bengali and I've read that the poetry is even more beautiful in Bengali than in English. Tagore spent considerable time in England and was born in Calcutta. It was Tagore who first called Gandhi "Mahatma" (Great Soul). Tagore knew too much of sadness. His mom died when he was 14, his wife when he was 43, his sister in law committed suicide, a daughter died a year after his wife and his youngest son died four years after that. His poetry, is complex. It can be uplifting and it can plumb the depths of sadness. Here's a sample:

Whatever gifts are in my power to give you,  
Be they flowers,  
Be they gems for your neck,  
How can they please you  
If in time they must surely wither,  
Crack,  
Lose luster?  
All that my hands can place in yours  
Will slip through your fingers  
And fall forgotten to the dust  
To turn into dust.

Ineffable sadness, yes Tagore knew that. But, if Gandhi was the "Great Soul, Tagore was the "Beautiful Soul"

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### **Jee Koh says**

#### **The Play of the Universe**

From a deep appreciation of the varied imperfections of earth, Tagore's poems yearn for the single, perfect ineffable. The narrative poems tell the stories of ordinary people, but tell them in such a manner as to evoke that deep yearning, so that the ordinary matter is suffused with immense dignity. The allegorical poems are dream-like and imaginative, at once passive and active. The lyrics are his supreme achievement, to my mind. Ardent, yet harmonious, they map human love onto the love of God.

According to Radice, the ideas in "Yaksha" lead right into the heart of Tagore's religious and artistic thought.

In Creative Unity (p. 35), in the chapter on the Creative Ideal, Tagore writes: "this world is a creation . . . in its center there is a living idea which reveals itself in an eternal symphony, played on innumerable instruments, all keeping perfect time." Radice identifies this 'living idea' with the Yaksā's ideal, with his Beloved. However, the revelation of this idea through time and space involves separation from that ideal, and thus the pain of yearning for it. Joy and pain are thus an inextricable reflection of the creative khela (play) of the universe.

That ideal is not the unalloyed joy of Christian heaven nor the dissolution of self of nirvana. That ideal is perfection but a perfection lacks the power to express itself through pain and yearning, just like the Beloved trapped in the permanent perfection of "eternal moonlight." Perfection would indeed be a torment if it is unable to enter into a relationship with imperfection. The Yaksā, beating at the door of his Beloved, is advantaged by his mortality: "his freedom to yearn is a gift from God," as Radice puts it.

A more personal poem than "Yaksā," but with some of the same ideas is one written for the Argentinian feminist and writer Victoria Ocampo who found a villa for Tagore to rest in when he fell ill in Buenos Aires. In "Guest," by linking the music of the stars to human love, Tagore puts a Personality at the heart of the universe. Radice's translation makes an alluring music.

### Guest

Lady, you have filled these exile days of mine  
With sweetness, made a foreign traveller your own  
As easily as these unfamiliar stars, quietly,  
Coolly smiling from heaven, have likewise given me  
Welcome. When I stood at this window and stared  
At the southern sky, a message seemed to slide  
Into my soul from the harmony of the stars,  
A solemn music that said, 'We know you are ours--  
Guest of our light from the day you passed  
From darkness into the world, always our guest.'  
Lady, your kindness is a star, the same solemn tune  
In your glance seems to say, 'I know you are mine.'  
I do not know your language, but I hear your melody:  
'Poet, guest of my love, my guest eternally.'

Is the original written in fourteen lines, in rhyming couplets? Radice's notes are useful on Tagore's ideas and diction, but I wish they give more information about his versification. The sonnet form is certainly appropriate here, shaping the matter of human and divine love. Grateful and considerate, the guest gives the Host-God the last line of the poem. The poem's courtesy reminds me of Herbert's "Love (III)" but it has none of that Anglican's consciousness of unworthiness. The universal drama, here, is not one of redemption, but of homecoming; more, of self-realization.

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### Val says

I read one of these poems at my mother's funeral. I don't think she knew anything about Rabindranath

Tagore, but I hope she would have appreciated the poem.

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### **Zulqarnain Ali Zaki says**

"Trust love even if it brings sorrow. Do not close up your heart."

"Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them."

"The heart is only for giving away with a year and a song, my love."

"Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them."

"Pleasure is frail like a dewdrop, while it laughs it dies. But sorrow is strong and abiding. Let sorrowful love wake in your eyes."

"Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them."

"The lotus blooms in the sight of the sun, and loses all that it has. It would not remain in bid in the eternal winter mist."

"Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them."

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### **Melanie says**

I'm glad I read Gitanjali first, because even though I loved a few of these poems, they wouldn't have inspired me to read more Tagore. There's a lot of cultural knowledge needed to be able to understand most of these.

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