

POETRY

DEDICATION

Rabindranath Tagore



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THE FLEETING SPRING

অচির বসন্ত হয় এল, গেল চলে

Alas, the brief spring came, and swiftly it was gone —
this time, poet, what have you laid by?
Have you filled fancy's golden hem
with the wind-tossed, restless, dark young leaves,
the wearied clusters of the oleander?
From the fierce noonday sun have you distilled
the wine of youth, and poured it
into your own surging stream of song,
and kept it there, made sweet without an end?

This spring, your beloved, in the full-moon night,
her hair bound round with fresh-strung jasmine,
turned on you, in one brief, burning instant,
the glance of eyes that longed and never found their fill —
have you not woven that into deathless music?
Or has it drifted away, to the country where fallen petals keep their fragrance
still?

O DEATH, MY DEATH

অত চুপি চুপি কেন কথা কও

Why do you speak so softly,
O Death, my Death?
You come so slowly, and stand there gazing —
is this, then, the manner of love?
When, at evening, the petals
sink, wearied, on their drooping stems,
when the cattle wind home to the byre

from wandering all day in the field,
you come and sit quietly at my side,
O softest of all footsteps.
I do not understand what it is you say,
O Death, my Death.

Ah, is it thus, O thief,
O Death, my Death,
that you will spread deep sleep across my eyes
and descend into my heart's depths?
Will you rock, so gently,
this blood grown languid in my breast?
Will you ring the murmur of sleep in my ear
with the tinkling of your anklet-bells?
And at the last, opening wide your lap of cold,
will you carry me off within a dream?
I do not understand why you come and go,
O Death, my Death.

Tell me, is this the manner of a wedding,
O Death, my Death?
It carries none of that pomp, that retinue —
is there no rite of blessing here at all?
Your tawny, towering crown of matted hair,
will no one bind it into a coronet?
Your banner, lifted high in triumph,
will none bear it before you, none behind?
Will the riverbank not lift its reddened eyes
to the blaze of your torches?
Will the earth not tremble, shaking with dread,
O Death, my Death?

When the Dark One went out to his own wedding,
O Death, my Death,
what manifold arrangements there were then,

what a hundred kinds of dress and gear!
His tiger-skin flapped loose about him,
his bull bellowed, again and again,
and coiled about his tangled hair
whole hosts of serpents hissed and swayed.
His cheeks rang out, bom, bom, with chanting,
a skull swung, an ornament, at his throat,
and from his horn a wild blast of music rose,
O Death, my Death.

Hearing the murmur of the dwellers of the burning-ground,
O Death, my Death,
Gauri's eyes brimmed over with a secret joy,
her thin veil trembled as she shook.
Her left eye fluttered, quivering,
her heart beat fast, unquiet in her breast,
her rapturous body shook through and through,
her mind forgot itself entirely.
Her mother wept, beating her brow,
to give her child to so wild a groom;
her father, in his secret heart, feared ruin,
O Death, my Death.

Why do you come like a thief, stealing in,
O Death, my Death?
Only in silence, at some turn of the night,
only a fountain of falling tears.
Do you hold festival the whole night through,
sounding your conch-shell of victory?
Then take me — seize me by the hand,
robe me in fresh red, and bear me off.
Turn your glance toward no other —
I myself will come, and take shelter in you,
if only you will carry me away in glory,
O Death, my Death.

If you should find me still at work within my house,
O Death, my Death,
then break to pieces all that work of mine,
and strip me of my every shame.
If, every longing satisfied in dream,
I should lie at rest on a bed of ease,
if, wrapped about with a weariness of heart,
I lie with eyes half-waking, half-asleep,
then sound the blast of your great conch-shell,
filled with the breath that brings all worlds to close —
I will come running, O my lord,
O Death, my Death.

I will go where your boat lies waiting,
O Death, my Death,
where the wind blows in from the shoreless deep,
following hard upon the dark.
If I should see the heavy clouds massed low
in the far northeast corner of the sky,
if the lightning, like a fiery serpent,
should spread abroad its lifted hood,
I will not turn back for an idle fear —
I will cross, in silence,
those red and swollen waters of the great deluging rain,
O Death, my Death.

THE STILL POINT

আকাশ-সিন্ধু-মাবে এক ঠাঁই

In one still point between the sky and sea

what wind has sprung up there —
the whirling of the world has wakened.
Sun and moon flash and flare,
the stars go flashing past,
ten thousand wheels have risen, turning,
unceasing, drunk with their own motion.
Only one point stands still,
there, in the whirlwind's very heart —
and from that place a golden lotus
has risen toward the void.

O beautiful one, O beautiful one,
upon a hundred petals, Lakshmi of all the worlds,
you stand — how lovely, how lovely!
All things turn in the great eddy of the world;
unmoving is your wealth of beauty.
From many a quarter, on many a day, I look,
and always find that same face smiling back at me.

Through birth and death, through light and darkness,
I go on, taking, giving,
turning on and on in this turning.
Whom I draw near, even as I watch,
goes drifting far away from me;
whom I hold, one moment, in my hand,
I touch only in passing, turning still.
Nowhere can I stay, not for an instant,
nothing at all can I keep —
this maddened heart runs on and on
after the drifting heap of foam.

O Love, O beauty fixed forever,
you have built your quiet nest
within the swift-turning whirlpool's very heart.
Your islands ring with singing,

your fountains fall in murmuring speech,
and the eternal, final peace of the infinite
comes, in a single instant, into the mind.

I EXIST AS A POINT

আছি আমি বিন্দুরূপে

I exist as a point, O Indweller of my soul,
I exist at the very centre of the universe. "I exist" —
remembering this, a great wonder
fills me with unrest; this heart falls silent
beneath the weight of so vast a mystery. "I am, and it is" —
an endless, primal riddle. Of whom
shall I ask its meaning? And so the men of learning say:
"In all this boundless world there is nothing else —
only the One exists" — and thus they make
one single thing of all this wealth of being,
denying the mystery at existence's heart.

You alone know, in this whole world of becoming,
that first, that hidden truth. I, who am only a poet,
will, through all my days, in all humility, confess it,
and keep my heart brimming with a wonder without end.

TODAY IT SEEMS

আজ মনে হয় সকলেরই মাঝে

Today it seems that, amid everyone,

it is you alone I have loved.
Moving on through the crowd, always,
it is only you and I who have come.
I look on every side —
what is it that wakes within my heart? —
your union and mine, boundless,
seems to lie everywhere, in everything.
How many ages I have spent within this sky
I have mostly forgotten now;
in the light that trembles, star to star,
the two of us have swayed together.

The grass thrills toward the earth
in the new light of autumn;
gazing at it, lost within myself,
my life brims over with a sudden joy.
It seems to me as though I know
this unspoken language,
that in the mute heart of the earth
that selfsame feeling wakes.
In this life-filled dust of the earth
how many ages we have spent,
in how many an autumn's golden light
have the two of us trembled, together, in the grass.

Reading the histories of ancient days,
their old tales of joy and sorrow —
like something known before, they ring,
all those melodies out of the past.
That ancient song
seems to me my own remembering,
in what treasury it has lain kept
I cannot say, but it is always there.
How much of it lies folded still within,
how much comes now unfurling forth —

in the lives of all our distant fathers
the two of us have come, and played there too.

The dawn that rose upon this world
a hundred thousand years ago —
was not some grain of its red first light
woven into my own life as well?
In that far dawn, in what place
I first awoke, who now can say.
In what shape did you fashion me then,
hidden, that day, within my life!
O ever-ancient one, forever
you go on shaping me anew.
You have been with me through all my days,
and through all my days you will remain.

TO THE HIMALAYA

আজি হেরিতেছি আমি

Today I behold you, Himalaya, here in this deep silence,
seated like a reader on your motionless throne,
the eternal scripture open on your knee.
Your leaves of stone lie turned back, layer on layer,
and you read on, absorbed, alone. Kingdoms have broken, kingdoms have risen,
age upon age has come and gone — and still your reading is not done.
Upon this pathway of the light, these thousand open pages —
is it written there, the love-tale of the world's own mother and lord?
How did the passionless, desireless, the great lord of all ascetics,
who longed for nothing, let himself be won
by one soft, frail, and lovely arm's compassionate pull —
why did he desire, why did he love, unmoved as he had been,

and take upon himself the bond of marriage? This very tale of love —
it is this, O mountain, that all your rocks, layer upon layer, still carry.

Almora, 26th of Jyaistha, 1310

WE, THE CAGED BIRDS

আজিকে গহন কালিমা লেগেছে গগনে

Today a heavy darkness has fallen upon the sky, oh,
covering every quarter, every horizon.
Today, weeping, we ask, again and again, oh,
we, the caged birds.
Friend of my heart, listen, O my friend —
has the night of ruin come upon us, then, at last?
Has the light of all our endless days been wiped away?
Has the promise of all our endless days been broken?
Beneath the heavens, is there nothing left
of the mercy of God? —
turned toward you, weeping, we ask,
we, the caged birds.

When spring came, suddenly, out of the southern wind,
now and again,
fragrance would come from far garden-bowers,
carrying a wondrous hope.
Friend of my heart, listen, O my friend —
now and again, when night was turning into dawn,
by what charm, dispelling the sorrow of our bondage,
morning would enter, smiling, into the corner of our cage,
touching with gold those iron bars
painted thick with soot —

we, the caged birds, felt in that one moment
the whole wide world alive within us.

Today, look, gazing toward that eastern ridge, there —
nothing at all is to be seen.

Today, in no direction does the dark's edge burn away, there,
no line of gold has fallen.

Friend of my heart, listen, O my friend —
today our chains ring out most harsh.

Today there is nothing left to charm away this cage —
whom shall I search for, within, without?

I will take a mirage and cool my eyes upon it,
I will deceive myself —
even that small light we had, we have lost today,
we, the caged birds.

Oh, may this fearful anguish of our own
never bring you pain.

Sitting at the door of the cage, do not you, too, weep,
carrying a restlessness that has no use.

Friend of my heart, listen, O my friend —
there is no iron chain about your feet.

Go, rise above all the clouds in flight,
and there pour out your song, filling the clear void —
call down to us, "It shall not be taken, no, it shall not be taken,
the morning sun" —
with closed eyes, we will listen to that song,
we, the caged birds.

HOW WILL YOU HIDE YOURSELF?

আপনারে তুমি করিবে গোপন

How will you hide yourself away —
how can you?
Your heart, from the corners of your eyes,
keeps glinting through, again and again.
Today you have come in a mood of mischief,
a necklace of jewels strung through your loosened hair,
with a half-smile stealing at the edge of your glance
you have come to the shore of my heart.
I am not deceived by your sidelong, wilful look,
I am not deceived by your clever, cruel words —
I am not deceived.
If, with the leaf of your hand, you strike a blow,
shall I answer it with a fall of tears?
I am not so foolish as all that.
Laugh, if you will — smiling, I will bear it all.

Today, in this guise, you have come
to beguile me.
Have you never come before, to touch
my shining brow with tenderness?
I have seen your face, speechless,
your dim eyes brimming with tears,
I have seen your form, so tender, so complete,
overcome, and trembling with a fear.
I have seen your sorrow-laden,
unblinking eyes, and their sweet
entreaty.
Today, beneath this smiling, cunning sternness,
shall I feel, within, any dread at all?
I am not so foolish as all that.
Laugh, if you will — smiling, I will bear it all.

THE VILLAGE AMONG THE MOUNTAINS

আমাদের এই পল্লিখানি পাহাড় দিয়ে ঘেরা

Our little village here is ringed about with mountains,
shepherd boys graze their cattle in the deodar groves.
From where, in Chaitra, come the wild geese flying,
and where, in Aghran, across the sky they go,
we do not know at all — that tale of the far distance.
We know only our few villages, we know ten peaks —
Mother Earth keeps us folded in the circle of her lap.

It was there, beside that forest, at the edge of the maize-field,
just where, beneath that shade, the water comes trickling down.
Many women used to come there, to draw water from the spring,
much laughter used to rise there, before her door,
morning and evening, comings and goings along her path.
The stream's soft murmur mingled with her daily work,
and that same melody would lose its way inside her sleep.

One evening a sannyasi came, his matted hair piled high,
descending, slow, from a cloud-veiled peak.
In wonder we all asked him, "Who, then, are you?"
The ascetic sat, without an answer, on the bank of the stream,
his gaze held, silent, steady, toward that house.
Some nameless dread made all our hearts tremble with fear —
night came, and each of us went back to our own home.

The next day, morning broke over the deodar wood,
the women gathered again beneath the falling stream to fill their jars.
They came, and found the door standing open — no joy there, no laughter,

the water-jar lay tipped and empty on the floor of the house,
a lamp, near guttering out, still burned in a corner of the room.
Where had she gone, vanished before the night was through?
By the door of that empty house, the sannyasi too was gone.

In Chaitra the sun grows fierce, the snow melts and falls away —
we sit beside the stream and weep for her.
Today, in this season of thirst, where, without the fountain,
shall the dry jar go wandering to find its water?
Who knows in what unknown place she has gone and lost herself,
beyond this sky-walled ring of our ten mountains.

On a summer night the wind moans through the window,
we sit within her lampless, empty house.
Sitting by the door, we hear the stream, as though it pleads with her —
it says, "Are you not thirsty, even now, tonight?
Have you no more need of water, on so parched a summer night?"
And I, too, weeping, say, "O wanderer unknown to us,
though your thirst be gone, forget not, still, this water."

Just then, all at once, my eyes seemed to grow dazzled —
I looked about me, and found no mountain standing in my way.
There — who comes there? Was it not the one who had been ours?
Oh, how do you fare — are you well, and at peace?
Beneath the open sky, here, where is your house, in what direction?
There is no mountain here, nowhere does any fountain fall —
should thirst come upon you, where will you go to drink?

She said, "That stream which flows there, at our door,
has grown into a river now, flowing here in its own wide course.
That sky, that mountain — it has left them behind, and grown
toward the boundless; it holds this earth no longer
bound within its rock." "Everything remains — only we are not there,"
I said to her, weeping. She answered, with a gentle smile,
"You are there — in the depths of the heart."

I woke from my dream, and found myself beside the stream.

Jorasanko, 10th of Magh, 1309

AT MY OPEN WINDOW

আমার খোলা জানালাতে

At my open window,
with soundless footfall,
who came — oh, who was it that came?
I sat alone
close to the place where the sun was setting,
my two eyes turned toward the west.
From a road immeasurably far,
out of your restless veil,
a trail of fragrance was left within the dark,
lighting fireflies at the edge of the wood —
when did you come to my threshold,
your face half-hidden behind your loosened hair?

With you, beside me,
the sleep of how many villages comes,
the loneliness of roads where no traveller goes,
the grey light of how many fields,
the murmuring speech of water in the dark corner
of how many a bride-less ferry-landing.
Along the mountain's foot
the sea's waves lie down to sleep,
carrying their dream, with you, as you come.
In how many a forest, on how many a bough,
the birdsong that lies sleeping,

that too you bring, filling your silent anklets.

That gentle hand of yours upon my brow
brings me the setting of the sun,
brings me the ending of all labour —
of truth and falsehood, of good and ill,
the rhythm of every consummation,
the last, spent strain of the evening river.
Your veil comes flying
to brush against my breast, my hair,
my body seems to melt away into the void,
your eyes, still as death,
rest silent on my face,
filling my whole heart with a darkened light.

Just as your right hand
lifted up the lamp
and set it down in the corner of my room,
my house, in that one instant,
spread out into the country of the stars,
into a garden of light upon the shore of dark.
Today, beside my house,
the dwellers beyond the sky have come,
their bodies wrapped in robes of blue.
Today, close by my door,
the beginningless night stands silent,
turning its gaze on you.

In this one moment, taking
half the earth with her,
filled with darkness,
with so much stillness, so much deep affection,
she has come, and stands
at my window, at the day's end,
sounding for you

a low, murmuring song.
Your eyes do not blink,
turned toward the pole-star,
you gaze on, into the unknown.
With silent steps,
who came, out of the dark,
into my house, into my song, my melody? —

Over how many an empty field,
from the far edge of how many a town,
along how many a shore of ocean sand,
beside how many a quiet river,
past how many a silent village,
by how many a sleeping house-door,
over how many a forest's wind,
your loosened hair came brushing past,
you came today, suddenly, for no cause at all.
From many far-off lands,
from many distant days,
from many a distant melody,
you have brought a song to my window.

Hazaribagh, 16th of Chaitra, 1309

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

A few words and images in these poems carry more than their English equivalents can hold on their own:

- অন্তর্যামী (Antaryami) — literally "the one who guides/controls from within." I rendered it "Indweller," the word Tagore himself favoured, but it loses the sense

of active steering the Bengali retains — this is not a passive resident of the soul but the one at its helm.

- বিন্দুরূপে (bindu-rupe), "in point-form" — a term from Indian cosmological thought: consciousness contracted to a dimensionless point that is, paradoxically, also the centre of the infinite. English has no single word for a point that is simultaneously nothing and everything, so "as a point" has to do the work alone.

- ধ্রুবসুন্দর (dhruva-sundar) — a compound fusing dhruva ("fixed," the word also used for the polestar) with sundar ("beautiful"). I split it into "beauty fixed forever," but the original holds both ideas in a single breath — beauty as the still axis of a turning universe.

- ওগো মরণ, হে মোর মরণ, "O Death, my Death" — the poem's refrain, and its central daring: Tagore addresses Death not as an abstraction to fear but with the intimate, familiar "tumi" and "mor," the grammar of a lover. I kept the refrain identical at every stanza's end, since its hypnotic repetition — as in a wedding chant — is part of the poem's meaning, not just its music.

- গৌরী (Gauri) and the wedding of Shiva — stanzas four and five draw directly on the myth of Shiva's wild, ash-and-serpent wedding procession to Parvati (Gauri). A Bengali reader hears the whole myth in a few images — tiger-skin, bull, matted hair, skull-ornament; I've kept these literal rather than explaining them, trusting the strangeness to do the same work in English that it does in Bengali: this bridegroom is fearsome, and still — chosen.

- ববম্ববম্ (bom-bom) — the onomatopoeic chant devotees ritually raise to Shiva. There is no English equivalent that isn't either silly or over-explained, so I translated it as "chanting" rather than transliterating the sound itself, at some cost to the original's percussive texture.

- খাঁচার পাখি (khanchar pakhi), "the caged bird" — the poem's refrain and its identity. Caged-bird imagery recurs throughout Bengali poetry of this era as a figure for a life, or a people, denied the sky it was made for; I have left the image

to speak for itself rather than naming what it might stand for, as the poem itself does.

- সন্ন্যাসী (sannyasi) — an ascetic who has formally renounced worldly and household life. "Monk" imports a monastery and vows that don't belong here; I used "ascetic" and, once, kept "sannyasi" itself, since the word's wildness — a solitary figure descending unbidden from the peaks — is part of the village's fear of him.

- যৌবনের সুরা, "the wine of youth" — sura is real fermented wine, not a metaphorical stand-in, which gives the phrase a more physical, intoxicated charge in Bengali than "wine of youth" quite carries in English.

- চির-পুরানো, "ever-ancient" — paired, in the same breath, with "you shape me ever new." Bengali holds the paradox comfortably in two adjacent words; English tends to want a sentence to explain it, which is why I kept the line as spare as possible and let the contradiction stand unresolved.

- The place-and-date signatures (Almora, Jorasanko, Hazaribagh, with dates in the Bengali calendar — Jyaistha, Magh, Chaitra) are not decorative. Tagore dated and located poems the way a diarist would; I've kept them in the original calendar rather than converting them to the Gregorian date, since the rhythm of the Bengali months is itself part of several poems' imagery (Chaitra's heat, Magh's cold).

WHO IS SHE THAT DWELLS WITHIN ME

আমার মাঝারে যে আছে কে গো সে

Who is she, then, that dwells within me —
what woman of separation is she?
I longed to make her wholly mine,
and yet, by no means, could I.
Who indeed can know a woman's heart —
in what place her mind may dwell.
I served her, day and night without end,
I strung and hung upon her neck garland after garland of flowers,
and it seemed to me, in gladness, with a face grown bright,
she turned her gaze on me.
Some days went by — then, one day, alas,
she let fall the water of her eyes —
"In you I find no happiness at all,"
says the woman of separation.

Anklelets set thick with jewels
I fastened upon her feet,
I stayed awake the whole night through, and fanned her
with a breeze made wet with sandal-scent.
Who indeed can know a woman's heart —
in what place her mind may dwell.
Upon a couch inlaid with gold
I seated her, with every honour I could give,
and it seemed to me, with just such a smiling face,
she turned her gaze on me.
Some days went by — then, flung down in the dust,
she let fall the water of her eyes —
"In all of this I find no happiness at all,"
says the woman of separation.

I brought her out into the world, to win

the conquest of every heart.
Turned charioteer, I drove her chariot
across the whole wide earth.
Who indeed can know a woman's heart —
in what place her mind may dwell.
In every quarter people gave their lives to her,
in every quarter songs of praise rose up for her,
and it seemed to me, with a bright and burning pride,
she turned her gaze on me.
Some days went by — she turned her face away,
she let fall the water of her eyes —
"In gathering hearts I find no happiness at all,"
says the woman of separation.

Then I said, "Whom is it you long for,
O woman of separation?"
She answered, "The one I long for —
his name I cannot even say."
Who indeed can know a woman's heart —
in what place her mind may dwell.
She said, "The one I long for —
if but for a moment I could see him,
in that instant, with a thrill of joy, I would know him,
gazing full upon his face."
The days go on, and she does nothing, alas,
but let fall the water of her eyes —
"When shall I make the unknown mine at last?" —
so says the woman of separation.

RESTLESS AM I

আমি চঞ্চল হে

Restless am I,
I am athirst for the Far Away.
The days go by, and I, lost in my own thought,
sit at my window, watching for its hope,
oh, with all my heart and soul I am one
who strives to feel its touch.
I am athirst for the Far Away.
O Distant One, O vast and boundless Distance, it is you
who play the restless flute.
I have no wings, I am bound to one single place —
and that alone I keep forgetting.

Eager am I,
O Far Away, I am an exile here.
Like a hope beyond all reach, you
forever whisper something to me.
Hearing your language, my heart
has known you as its own native tongue.
O Far Away, I am an exile here.
O Distant One, O vast and boundless Distance, it is you
who play the restless flute.
I know no road, I have no chariot to ride —
and that alone I keep forgetting.

Absent-minded am I,
O Far Away, I am indifferent to all else.
In the idle hours steeped in sunlight,
in the rustle of trees, in the play of shadow,
what form of yours, lying along the blue heaven,
rises, half-glimpsed, before my eyes.
O Far Away, I am indifferent to all else.

O Distant One, O vast and boundless Distance, it is you
who play the restless flute.
The door of my own chamber stands shut fast —
and that alone I keep forgetting.

SHE WHOM I LOVE, SHE LIVED HERE

আমি যারে ভালোবাসি সে ছিল এই গাঁয়ে

She whom I love, she lived here, in this village,
on the right side of the winding path, to the left of the broken landing-stair.
Who knows this village,
who knows even its name,
here by the edge of the fields, at the border of the meadow, in the forest's thick
shade —
only my own heart knows that she lived here, in this village.

Peering past the screen of bamboo branches toward the sky,
how many an evening moonrise has she watched from just this place.
In how many an Ashadh month,
scented with wet earth,
the rain-laden wind has blown across their tender rice.
On all those days heavy with cloud, she was here, in this very place.

This pond, that mango grove, that little shrine of Shiva there,
this courtyard — they know her only by her pet name.
In this very pool
the water still holds the memory of her swimming,
the worn path to the landing is written all over with her footprints.
Who she was, that lived here in this village — that, they do not know.

These very women who come and stand at the landing with their water-jars —

every one of them has seen the smile upon her face.
That old farmer there, going to the fields with his plough on his shoulder,
used to stop at her door
and ask after her welfare.
She whom I love — she lived here, in this village.

How many sailboats go gliding by, borne on the southern wind,
travellers from far countries come and rest beneath the bakul's shade.
The crowd of passengers crossing over
moves on toward the ferry landing —
not one of them so much as glances to the left of that broken stair.
She whom I love — she lived here, in this village.

Almora, 29th of Baishakh, 1310

WEARY WAYFARER

আলো নাই, দিন শেষ হল, ওরে

There is no light left, the day is done, O
wayfarer, wayfarer from a foreign land.
A bell has rung, far off,
in the palace on the other shore,
and still you go on, along that road,
alas, worn out with travel,
O wayfarer, wayfarer from a foreign land.

See, everyone else has turned home again, O
wayfarer, wayfarer from a foreign land.
Their worship finished at the temple,
carrying home the blessed flowers,
now make ready, at last, for sleep,

alas, worn out with travel,
O wayfarer, wayfarer from a foreign land.

The night is darkening now, drawing on, O
wayfarer, wayfarer from a foreign land.
There, over the village,
lamps are lit in house after house —
what will you do, alone, on a lampless road,
alas, worn out with travel,
O wayfarer, wayfarer from a foreign land.

Carrying so heavy a load, where do you go, O
wayfarer, wayfarer from a foreign land.
Is there nowhere, in all this neighbourhood,
where you might set it down at last?
Has no one, anywhere, spread out a bed for you,
alas, worn out with travel,
O wayfarer, wayfarer from a foreign land.

No sign of the road is left to see now,
O wayfarer, wayfarer from a foreign land.
At the far edge of what waste,
in what far distant country,
where will your night at last turn into morning,
alas, worn out with travel,
O wayfarer, wayfarer from a foreign land.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- বিরহিণী নারী (birahini nari), "the woman of separation" — biraha is the Vaishnava poetic tradition's technical word for the ache of separation from the

beloved, most often Radha's longing for Krishna. Tagore turns that stock figure inward: she is not a woman he has lost, but one who lives inside him and can never be satisfied by anything he offers. "Woman of separation" is clumsier than the single Bengali word, but any tighter English phrase ("lovelorn woman," "pining woman") loses the specific devotional weight biraha carries.

- রমণীকে কে বা জানে, মন তার কোন্‌খানে — the poem's refrain, almost proverbial in its shrug: "who can know a woman, where her heart may be." I kept it word-for-word identical at every turn, since its repetition is doing the same work the eight-fold refrain does in the poem about Death in your earlier document — it is less a line of argument than a chant the poem returns to helplessly.

- চাটুগান (chatu-gaan) — "flattering songs." I softened this to "songs of praise," but the Bengali carries a faint edge of empty flattery, praise without substance — appropriate, since it's precisely this hollow public adoration that fails to satisfy the woman within.

- সুদূর (sudur), "the Far Away" — one of Tagore's recurring personifications: not simply distance, but Distance itself addressed as a "tumi," almost a second beloved, playing an unreachable flute. English has no ready-made word that turns an adverb into an addressee, so I capitalized it ("the Far Away," "the Distant One") to signal that a place has become a person.

- চঞ্চল / উৎসুক / উন্মনা (chanchal / utsuk / unmona) — "restless," "eager," "absent-minded" — the three stanzas each open on a different shade of longing, and in Bengali these three words half-rhyme with the "সুদূর" refrain that follows them, binding sound to sense. That chime is close to impossible to carry into English without forcing a false rhyme, so I let the meaning carry the progression instead — restless, then eager, then withdrawn into reverie — and sacrificed the music of the rhyme.

- বাঁশরি (bashori), "flute" — in Bengali devotional imagery the flute is above all Krishna's flute, the instrument that calls the soul out of its ordinary life toward

something it cannot reach. Calling it merely "flute" loses that echo; I added "restless" to the phrase ("the restless flute") to gesture at the same yearning, unanswerable summons.

- ডাক-নাম (dak-naam), "pet name" — the informal, private name a family uses, as opposed to one's formal name. The poem's quiet devastation is that the whole village remembers her only by this intimate nickname and nothing else about who she was — a detail that depends on the reader knowing dak-naam is not simply "nickname" in the English sense, but the name of home and childhood.

- পান্থ, বিদেশী পান্থ (pantha, bideshi pantha), "wayfarer, wayfarer from a foreign land" — pantha is an old, almost scriptural word for a traveler, distinct from the everyday "musafir" or "pathik." Paired with "bideshi" (foreign, of another country), it suggests a stranger with no home nearby to return to — which is why the whole village can go home for the night, and only he cannot. I kept the doubled address ("wayfarer, wayfarer from a foreign land") because the repetition itself, at the head of every stanza, does the calling-out that a single vocative would flatten.

- ঘন্টা বাজিল দূরে ও পারের রাজপুরে, "a bell has rung, far off, in the palace on the other shore" — raj-pur literally means "the king's city." Left untouched, "palace on the other shore" carries a hint of something beyond the literal riverbank — evening prayer-bells across water are a common image in Bengali poetry for the boundary between the day's world and whatever lies past it, and I chose to let that ambiguity stand rather than resolve it into either "temple" or "kingdom."

- The refrain হয় রে পথশ্রান্ত, "alas, worn out with travel" — repeated, unchanged, at the close of every stanza — I preserved exactly as in the original for the same reason as the refrain in "O Death, my Death": its comfort lies in its sameness, a voice returning again and again to the same note of pity for the traveler who cannot stop.

THE PLAY OF LIGHT AND SHADOW

আলোকে আসিয়া এরা লীলা করে যায়

Coming into the light, they play their play a while,
and pass again outside, into the dark.
The heart thinks: useless, this coming and this going,
there is no meaning in it at all.
Why do I come, why do I laugh,
why do I drift, awash in my own tears,
whose story do I go on telling, whose song do I go on singing —
there is no meaning in it at all.

O my heart, come — come, casting off your costume;
what is the use of your acting on this stage?
If you wish to understand, then come outside;
leave off the play, and come, instead, to watch it.
Look there — the playhouse itself
has decked itself in strings of lamps.
If it is the whole mystery you wish to fathom,
you must, yourself, turn away from that stage.

When you come down, and come stand at a distance,
you will only watch, and you will no longer search;
then, at last, you will understand something
of the meaning of this great drama of laughter and tears.
Taking one thing together with another,
you will see how each is joined to each,
and you will understand: you must not wrestle against the One who ordains —
you will only watch, and you will no longer search.

DEDICATION — TO JAGADISH CHANDRA BOSE

বন্ধু, এ যে আমার লজ্জাবতী লতা

Friend, here is my own bashful, shrinking creeper —
what has it received from the sky,
what has come to it upon the running wind —
folded away within its leaves
lies hidden the very word of life.
With patient care, searching, searching,
you must take it, and come to understand;
you must break through
its silent, restless longing.
My own bashful, shrinking creeper.

Friend, evening has come, and a wind
heavy with dreams kisses it now.
All its branches, gathering in their leaves,
have wrapped themselves in sleep.
All its flowers, with their blue eyes,
gaze, silent and secret, toward the sky,
turned toward the stars,
lost in what meditation, who can say.
My own bashful, shrinking creeper.

Friend, bring now your touch of lightning,
grant it a moment's joy;
open your compassionate eyes
and look into the very heart of it.
Carrying the whole day's song of fragrance,
the whole day's memory of light,
it bends now, heavy at heart,
low toward the earth —
my own bashful, shrinking creeper.

Friend, you know that what seems small
is, in truth, never small at all;
wherever the least particle of truth exists,
the whole universe abides there too.
In this very thing, closed up in shyness,
you will read, if you look —
life and death, sunlight and shadow,
the tidings of the storm itself.
My own bashful, shrinking creeper.

Calcutta, 18th of Ashadh, 1313

O MY IDLE ONE

ওরে আমার কর্মহারা, ওরে আমার সৃষ্টিছাড়া

O my idle one, O outcast from all creation,
O my mind, O my own heart's mind.
I do not know for what you wait,
awake in what strange world —
what vanished realm of some age long gone.
Some word out of an ancient era, whose meaning I cannot fathom,
is rising, even now, to bloom upon your lips.
In what tongue your boundless, primeval memory
is weaving its own song, I do not know —
but hearing it, a stream of tears breaks from my eyes.
Today your wings go sweeping across the whole sky,
and I cannot keep pace with you.
Those you claim to know, and draw close to your breast, and gather to your lap —
I cannot recognize them at all.

Today, in this fresh month of Chaitra, an ancient wind comes blowing,
and the bridge across the ages has swung open.
False, today, seem all the words of daily work; all the old griefs
that have wakened today have, in this life, no cause at all.
Deep within the heart, in some hidden chamber,
a princess lies asleep — I do not know from what former birth I found her.
I caught but a glimpse of her, the very moment the wind, at my mind's own door,
blew the curtain aside.
The scent of flowers, softly, softly, today, like a wand of gold,
has broken through her sleep of endless ages.
Taking up a mirror, she gazes now upon her own brow,
where some past birth has traced its sandal-paste and vermilion.

What the heart says today is neither falsehood, nor is it truth —
it is only the formless, taking on a form beyond all form.
How has it happened that today, on the house of the impossible,
the old, rust-eaten lock has fallen open?
There, on some island of illusion, a lute of invitation sounds,
the blue sea's waves rise foaming,
in the rustling shade of the tamal tree, wet locks of hair dry in the wind —
some know them, and some do not know them at all.
At the mountain's foot the cattle graze, a shepherd-child plays upon his flute,
they wear, upon their heads, garlands wrought of gold.
Traced there with a brush of gold, the mirage of Chaitra
sets the heart to weeping, for some rare, unattainable treasure.

As the leaves of a tree tremble in the southern wind's sweet warmth,
so my whole being trembles, through and through.
My body trembles, my mind trembles, together with the wind, together with the
light,
a rustling music rises everywhere.
What guest has come, I wonder — I do not know who it is
that keeps passing, back and forth, at my door.
In the shade, today, at the root of the tree, upon the grass, along the river's edge,
oh, all of you, let me hear it, let me hear —

the song that lulls the far sky to sleep, that steals away the hearts of bees,
that opens the jasmine, that sets the grasses swaying,
the melody that sends a thrill across the water's face, that gathers up the
fragrance of flowers,
that draws a film of sleep across the eyelids.

Do not sing to me of the heart's weary sorrows, of all its joys and griefs —
of love's own story — of hope, and of despair.
Sing only the soft, slow rhythm of words that carry no meaning,
only the restless, ringing chime of pure melody.
Bathed beneath the falling water, come, carefully dressed,
in a light robe the color of the champak flower.
Draw upon your brow a line of flowers, a leaf-pattern traced in sandal-paste,
and draw the sitar close upon your lap.
Toward the far horizon, beyond the field, where the deep-blue shadow lies along
the ranks of trees,
let your two eyes rest, lost in thought.
Hum, then, murmuring, murmuring, some ballad of a poet from another land,
a song in a language none of us can know.

Hazaribagh, 12th of Chaitra, 1309

O PADMA, MY DEMON BELOVED

ওরে পদ্মা, ওরে মোর রাক্ষসী প্রেয়সী

O Padma, O my demon-hearted love,
stretching out your greedy arms, surging, exulting,
is it me you wish to hold in an endless embrace?
In one single moment's frenzied union
do you long to dissolve, within your own breast,
all the joy, the sorrow, the fear that fill mine?

I too, so many days, sitting in the tranquil solitude
of your riverbank, have turned this thought over in my mind —
outside, you are restless, wild, and clamorous,
terrible and keen-edged as a whetted sword,
but within, hidden, cool, calm, and deeply grave —
silent and solitary as a bridal chamber at the dead
of midnight, lampless, its door shut fast —
there, for whom is spread that long, unending bed?

THE HELMSMAN

কত দিবা কত বিভাবরী

How many days, how many nights,
through how many rivers, among a million currents,
holding fast to a single course,
touching at landing after landing,
waking, as you went, song after song of the rowers,
in how many an Aghran, with each new harvest of rice,
how many times have you filled your boat with cargo.
O helmsman, O helmsman,
buying and selling how great a weight of gold —
in what village now, to accomplish what task,
have you moored and tied your boat fast?

Whose market is this, where they buy and sell?
Why do they gather their wares in such haste,
hurrying off, these people, to what house, what home?
Listen — every now and then,
someone drives past, calling out, bearing a load,
and at that mournful cry my heart, I know not what it does —
lost in what thought, my days go by.

O helmsman, O helmsman,
buy and sell your weight of gold —
here, learn who it is that dwells,
who it is that comes and goes at this very landing.

From wherever I go, I go weeping.
Shall I ever again find such a place as this? —
my heart will not let go of that regret.
You made me forget every one of those old griefs,
on what swing did you set my life to rocking?
There, along the shore, those who wander back, lost in their own thoughts —
I long, I die, to call after them.
O helmsman, O helmsman,
buy and sell your weight of gold.
Let me step down into this market and see it for myself —
moor the boat here, just for one turn of the day.

In what melody do you strike up your song?
It comes back to me now that I came from some far place,
and that I must go on again, toward some other, farther place.
Hearing it, I remember how the two of us once played,
in company and in solitude alike —
how many countries, without end,
how many ages I have spent, wandering.
O helmsman, O helmsman,
buy and sell your weight of gold.
A conch-shell has sounded, a call has come,
from some unknown, unrecognized palace of a king.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- লীলা (lila), "play" — in the first poem, "play" is not idle amusement but the specific theological concept of lila: the world as the divine's purposeless yet radiant creative act, sport without need or lack behind it. "Play" in English risks sounding trivial; I let the surrounding stage-and-theatre imagery of the poem carry the weight the single word can't.

- নাট-বেদী / নাটশালা (nat-bedi / nat-shala), "stage" / "playhouse" — the poem's central metaphor is the ancient one of life as a play watched from within, which only makes sense once you step outside it. This isn't quite "all the world's a stage" in the Shakespearean sense of role-playing; it's closer to the Vedantic idea of the witnessing self (sakshi) who understands only by ceasing to perform.

- বিধাতা (bidhata), "the One who ordains" — a specific figure in Bengali religious vocabulary: not simply "God" in a general sense, but the one who writes each soul's fate, closer to "Providence" or "Fate's author." I avoided the flatter "God" to keep that sense of a hand actively writing one's lot, which the poem's final line — "you must not wrestle against" him — depends on.

- লজ্জাবতী লতা (lajjabati lata) — literally "the shy-possessing creeper," the Bengali name for Mimosa pudica, the touch-me-not plant whose leaves fold shut at the lightest contact. This dedication poem is addressed to Jagadish Chandra Bose, the physicist and plant physiologist who devised instruments to prove scientifically that plants respond to stimuli — so Tagore is doing something quite exact here: comparing his own book of poems to the very plant his friend had spent years studying. "Bashful, shrinking creeper" tries to hold onto both the botanical fact (it shrinks at a touch) and the connotation of shyness the Bengali name carries.

- তড়িৎ-পরশ (tarit-parash), "touch of lightning" — a lovely private joke inside the dedication: Bose's laboratory technique involved applying electrical stimulus to plants and measuring their response on a galvanometer. Asking the scientist-friend to bring his "electric touch" to the poems is Tagore inviting Bose to do to his verses exactly what Bose did in his laboratory — and I kept "touch of lightning" literal rather than softening it to something vaguer, since the specificity is the whole point.

- কর্ণধার (karnadhar), "helmsman" — literally "holder of the rudder," an old, slightly formal word (as opposed to a plain boatman) used across Bengali devotional poetry as a figure for God or fate steering the vessel of the soul through the river of existence. I chose "helmsman" over "captain" or "boatman" to preserve that liturgical, invocatory register — this is a poem addressed to a guide, not simply a laborer.

- রাক্ষসী (rakkhoshi), "demoness" — a rakshasi in Hindu myth is a female demon, associated with wildness and danger but sometimes also a terrible, overwhelming beauty. Tagore's own life on the Padma, managing family estates from houseboats, gave him a lived, ambivalent love for this famously violent, bank-eroding river — feared and adored in the same breath. "Demon-hearted love" tries to keep both the menace and the intimacy in a single English phrase, where a flatter "she-demon, my beloved" would tip too far toward the comic.

- রাজবালা (rajbala), "princess" — literally "king's daughter." In the poem addressed to the restless mind, this figure asleep in a hidden chamber of the heart carries a fairy-tale charge: a dormant royalty, some self or memory from an earlier existence, waiting to be startled awake by a scent of flowers.

- সজনে বিজনে (sajane bijane), "in company and in solitude" — a compact idiomatic pair (sajan, amid people; bijan, in emptiness or solitude) that Bengali

holds in two rhyming words. English has no equally tight equivalent, so the pairing had to be unpacked into a full phrase, at some cost to the original's compression.

- The recurring place-and-date signatures — Calcutta, 18th of Ashadh, 1313; Hazaribagh, 12th of Chaitra, 1309 — are, as before, kept in the Bengali calendar rather than converted, since the specific month (Chaitra's heat and mirages, in particular) is often doing real work inside the poem's imagery, not just marking when it was written.

YESTERDAY EVENING, IN THE CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

কাল যবে সন্ধ্যাকালে বন্ধুসভাতলে

Yesterday evening, in the circle of friends,
when they called on me to sing thy song,
suddenly the door of my heart swung shut —
there, where thy throne is set, my secret chamber.

Thy song wears a new face wherever it dwells:
in a companion's company, it is the burst of laughter — that too is thy song;
in the beloved's presence, the lover's murmured word;
with a child, it is play.
Wherever in this world joy holds its gathering,
there thy song is sounding, in its own strange glory,
aloud or unheard.

Stars open in the sky, flowers open in the garden,
the gem lies hidden in the mine — this is never otherwise.
So too thou thyself, wherever, whatever song
thou hast set down and kept —
let the poet, too, keep faith with its worth.

WHAT WORD I MEANT TO SPEAK

কী কথা বলিব বলে

What word I meant to speak
I stepped outside to say —
and stood before thy door;
but when, with face upturned,
I tried to speak it loud,
no words were left to say.
Whatever the heart would tell
can only rise as song.
I cannot fathom it myself,
I cannot make it known to thee,
I only stand and gaze, mine eyes grown restless with wanting.

So ask me nothing more —
only listen, half-attending,
to what thou understandest, and what thou dost not.
Beyond the evening's dark,
in this face, in this voice,
go seeking what remains unsaid.
Words can carry nothing through;
even song runs wild and cannot rest.
Yet if thou, into my melody,
shouldst pour thine own word,
my singing will not have been for nothing.

INSIDE THE BUD THE FRAGRANCE WEEPS, GONE BLIND WITH WEEPING

কুঁড়ির ভিতর কাঁদিয়ে গন্ধ অন্ধ হয়ে

Inside the bud the fragrance weeps, gone blind with weeping —
weeps within itself alone,
shut fast inside the flower's folded petals,
in a low and grieving moan.
It cries, "Alas, alas,
the hour is going, going, oh,
the hour of spring is going."
Fear not, oh fear not, fear not —
there is naught for thee to dread.
The flower will open, the binding will give way,
every longing will be fed.
Though thou shouldst spend thyself to nothing in the end,
still spring will not have fled.

Inside the bud the fragrance roams, in hope of — what? —
roams about within its own small room,
longs to break out on a restless breath
toward some errand, toward what doom.
It cries, "Alas, alas,
where shall I go, whom shall I seek, oh,
not knowing, the days consume."
Fear not, oh fear not, fear not —
there is naught for thee to dread.
The south wind has pressed its ear against the door
and learned the wish in thy heart unsaid.
If only thou dost not deceive thyself,
thy days will not have fled.

Inside the bud the restless fragrance sits and broods —
broods, forlorn, apart,
"Through whose fault has my life become
a thing so void of heart?"
It cries, "Alas, alas,
why do I live, why do I stay, oh,
I cannot read my own heart."
Fear not, oh fear not, fear not —
there is naught for thee to dread.
On that blessed morning, when with all the world
thou meet'st, and longing is fed,
that day thou shalt understand thine own true worth —
thy birth will not have been in vain.

ONLY TOWARD THY FACE, GAZING

কেবল তব মুখের পানে চাহিয়া

Only toward thy face,
gazing,
I set out in the dark of night,
rowing my small boat.
Has the dawn risen today? —
has the ashoka bloomed today? —
if it has not risen, if it has not bloomed,
still I will go rushing on,
mine eyes upon thy face.

Thou hast called me with thy glance,
in silence.

My heart, in one swift breath,
has risen, full of pride.
Has thy conch-shell sounded? —
is the golden boat arrayed? —
if it has not sounded, if it is not arrayed,
though pride should break apart in shame,
still I will go on, in silence.

I will not ask thee anything.
I will not stand, even a moment,
wavering at thy door.
The sail is bellying in the wind —
the flag today is dancing —
if it does not belly, if it does not dance,
if my boat should never touch the shore,
I will not ask thee anything.

THOU HAST STILLED THYSELF, AND SO BEHOLD, TODAY

ক্ষান্ত করিয়াছ তুমি আপনারে

Thou hast stilled thyself, and so behold, today
green grasses thrill with joy across thy flanks entire,
in webs of blossoming flowers; and the age-old forest trees
are writing, in their crowded leaves, a poem of joyful rain,
in bark, in moss, in tangled growth like a hermit's matted hair;
thy far, unreachable summit rings with the glad noise
of fearless birds. Come to thee, throngs of men and women
have built their fearless huts along thy vast breast,
upon the banks of thy mountain streams.

The day thou didst rise in fire to defy the very sky,
while the round earth trembled, to swallow up the moon and sun —
that day, O mountain, thy one companion was the end of worlds;
but the moment thou didst pause, and speak the words, "Enough, no more" —
a breath of joy came toward thee from every quarter of the earth,
and round thy stillness spread the trust of all the world.

— Jorasanko, 9 Ashadh 1310 (B.S.), circa late June 1903

FOREVER THE SAME PLAY, OH

চিরকাল একি লীলা গো

Forever the same play, oh —
this endless tumult.
To some unheard song's rhythm
thou keepest this strange, wild swing in motion.
Thou swingest, and thou settest us swinging.
One moment thou liftest us into light,
the next thou drawest us down into dark.
When we come round to the front
we laugh in delight;
when the swing turns back behind,
we drift in tears of fear.
As it is in front, so it is behind —
in vain do we make our noise.
Forever the same play, oh —
this endless tumult.

From thy right hand to thy left thou takest,
from thy left hand to thy right.

Stealing thine own wealth from thine own self —
what thou art doing, who can say.
Where dost thou sit, alone,
gathering up all the suns and moons,
playing this game, beat upon beat?
Thou openest thy hand a moment,
thou closest it a moment after —
and we, weeping, think, "what was mine,
has someone snatched it away!"
That thy giving and taking are one and the same —
that, no one understands.
From thy right hand to thy left thou takest,
from thy left hand to thy right.

So it goes on, forever, oh,
only a going, only a coming.
Through every day and night, with thine own self,
alone, thou playest at dice.
All remains as it has always been —
nothing is lost, nothing spent away,
whether one hath died, or one hath lived.
Bearing all its joy and sorrow,
this world still wears a smiling face;
with the joy of thy great play
its heart has grown full.
That same light remains, that same song remains,
that same love remains.
So it goes on, forever, oh,
only a going, only a coming.

THOU ART, O HIMACHAL, LIKE INDIA'S OWN

তুমি আছ হিমাচল ভারতের অনন্তসঞ্চিত

Thou art, O Himachal, like India's own
eternal-gathered penance, made manifest —
a hushed, world-filling bliss that seems to shiver
through thy dense and pathless solitude of thought,
in the sky-piercing self-surrender of thy stainless snows.
Thy thousand summits, arms upraised, speak out in silence
the sage's word of comfort: "Hear, O hear, all people of the earth —
I have known, I have known." That sacred Word, that rose
in bliss and light from India's vast and unplumbed heart
toward the boundless, undivided realm of the immortal,
that same Word rises now, O mountain, ringing in thy ancient stone.
Once, in this land, from forest to forest, the fire of sacrifice
strained to utter a wordless, mighty message —
and that same tongue of flame stands now, unmoving,
carved in rock, and on peak after peak some silent mantra
surges upward, still, into the smoke-grey banks of cloud.

— Jorasanko, 8 Ashadh 1310 (B.S.), circa late June 1903

HOW MANY STRINGS ARE IN THY VEENA

তোমার বীণায় কত তার আছে

How many strings are in thy veena,
how many melodies untold —
I will add my single string
to sound among them all.
Then, through every dawn and dusk,

within thy wondrous, shifting strains,
my own heart, too, will ring and ring,
and find its voice at last.
In thy music my whole spirit
will remain forever bound.

In thy stars I'll keep my small lamp
of hope alight and burning.
Into thy flowers I will pour
the whole of my desiring.
Then, through every night and morning,
amid thy strange, unfolding beauty,
my heart, too, will catch fire, will bloom,
will sway in secret joy —
and the shadow of my spirit
will fall across thy face.

(Preserved in Utsarga, 1914)

LEST I SHOULD UNDERSTAND THEE TOO EASILY

তোমাতে পাছে সহজে বুঝি

Lest I should understand thee too easily,
is that why thou dost play so many tricks of hiding —
when outward there's a burst of laughter,
inward, still, the tears remain?
I understand — oh, I understand thy
deceiving,

the word thou long'st to say,
that word thou never sayest.

Lest I should hold thee too easily,
is that why nothing of thine has any shore —
lest, drawn into the common crowd,
thou shouldst grow distant, shouldst turn away?
I understand — oh, I understand thy
deceiving,
the road thou long'st to walk,
that road thou never walkest.

Thou wantest more than anyone else could want —
is that why thou turnest back and leavest,
and with an air of careless play
settest thy beggar's bowl adrift?
I have understood, oh, I have understood thy
deceiving —
what was enough for everyone else,
in that, thou wast not satisfied.

BECAUSE I KNOW THEE, I HAVE TAKEN PRIDE

তোমায় চিনি বলে আমি করেছি গর্ব

Because I know thee, I have taken pride
among the people;
in many a guise they have beheld thee
upon my painted canvas.
Many a one comes calling out to me,

"Who is this, then?" — asking after thee —
"Who is this?"
And what do I say? No word will come;
I only answer, "Who can say! Who can say!"
Thou, hearing this, breakest into laughter; they blame me
for I know not what fault.

Many a tale of thee I have sung
in many a song.
The secret message I could never keep
hidden within my own breast.
Many a one has called to me and said,
"What thou singest — does it hold
some meaning?"
And what do I say? No word will come;
I only answer, "What meaning — who can say!"
They go off laughing; and thou sittest and smilest
thy hidden, sidelong smile.

That I do not know thee, do not recognize thee — how,
how could I say such a thing?
Moment by moment thou peerest out and lookest at me,
moment by moment thou slippest away, deceiving.
On moonlit nights, beneath the full white moon,
I have seen thy veil come sliding off,
in the blink of an eye I have caught
one glimpse of thee.
My breast has risen of a sudden, swaying,
mine eyes have grown restless for no cause I know,
I have understood — into my heart, all unannounced,
thou hast set thy foot.

Moment by moment I have longed to bind thee
with the rope of words.
Forever, in the melody of song,

I have longed to hold thee fast.
In golden rhythm I have laid my snare,
in the flute I have filled the low, soft note —
and yet the doubt still rises: hast thou,
truly, given thyself into it?
No matter — do just as thou wilt —
give not thyself, only steal my heart away —
know thee or know thee not, still let my spirit
rise up in joy.

THOU HAST INDULGED ME, O ABODE OF MERCY

দিয়েছ প্রশ্রয় মোরে, করুণানিলয়

Thou hast indulged me, O abode of mercy,
Lord, day after day thou hast indulged me still.
I wandered in my own mind, through idleness and craving,
adrift in luxury and languor, ruled by appetite,
down many paths, through many fruitless labors — yet thou,
even then, wast with me at every step, my Lord;
this I know today. That lazy vine of thought,
grown thick and tangled with abundant leaves,
had wound itself about my heart; and in its very branches
thou madest the flower of thine own remembrance bloom,
and at its hidden root, drop by secret drop,
thou pouredst thy nectar down. Through thirst and hunger,
through punishment and reward, through joy and grief and fear,
forever drawing me toward thee, still thou didst indulge me.

— 23 Falgun 1307 (B.S.), circa early March 1901

LET THOSE WHO CROWD ABOUT THY DOOR

দুয়ারে তোমার ভিড় ক'রে যারা আছে

Let those who crowd about thy door
be paid their alms and portions first.
My own petition, made to thee in private,
is this — thy servant asks for nothing more.
My begging-bowl I have already broken;
only my veena I have kept with me,
and sitting here, alone, at the road's edge,
I play upon it through the day and night.

See how many beg for dust of jewels,
how many come to beg the pomp of fame —
some wish to fill a satchel full of learning,
some will leave here dressed in borrowed eloquence.
I have brought nothing here except this veena;
from thee I ask only the mantra of a song —
with thine own hand, string on this instrument
one single golden string that is thine own.

I will do no buying, no selling, in the marketplace,
I will take no post, no labor, in the town.
I will gain nothing, and I will owe nothing,
I will spend an idle life out in the village.
Under the trees I'll sit, and soft and slow
strike out whatever rhythms come to me,
and every song I sing on thy one tuned string
will carry the deep, unstinting sound of thee.

LOOK, SEE HOW OVER THE MOUNTAIN'S CREST

দেখো চেয়ে গিরির শিরে

This last piece unfolds in five movements — a storm gathering over a mountain coast becomes the occasion for a lover's summons across lifetimes.

Look, see how over the mountain's crest
the clouds have gathered, ringing the sky —
delay no longer now.
O thief of my heart,
O tender, deep-hued one,
stand thou — let me behold thee.
Stand there, in the sky's wide lap,
stand in the swinging of my heart,
stand there, upon the green, green grass,
with the restless water of mine eyes streaming,
stand, and cover my sight,
birth after birth, age after endless age.
Come to me, gathering thick, just as thou art,
laugh thy laugh of lightning, just as thou art,
let thy hair fly loose, just as thou art.
In the dense falling rain, just as thou art,
beneath the thick, deep dark, just as thou art,
lose me — make me utterly lost.

Oh, longing for the sight of thee,
oh, begging for the touch of thee,
my heart chokes within me.
Again, again, a streak of fire
runs trembling through my soul

and goes on flashing.
Across the sky of mine own mind
a flock of wild cranes is flying,
toward what far, unknown shore beyond the sea, I cannot say.
The rain-heavy wind runs on, forlorn,
and somewhere breaks out weeping
in the trackless, gathering dark.
Oh, bring thy ferry-boat to me;
with thee I will sail out on the shoreless sea,
I will go with every bond and hindrance loosed.
In the hour of storm thy quiet smile
will come and touch me, through my whole body,
and joy will sway together with my terror.

There, where in the storm-corner of the sky
the lightning strikes again, again,
on that lonely shore —
where, beating its head against the strand,
the crowd of waves rises up in foam
at the foot of the mountain,
there, where the braided hair of cloud
is tangled with the ranks of trees,
where the coconut branches murmur,
there, like Garuda, where the mountain-range,
its head held high toward the sky,
has lifted up its wings of blue —
why does it come to my mind today
that there, once, meeting with thee,
I built a house of long, long ago —
there, even now, within the dance of storms,
in the tune of the waves, still sounds
the note of a union-song from a vanished age.

Who, oh, who is it that through all my lives
has taken my heart away,

rising now, awake, into my mind?
The old, eternal knowing between us
comes and goes today
within this young, dense cloud.
How many a beloved face's shadow
has taken shape today, in this body or in that,
scattering abroad its store of joy and sorrow —
today, as if in every direction,
mingling with the storm, there travels
the love of many, many births.
All the days that thou and I have met,
all the ages we have played across world after world —
let it come to fullness now, in this one moment.
In this single breath, thou alone,
show thyself to me across the whole wide world,
let union, at last, fill the whole of my life, today.

Gone mad, the wind has risen;
in torn and scattered clouds
the rain comes down, disordered.
I do not know, in any quarter of the sky,
what is being prepared, what purpose
covers the whole heaven.
The traveler has turned back home,
every bird has gone to its nest,
every boat lies moored at the harbor's edge.
Today, on either side of the road,
the village lies awake behind bolted doors,
today the daylight does not open its eyes.
Be still, be still, O my heart —
let this bold, unruly song fall silent,
let this swaying of my breast be still.
If, of a sudden, the door should swing open,
if, of a sudden, joy should brush my body and pass,
then lift thine eyes, and look, and see.

— Almora, 30 Baishakh 1310 (B.S.), circa mid-May 1903

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

"তুমি" and the choice of "thou." Every one of these thirteen poems turns on a single pronoun: তুমি (tumi), the intimate, respectful second person that in Bengali can address a lover, a friend, a child, a mountain, or God — often several at once, without ever settling on one. English forces a choice Bengali doesn't have to make: "you" flattens all of that ambiguity into something conversational and modern, while "thou" — archaic now, but originally the more intimate register of English, the form once used for family and for God alike — comes closer to preserving tumi's peculiar mix of closeness and reverence. This is the choice Tagore made when he rendered his own "tumi"-poems into the English Gitanjali, and it's why I've kept "thou / thee / thy" throughout rather than modernizing to "you." Given that at least one of these poems is a dedication-poem in the literal sense (see below), the "thou" does real work: it lets the same word gesture toward a real, historical dedicatee and toward something larger, without forcing the English to choose between them.

গো (go) — the untranslatable sigh. Poems 1, 6, and 13 lean on go, a small vocative particle tacked onto a line ("লীলা গো," "চিরকাল একি লীলা গো") with no direct English counterpart — not quite "oh," not quite an endearment, closer to a sung exhalation that Bengali speech, and Rabindra Sangeet especially, use constantly to soften and musicalize an address. I've generally rendered it as "oh," sometimes folding it into the line's rhythm rather than its exact position, since a mechanical "oh" in every single instance would flatten what is, in the original, closer to a catch in the voice than a word.

লীলা (leela) — play that is also the world. In poem 6, leela is usually glossed as "play" or "sport," but the Bengali carries the specific Vaishnava theological weight of creation itself as God's unmotivated, joyful activity — not a plan, not a burden, but play for its own sake, in which nothing is ultimately lost (see the poem's central image of wealth passed from the right hand to the left). "Play" is the only workable English word, but it can't carry that metaphysical charge on its own, so I've let the poem's own images — the swing, the game of dice, the right-hand-left-hand sleight of hand — do the philosophical work that leela does in a single word.

গান (gaan) — song as the highest speech. Several of these poems (2, 8, 9, 12) are, in Bengali, literally songs, and their recurring conceit is that song succeeds exactly where speech fails ("যে কথা বলিতে চাহে প্রাণ / সে শুধু হইয়া উঠে গান" — "whatever the heart would tell / can only rise as song," poem 2). It's worth flagging because it explains a real shift in register within the sequence: the densely Sanskritized poems addressed directly to a mountain (5 and 7) are formal verse, meant to be read, while the shorter, refrain-built poems are songs, meant to be sung — and I've tried to keep the songs lighter and more rhythmically driven in translation, saving the heavier, clause-stacked English for the mountain odes.

বীণা (veena). Rather than "lute" or "harp" — both of which Tagore himself sometimes used, and both closer to a general Western reader's ear — I've kept "veena," the actual North Indian stringed instrument the poems name. A specific, correctly named instrument (poems 8 and 12) does more work than a vaguer substitute, especially in poem 12, which turns on a very particular image: the poet asking God to string a single golden string onto the instrument with His own hand.

ফাগুন (Phalgun) and the seasonal calendar. Poem 3's refrain — "বেলা যায় বেলা যায় গো / ফাগুনের বেলা যায়" — names Phalgun, the last month of the Bengali year (roughly mid-February to mid-March), saturated for a Bengali reader with the specific ache of a season that is both beautiful and ending. "Spring" is the only available English word, and it necessarily loses that calendar-specific edge — I've

kept "spring" rather than importing "Phalgun" untranslated, since the poem's reassurance ("even when you are spent, spring will not have gone") depends on the word being immediately legible.

The weeping, blinded fragrance. Poem 3's central image — গন্ধ অন্ধ হয়ে কাঁদা, fragrance "gone blind" and weeping inside a still-closed bud — is a strange, deliberately disorienting synaesthesia in Bengali as much as in English (scent has no eyes to lose). It isn't a dead metaphor Tagore reached for out of habit; the strangeness is the point, standing in for a longing that hasn't yet found its object or its voice. I've translated it as literally as English allows ("gone blind with weeping") rather than smoothing it into something more conventional like "hidden" or "trapped."

The Himalaya odes' compound diction. Poems 5 and 7 — companion pieces, composed a day apart at Jorasanko — reach for a Sanskritized register almost impossible to carry over intact: অনন্তসঞ্চিত ("infinitely accumulated," poem 7) or নিষ্কলঙ্ক নীহারের অত্রভেদী আত্মবিসর্জনে ("in the sky-piercing self-surrender of stainless snow") pack, in a handful of syllables, compound images that English can only unpack across a full line or two. I've chosen to spend the extra words rather than hunt for an equally compact and inevitably paler English equivalent — a slower, more expansive line seemed truer to the density of feeling than a clipped one would be.

The right hand and the left. Poem 6's image of the cosmic self playing with its own wealth — ডান হাত হতে বাম হাতে লও, বাম হাত হতে ডানে ("from the right hand to the left you take, from the left hand to the right") — is vernacular Bengali idiom, the kind of thing said of someone who "loses" money only into their own other pocket, elevated here into a description of divine play, where all apparent loss is really motion within a single, undivided whole. I've kept the image completely literal, trusting that the same domestic, faintly comic picture works the same way in English.

Rhyme, or the deliberate absence of it. Almost every one of these thirteen originals is tightly rhymed and metrically regular in Bengali — several are songs with fixed melodic lines. I haven't tried to reproduce that rhyme in English. This isn't a failure of nerve so much as a choice Tagore made himself: his own English versions of his lyrics almost never rhyme, trading the original's music for a cadenced, unrhymed free verse that keeps the sense and the breath-rhythm intact without forcing English words into the sing-song shapes end-rhyme tends to impose. A forced rhyme chasing the Bengali's would have cost more meaning than it preserved.

INCENSE LONGS TO MELT ITSELF IN FRAGRANCE

Incense longs to melt itself away in fragrance,
and fragrance longs to stay bound close within the incense.
The tune longs to surrender itself into rhythm,
and rhythm longs to turn back and hasten to the tune.

Feeling longs for a body amid form,
and form longs to be set free within feeling.
The boundless longs for the deep embrace of the bounded,
and the bounded longs to be lost inside the boundless.

In destruction, in creation, I cannot say whose reasoning this is —
only this endless passing back and forth, between feeling and form.
The bound one wanders, searching for its own freedom,
and freedom begs for a home inside the bonds.

Note: The poem turns on *bhāb* (essence, inner feeling) and *rūp* (outward form) — a pairing from Bengali aesthetic and devotional thought that no single English word quite covers. The final line's verb, *māgichhe* ("begs," a humble, supplicating

word), is the poem's real surprise: freedom doesn't simply escape bondage, it pleads for a home within it. I kept that startling humility rather than softening it to something like "seeks."

A NEW YEAR'S VOW

In this new year I make a vow —
I will take initiation from my own land,
in your hermitage, at your feet,
O Bharat, I will learn my lesson.
Others' ornaments, others' garments,
I will renounce today, and others' food;
if I become poor, I will not become base,
I will give up begging from others.
In this new year I make a vow —
I will take initiation from my own land.

If there's no palace, there is still the cottage,
sanctified by grace.
If there's no city, there is still your forest,
wondrous with fruit and flower.
The farther I drifted away from you,
the smaller I saw you become;
now, seen close, O king of my heart,
you are an old, familiar friend.
O ascetic, your leaf-thatched hut
is sanctified by grace.

Following others' words, I became a stranger to you —
I have given shame and received it.
Trying to forget you, I turned my face away,
and dressed myself in others' finery.

Yet you count nothing against me, say nothing,
you go on murmuring your mantra, dwelling within me —
your eternal seat of meditation
is in the very marrow of my bones.
Following others' talk, trying to forget you,
I have given shame and received it.

All that shame I will renounce today,
I will take your initiation.
Sitting alone at your feet
I will learn your teaching.
Your righteousness, your labor,
the deep meaning at the heart of your mantra —
I will take these up, forgetting everything else,
giving up begging from others.
In your glory I will find my pride,
I will take your initiation.

Note: Bhārat (India) is addressed throughout as a guru — the poem borrows the vocabulary of religious dīkṣā (initiation) and applies it to national self-reliance, written in the Swadeshi-era spirit of turning from foreign goods and foreign manners ("others' ornaments... others' garments") back to one's own soil. "Dīkṣā" itself resists translation — it's not just "teaching" but formal admission into a discipleship — so I let "initiation" carry it and used "lesson"/"teaching" for its softer echoes elsewhere in the poem.

I DO NOT KNOW WHOM I HAVE SEEN

I do not know whom I have seen,
whose face it was I glimpsed.
This morning I received a letter from that one.
Because I received it, I am happy —

I have this joy —
and I will show it to no one.
I do not know how to read writing —
I do not understand what message it holds —
whatever is there, let it stay, let it remain mine.
Because of this joy, today
a flute has risen on the wind, playing,
and in this joy my soul sings out, "Ah!"

There is a scholar somewhere,
I have heard that he
can read out all sorts of writings.
I will not go to him,
I do not know him,
let him keep his heap of old manuscripts.
Hearing his words I would find no direction,
how would I know if he understood it rightly —
I would fall into great confusion, full of doubt.
Better, this letter of mine —
sometimes I will hold it to my head,
sometimes tenderly lift it into my lap.

When the night, grown dark,
gathers close on every side,
when the planets and stars rise into the sky,
I will hold the letter open
sitting at my door,
unblinking, lost in delight —
then the river will flow on,
singing whatever is written there,
the leaves of the forest will sing the letter's song —
from the sky the seven sages
will sing, piercing the deep night,
this secret ballad, in a profound melody.

Understanding or not — what harm is there,
let me remain simple, unknowing.
What I have received, who can snatch it away?
What stays through night and day
will remain mine —
this treasure of the heart will never leave the heart.
When I go searching, I search in vain,
when I try to understand, I understand it wrong,
when I wander about, I put the near thing far.
This letter of mine, not understood,
has drawn away the burden of my soul,
and set a melody running through every song.

— Hazaribagh, 11 Chaitra, 1309

Note: The poem is a parable of faith versus scholarship — the paṇḍit who can "read" is refused in favor of an illiterate, wordless certainty. Saptaṛṣi, "the seven sages," refers to the constellation of the Great Bear as much as to legendary Vedic seers, so the sky itself is imagined joining the song. I translated it literally as "the seven sages" to preserve that double meaning, which "the Great Bear" alone would lose.

WANDERING, SINGING THROUGH MANY LANDS

I wander, singing many songs, through many lands;
seeing this wildness of mine, an old man comes and says,
"Being His servant, what is this frivolity of yours?
Why this laughter and jesting, this talk of love,
why do you wander door to door with trifling songs,
beguiling a thousand idle souls of this world?"

I gave him this answer: "O white-haired one,
it is His command that sounds through my lyre.
With whatever joy, whatever endless ache of the heart,
the human soul rings out — that very tune
He has given to my lyre — it is His gift.
I have no power to ruin that wondrous song.
I have no strength to keep your command instead;
I have no power to go against His command."

Note: A short dialogue-poem defending the poet's freedom against pious scolding. The old man's chapalatā ("frivolity," "fickleness") is a word of moral rebuke in Bengali devotional contexts; the poet's reply reframes love-songs and laughter themselves as divine "command" (ādes̥h), collapsing the line between the sacred and the playful — a very characteristic Tagore move.

YOU HAVE MADE ME A TRAVELER OF THE ROAD

You have made me a traveler of the road —
that is well, oh, that is well.
You have lit a will-o'-the-wisp across the wasteland —
that is my light, that is my light.
The ferry-boat was moored at the landing,
did you sink even that, by some trick?
I shall swim across, bearing my own burden —
that is well, my own, that is well.

You have thrown me into the mouth of the storm —
that is well, oh, that is well.
Into every net of happiness you struck lightning —
that is my light, that is my light.

The companion I had, you have snatched away —
what terror you set loose, that made them leave —
alone now I shall walk this world's road —
that is well, my own, that is well.

You have kept no honor of mine intact —
that is well, oh, that is well.

The fire that burns beneath my heart —
that is my light, that is my light.

The few coins I had for the journey
fell from me somewhere along the way, unnoticed —
only my own strength remains my provision —
that is well, my own, that is well.

Note: The refrain "সেই ভালো" ("that is well/good") is deceptively simple — it's not resignation but a kind of defiant gratitude, closer to "so be it, and I am glad of it." The poem strips the speaker of ferry, companion, honor, and coin, one by one, each loss answered with the same phrase; I kept the refrain nearly identical each time, as the Bengali does, letting the repetition itself carry the poem's stubborn courage.

MAD, I WANDER FROM FOREST TO FOREST

Gone mad, I wander from forest to forest,
chasing my own scent,
like the musk deer.
In the Falgun night, in the southern wind,
I cannot find which way to turn.
What I want, I want by mistake,
what I find, I do not want.

Having gone out from my own breast,
my own desire
returns to me like a mirage.
I open my arms to gather it to my chest,
but find it not, back at my own chest.
What I want, I want by mistake,
what I find, I do not want.

My flute seems to long
to bind and hold its own song,
restless as a madman.
But within whatever it binds and holds,
it can no longer find that melody.
What I want, I want by mistake,
what I find, I do not want.

Note: The central image — the musk deer (kastūrīmṛga) driven wild by a scent that is its own, not knowing the musk lies within its own body — is a classical Indian figure for the soul's search for a God or truth that is already inside it. "Falgun," the Bengali spring month associated with restlessness and desire, has no real English equivalent, so I kept the name rather than substitute "spring," to preserve its specific, almost feverish connotation in Bengali poetry.

DO NOT LOOK FOR ME OUTSIDE

Do not look at me like this, from outside,
do not look for me on the outside.
You will not find me in my sorrow or my joy,
do not search for my pain within my breast,
you will not be able to see me in my face —
wherever you search for the poet, he is not there.

That which sounds in the clamor from sea to sea,
that rushes in thunder amid the storm,
that reigns in silent resonance across the midnight sky,
spreading its seat from darkness on to darkness —
that same I am; and here, in this human dwelling-place,
I have sounded out in joy, in sorrow, in shame and fear,
I roar and rush on through triumph and defeat,
intoxicated in vast rhythm, in a boundless resonance.

The fragrance that trembles near the heart of a flower,
the song that lies sleeping in the morning light,
the glow that dances faintly on the autumn rice-fields,
laughing in gold and green, ray upon ray —
that very fragrance has shaped my body,
that song composes new enchantment within me,
that glow has cast its shadow into my eyes —
who, then, can hold me within myself?

In the forest of humankind I raise an inward strain,
in the woodland of youth I scatter flower-dust,
the melodies asleep in the cave of the heart
shiver and wake at my touch.
I dwell in the young dawn's fresh crimson,
opening delighted eyes at the edge of the sky,
in the silent dusk, wrapped in a tender glow,
I remain, clinging to the crest of the human heart.

When tears fall from your eyes,
I string them together into the sound of song;
the word a shy heart dares not speak,
I speak, hidden within a melody.
I do not know on what wings I fly,
I play, I beguile, I rock, I make the bud unfold,
from where, and what fragrance, I have stolen —
I can tell no one the secret of its trace.

That self who moves in secret, a dream-shaped form,
that self who cannot understand or explain myself,
who loses myself before my own song —
that self is the poet. Who can ever hold me?
The one bound in human form, within a house,
who lies prostrate under the weight of every passing moment,
whom the fever of praise and blame sets trembling —
in that one's life-story, you will not find the poet.

Note: This is Tagore's fullest statement of a recurring idea — that the poet's true self is not the biographical, suffering man but an impersonal cosmic force moving through nature and song. I translated kabi consistently as "the poet" rather than "I," even where the grammar allows either, to preserve the poem's key move in the last stanza: the speaker splits himself in two, and watches the ordinary, praise-and-blame-shaken man from outside, denying that this man is where "the poet" can be found.

THE LYRE OF REUNION

Lyre of reunion, after a year of separation,
why did you not sound out in that same wild, ecstatic strain?
Why did your seven notes not rush upward
toward the seven heavens, on a reckless soul,
like a wild goose journeying with the mind, toward spring?
Why did all your strings, struck with full force,
trembling, weeping, in a mingled ringing,
not rise up sounding, the heart driven mad
with joy's own cry of anguish? Why, instead,
murmuring low, sighing in a faint, defeated voice,
did you fall silent, full of shyness and fear?
Is it, then, that my beloved

has forgotten that old skill of touch?
Or is it that my own lyre, its strings grown dusty,
no longer sounds as it did in those days?

— Shilaidaha, 21 Ashadh, 1303

Note: Balākā — the wild goose or crane in flight — is one of Tagore's great recurring symbols of restless longing (he later used it as the title of an entire collection). Here it appears as a single simile for the soul's flight toward reunion that fails to happen. The poem's real ache is in its final, unresolved question — is the fault in the beloved's forgetting, or in the poet's own instrument grown "dusty"? — which I kept open rather than resolving either way.

TO THE HIMALAYA

The ocean of India breathes its vapor-sigh into the sky,
drinking in light, in the languid southern wind,
like some inexpressible, unspoken passion of joy.
O Himalaya of upraised arms, you are that lifted cloud —
in peak after peak, in cave after shadowed cave,
you hold it contained — only to release it again in an open stream,
returning it, in a new tide of joy, in fresh life,
to the heart of that great ocean, still restless with its boundless questioning.
In just this way, the ocean-heart of India, all this long while,
has uttered upward a vast and singing word,
which, touched by the light of the eternal, gave itself back to the eternal —
and this you have kept in store, O mountain of snow, with your silent, still head.
It is in your hushed summits, therefore, that I go searching
for the true face of India — in the peace, the auspicious, the oneness beyond
duality.

— Jorasanko, 9 Ashadh, 1310

Note: The poem builds an extended conceit: sea-vapor rises to become the cloud that crowns the Himalaya, then falls again as rivers back to the sea — and this physical cycle becomes an image for India's spiritual thought, rising from the "ocean" of the people's heart to the Himalaya's contemplative silence, and returning again renewed. The closing phrase, śānta-śiva-advaita — "the peaceful, the auspicious, the non-dual" — is a compressed formula from Vedantic philosophy; I unpacked it slightly ("peace, the auspicious, the oneness beyond duality") rather than leave it as bare Sanskrit terms an English reader couldn't unpack.

TO ACHARYA JAGADISH

You are the youthful form of some ancient sage of India,
O Acharya Jagadish. What unseen ground of penance
have you built beneath the dry dust of this city of stone?
Where did you find that peace, amid this frenzied clamor of people,
sunk into which, you stood alone, for a moment,
at the very center of the universe — that place where alone reigns
the sun and moon, flower and leaf, beast and bird, dust and stone —
one sleepless life, forever, on its own lap,
rocking all creation with a silent music. While we
lay drunk on the far, barren glory of the past —
in others' clothing, others' words, the mocking shape of others' gestures,
raising our clamor with swollen throats in a narrow, dark well —
you were somewhere far away. Where had you spread
your own still seat of meditation? With a mind made calm and grave
you remained absorbed in penance, in the search for the formless ray,
hidden behind all worlds and beyond all worlds — where the ancient sages
once flung open the great gate of multiplicity, and, meeting the One,
stood speechless, astonished, transfixed, hands folded.
O ascetic, call out now, in the chant of the Sama, with the roar of rain-clouds,

"Arise, awake!" — call to those people who are proud in their scriptures
away from the barren disputes of learning. Across this vast plane of the world
call to the foolish and the arrogant. Call together your circle of disciples,
let them stand as one, encircling your sacrificial fire.
Let this India come back once more into itself,
in devotion, in reverence, in meditation — let it sit, its mind unclouded,
free of greed, free of conflict, at the pure, calm altar of the Guru.

Note: Addressed to Jagadish Chandra Bose, the physicist and plant-scientist, cast
here as a rishi whose scientific "penance" (tapasyā) is continuous with the ancient
seers' spiritual search — dissolving the line between laboratory and meditation-
seat. The line "uttiṣṭhata nibodhata" ("Arise, awake") directly echoes the Katha
Upanishad's famous call; I left it in English translation rather than transliteration,
since the phrase functions in the poem as a battle-cry, not a quotation to be
recognized only by Sanskrit readers.

WHERE DOES THE MORNING BIRD CALL

Where does the morning bird call?
The morning bird is calling.
Before morning has even come,
how does it keep the morning's news?
Even now the dark night
lies wrapped around every direction,
in a thousand, a hundred thousand coils
of its black-striped tail.
Somewhere in a corner of the sleeping forest,
the bird is calling.

O you, morning bird,
little bird of the morning,
by what hint of dawn's red light

have you opened your eyes?
Upon your soft wings
lie golden lines, layer on layer;
tied to your wing
is the crimson charm-thread of dawn.
O you, morning bird,
little bird of the morning.

There stands a banyan, its hundred hanging roots
trailing down to sweep the earth,
leaf upon crowding leaf
swelling and blossoming.
On some branch, in some corner of it,
to the cricket's sleepless call,
your neck bent, you had been sleeping,
your face tucked beneath your wing —
there where the banyan stands alone,
its roots sweeping the ground.

O simple bird of morning,
tell me, tell me —
in a night doubly wrapped in shadow,
while you lie there sleeping,
how does it suddenly reach
your nest,
that messenger of light,
coming down the path of darkness from the sky?
O simple bird of morning,
tell me, tell me!

Beneath your soft breast
the blood leaps up dancing,
a thrill of delight wakes
in the fold of your wings, at the thought of flight.
Opening your eyes toward the east,

in a fresh song broken loose from sleep,
your unhesitating voice
rushes out like a spring.
Beneath your soft breast
the blood leaps up dancing.

In the midst of so much darkness,
you carry such unwavering certainty!
Not one soul in all the world
believes you.
Yet you call out, "Stand ready on the road —
the sun is coming in his chariot of gold —
it is not night, it is not night,
it is not, not night!"
In the midst of so much darkness,
you carry such unwavering certainty!

Wake today in joy,
wake in joy.
Listen, the morning bird is calling —
this is no time now for slumber.
Let the first light fall upon your head,
upon eyelids just broken from sleep,
and beg the blessing
of the radiant goddess of dawn.
Listen, the morning bird is singing there —
wake in joy.

— Hazaribagh, 11 Chaitra, 1309

Note: A hymn to unreasoning hope — the bird sings certainty of dawn while the night is still visibly, physically wrapped around everything ("a thousand coils of its black-striped tail," an image of night as a great dark serpent). I rendered *asamśay* ("without doubt/hesitation") as "unwavering certainty," since the poem's whole

argument is that the bird's faith precedes and outruns any evidence — a small bird's conviction against a world that "believes" it not at all.

THE RAKHI

That sacred, consecrated,
red-dyed rakhi thread
I once tied about your wrist —
is it still there with you today?
The hour of parting came, spreading like a cloud,
and my two hands trembled as they tied the knot;
from that day, again and again, my two eyes
have brimmed and overflowed with streams of tears.
Today I sit by the side of the road,
lost in the thick mango-blossom of this honeyed month,
and only this small, trivial thought comes to mind,
like a bee that has lost its way —
that one slender rakhi on your left wrist,
half crimson, half gold —
is it still tied there today?

I do not know at all
how far that road runs,
to what far edge of the fields it goes,
into what land of the Chaitra harvest.
When you went away, at the nape of your neck
your long braid had come loose and hung open,
a garland strung of some evening flower
had slipped loose and fallen at your feet.
If only you had paused there a moment!
See how the grove bursts fresh with new blossoms —
I would have quickly strung you a new garland

in the shade of the champak trees.
As you went along the field-path, did your garland
slip loose and fall from your braid?
Today I sit and wonder just this.

There were anklets in the house,
you went away wearing them on your feet —
that much, at least, you took from here,
nothing else adorns you now.
In a restless jingling, with a hundred little tongues,
they weep around your feet in tenderness,
and with the pain of this parting, from here,
they fill your road with sound.
I do not know what haste was upon you then,
that you never once wore an ornament for your hair —
I would have found and brought you a lovely parting-jewel —
that wish is left only in my mind.
Those two anklets, carelessly tied about your feet —
are they still there, or have they come loose along the way?
That is what I sit and wonder, beneath the tree.

Many a song
I have brought to its end,
across many mornings and evenings,
across many hours of leisure and of work.
Carrying only half of its last song in your ear,
you went off along the long road, toward some far place,
in a half-known tune, a half-forgotten strain,
you went humming under your breath.
Why did you not stay to hear one song more —
a song that was yours alone, no one else's —
but you too went away, for its time too had come,
it bloomed for your worship, and no other's.
Somewhere out in the fields the last note was lost,
the song that you carried away in the end —

that is what I sit and wonder, unblinking.

— Hazaribagh, 10 Chaitra, 1309

Note: Rākhī is the protective thread tied at the wrist — most familiar today as a sibling festival, but here doing double duty as a token of parting between the speaker and someone unnamed (a daughter, a young woman leaving for marriage, is the traditional reading). The poem never states the relationship directly, working instead entirely through small physical details — a loosened braid, a dropped garland, anklets still worn — which is where its tenderness actually lives; I kept those objects as plain and concrete in English as they are in Bengali, resisting any temptation to explain the relationship the poem itself leaves unspoken.

I HAVE SOME WEALTH IN THIS WORLD

I have some wealth here in this world,
all the rest of my wealth lies in dream,
in secret, hidden dream.
O, where are you, beyond all my hoping,
O, where are you, startling at a touch,
where are you, wanderer of dreams?
Come, come, in deep secrecy,
come with a close and silent step,
your veil shielding the lamp's flame,
come in secret.
I have some wealth here in this world,
all the rest lies in dream,
in secret, hidden dream.

Do not come by the great highway,
that road is filled with light,

with too fierce a light.
Unknown to all, O my stranger from afar,
let no neighbor catch sight of you,
O my wanderer of dreams.
I shall know you by the thrill of my own life,
I shall know you in the glance of tear-filled eyes,
I shall know you, gazing on you alone, in solitude,
in utmost delight.
Come through the shadow-fall of twilight,
do not come by the road's light,
the too fierce light.

Note: Svapna-bihārī — "wanderer of dreams" or "one who roves in dream" — is the poem's central, untranslatable epithet for its addressee: not quite a person, not quite a vision, but a presence that only exists in the "secret, hidden dream" (nibhṛta svapan) rather than in daylight. The poem's whole tension is between the "fierce light" of the public road and the "shadow-fall of twilight" it begs its visitor to come by instead — I kept "fierce" for prakhar rather than a gentler word like "bright," since the Bengali specifically marks that light as harsh, almost hostile to this kind of intimacy.

IF YOU WISH, WITH A GLANCE, O WOMAN

If you wish, then with a single glance, O woman,
you could snatch away the poet's wondrous song
and lay it at your own feet; yet you, enchanted,
stay lost instead in the small music of your own house.
You have no ear for praise, and so I praise you;
that is why I am your devotee, O flawless beauty.
The world worships you, though you, knowing it, do not know it;
like a devoted handmaid, you offer your worship instead
to some unfamous, beloved person. With that same hand

that could touch a king's own majesty and make it
doubly magnificent, that lovely hand of yours
sweeps the dust, instead, from your own house.
That, truly, is your glory, that is your grandeur —
sweeter than every sweetness, that very sweetness.

Note: The poem's turn is in bhakta-dāsī-sam — "like a devoted handmaid" — a deliberately humble simile for a woman the poet has just called anindya-sundarī, "flawless beauty," worshipped (he says) by the whole world. Tagore is praising domestic, unrecognized devotion as a higher glory than fame; I kept "grandeur"/"glory" (mahimā/garimā) as near-synonyms doubled, the way the Bengali doubles them, rather than collapsing them into one English word.

I KEPT WATCH ALONE AT THE SICKBED THAT NIGHT

I had kept watch alone through the night, at the sickbed's head,
and came out to stand outside for a moment.
Over the sleeping rooftops of the calm and silent city
I saw the stars burning in the hushed dark.
Past, future, present — in a single instant
they came together, in a joy tender with sorrow,
deep within me; and in that inexpressible
moment, all that was dear in this life,
all its rare and hard-won griefs, all its vanished joys,
its unshed mist of tears, its songs kept silent, unspoken —
gathered into a great mass in the vessel of my heart,
and caught fire with what flame I cannot say. Breathing out in fragrance,
a strange, rare smoke of incense rose, slow and quiet,
into your star-bright, wordless temple.

Note: A single unbroken sentence in the original, building through clause after clause until it resolves in the closing image of the night sky as a "silent temple" and the speaker's grief and joy as incense burned before it. Biṣād-snigdha — literally "sorrow-tender" or "grief-gentle" — is a compound with no ready English equivalent; I rendered it as "a joy tender with sorrow" to keep both halves alive rather than choosing one mood over the other.

MY MIND WAS EMPTY

My mind was empty,
like a day
covered over with many a clamor,
etched with many a comings and goings.
Empty of many a crowd,
unaware in its labor,
my mind was empty.

I do not know when it came, that anklet-less,
soundless twilight.
I did not see what golden line
the brush of day's end
wrote as its final word.
That I was alone —
even that I had forgotten.
Twilight came.

Just then, like a wonder out of the sky,
from some unknown heaven,
carrying the moon and smiling,
the bright evening came floating
on the current of darkness.
Perhaps it merges of itself

in its own light —
from where, I do not know, it came.

Suddenly, with the delight of a blossoming flower,
I raised my eyes.
There was no one else, anywhere,
it had come only to my place,
alone.
So it stood there before me,
holding its unblinking eyes
upon my face.

A royal swan had come, in some age long past —
I have heard it in old legend.
Damayanti, at the flowerbed's edge,
pouring water from a golden pitcher
in her bower of vines —
whose word, in just such a moment,
it whispered into her ear —
I have heard it in old legend.

Just like that swan, this moonlit evening, gliding across the sky,
came to my breast.
What letter from what far, foreign land
does it carry
in its wordless face?
Out of whose eagerness,
in what delight of union,
has it come to my breast?

Two white wings encircled me,
through my whole body, into my heart.
Resting its head upon my shoulder
it remained still, motionless,
speaking not a word.

Bearing the softness
of what lotus-grove
did it enter my heart?

I understood nothing else, I understood only this —
that I am alone.

This alone I came to know —
I do not know the name
of the one whose letter this is.
This alone I understood —
if I never see them,
I will remain alone.

In vain, in vain pass these days and nights,
this life of mine!
Alas, alas, forever
this whole wide world
has remained without meaning.
Bearing the debt
of an endless love,
this life goes on in vain.

O messenger from some far dwelling, O wordless one,
O serene and beautiful one,
gazing into your face
I wonder, my soul enchanted,
what answer I should give.
Tears come to my two eyes,
my heart falls speechless,
O serene and beautiful one.

Note: Godhūli — the hour I've translated simply as "twilight" — literally means "cow-dust," the specific dusk hour when returning cattle raise dust on the village road; Bengali poetry uses it constantly for evening's soft, particular light, which plain "twilight" in English can't quite carry, so I've flagged it here instead of

forcing an awkward literal image into the verse. The swan (rājahansa) alludes to the Nala–Damayanti story from the Mahabharata, in which a golden swan carries messages of love between the two before they ever meet — Tagore's speaker casts the moonlit evening itself as that same swan, arriving with an unreadable message from an unknown sender.

I HAVE A HOME EVERYWHERE

I have a home in every place, and I
wander, dying to find that home.
I have my country in every land, and I
shall win that country by struggle.
A stranger, wherever door I look upon —
within it, it seems, some place of mine exists;
by what way I may enter there,
I shall search out and understand.
In every house there dwells my dearest kin,
and I go wandering, searching for them.

Again and again, in each new spring,
when the flower-fragrance fills the sky,
my heart wanders weeping, without union,
even in union's own blessed hour.
Those who are truly mine, on every side,
I have not been able to make my own;
they keep waking, night and day, within my heart,
a thick, unceasing pain of separation.
Even those close beside me — losing them still,
my soul wanders the whole sky through.

The earth, thrilled through with grass,
lies stretched out before me —

why it calls to me in this way,
how could I ever say?
It seems as though, beneath that dust,
age after age, I lay, in grass, in water,
and once, opening that door, by some strange chance,
I stepped outside to wander.
That same mute earth, gazing into my face,
lies stretched out before me.

The night sky — in what strange way
does it look toward me?
The stars, a hundred thousand leagues away,
seem to know my very name.
In whatever language they whisper to one another,
what power have I now to recall it;
what long-forgotten word, from the beginning of all days,
does it call back to my mind?
My friend, from a dawn without beginning,
looks toward me still.

In this seven-chambered mansion of mine,
in this homestead of all my lives,
on land and in water I am bound
by a thousand knots, tied knot upon knot.
And yet, alas, again and again I forget,
and coming to some far place, I long to build a home —
as though this home already bound to me
could not itself satisfy that same longing for home.
Why, then, do I wander like an exile, alas,
through this homestead of all my lives?

If I could truly know, if I could come to understand,
I would call even the dust my own.
Among all things, the small, the great, the lowly,
I would set the dwelling of my heart.

If I become soil, if I become water,
if I become grass, if I become flower and fruit,
if I wander this earth alongside every living thing,
there is nothing in that to fear.
Wherever I go, there, bound in boundless bonds,
I remain endlessly my own.

In this vast universe, from every side,
every single particle draws me in.
At my door the whole of creation
knocks with a hundred million hands.
O earth, what do you want of me?
Do you, water, stretch out your two arms for me?
The wind, entering my breast with every breath,
brings an eternal summons.
Those I think of as strangers, again and again,
all of them are drawing me toward them.

There is love, love, in every grain of dust,
there is joy in the whole creation.
It is only falsehood that surrounds you, if you look
on some small particle as trifling.
Every atom, every speck of this world
carries within itself, unmoving, silent,
one everlasting glory —
and if you have not learned this truth,
then in life and in death, in fear upon fear,
you will wander this whole world as an exile.

With the dust, I will remain dust,
at the feet of that same glory.
Among the flowers, I will become a flower's petal,
in the choosing of His worship-rite.
Wherever I go, wherever I look,
there is not a single point outside of Him,

there is no exile anywhere, none, none,
through birth after birth, through death.
Whatever I am, that I will remain,
at the feet of that same glory.

Blessed am I, through all eternity,
blessed is my earth.
Blessed is this soil, blessed the far-off
stars of golden hue.
Wherever I am, I am at His door,
I do not know why anyone speaks of salvation.
On His shore, in His boundless ocean,
sails the vast ship of the universe.
Whatever I have become, blessed I have become,
blessed is this earth of mine.

— 3 Falgun, 1307

Note: The whole poem turns on probāsī — "one who lives away from home," an exile or expatriate — which appears again and again as the condition the poet is trying to argue himself out of. His resolution is thoroughly monist: since everything in the universe (dust, stars, grass, strangers) is ultimately not-other than the self, there can be no true exile anywhere, "in life and in death" (jīvane maraṇe). I translated dhoraṇī/dharaṇī consistently as "earth," and let the capitalized "He" stand in for the poem's unnamed divine presence (never given a name in the Bengali either — only "His door," "His shore"), since supplying a name would resolve an ambiguity Tagore leaves open.

THE BATTLE IS OVER

The battle is over now.
After much struggle, much searching,
the long labor has come to its end.

Come, come, O woman,
bring your golden pitcher.
Wash away, wipe clean, every trace of dust,
mend together what is broken, what is torn,
make beautiful, make worthwhile
this heaped and gathered labor.
Come, beautiful woman,
bearing the golden pitcher upon your head.

No one remains now at the marketplace.
The play is ended, I have left the fairground,
and built a home here in the village.
Come, come, O woman,
bring the water of pilgrimage.
With a moon-face gently smiling,
a dot of vermilion drawn upon your parting,
make blessed, make worthwhile,
this empty house of mine.
Come, gracious woman,
carrying the water of pilgrimage.

The hours go on lengthening.
No one looks, in the fierce heat of the sun,
toward the wandering, homeless traveler.
Come, come, O woman,
bring your nectar-water.
Sound your spotless conch,
shaped as though of a hundred moons,
and welcoming him, make worthwhile
this wandering, homeless traveler.
O woman full of joy,
bring your nectar-water.

The raft has been set afloat upon the current.
For this time, the day has passed,

and the hour of farewell has come.
Come, come, O woman,
bring the water of tears.
Let your moist and grieving gaze
rain down its mercy upon the road,
let the touch of your restless arms
bless this hour of parting.
O sorrowing woman,
bring the water of tears.

The night is dark now.
The house lies desolate, the bed lies empty,
and the worship-lamp burns alone.
Come, come, O woman,
bring the water of libation.
Baring your grieving breast without restraint,
open the secret chamber of your heart,
with hair let loose, in garments white,
kindle the worship-lamp.
Come, ascetic woman,
bring the water of libation.

Note: The poem's architecture is in its five vessels — a golden pitcher, pilgrimage-water, nectar-water, tear-water, and finally tarpaṇ-water (the water used in Hindu rites for the dead). Each names a different water the "woman" carries, and each corresponds to a life-stage: youth after struggle, home-building, the heat of midday hospitality, a farewell, and finally death itself, with the woman transformed by the last stanza into a white-clad ascetic tending a funeral lamp. I kept "woman" (nārī) undefined throughout, as Tagore does — she is never named as wife, mother, or goddess, but shifts through all these roles as the poem moves toward its dark close.

THAT WAS THE STORY OF THAT DAY

That, indeed, was the story of that day, when, wordless,
I came into this world like one arriving in exile,
without any identity, with empty, destitute hands,
carrying only weeping as my one possession.
Today, I do not know how the love of human beings
draws out, from my very throat, all these songs of mine.
In this world you have taken up so small a place
in my heart, O Lord of the world. Yet this whole life
you have filled with the world entire. At your feet,
each day, in ever new songs bound to rhythm,
I offer my handful of flowers, and this too, when your worship ends,
everyone will take up, loving me, together with you —
this one hope stays unbroken in my mind.
In whatever exile you keep me, keep me bound there in love.

In ever new exiles, in ever new worlds,
you will bind me in this same love. In love's own light
I shall unfold, world after world,
in ever new petals; and by love's own pull,
whatever hidden honey plays within me
will rise up undiminished, in ever new savors,
and rush out into the open — with a life without end,
called by your love across the whole creation,
I shall leave behind the fragrance of ever new lives,
I shall paint the color of ever new unfoldings.
Who would wish, in some narrow, blind well of immortality,
to go on living, confined to a single earth,
in one form only? Along ever new paths of death
I shall go on, world after world, to worship you.

Note: Probāsī — "one living away from home," the same word that ran through the earth-and-exile poem in the previous set — reappears here in its most radical

form: rather than resolving the exile, the poet embraces endless exile, endless rebirth, as the very shape his worship should take. The closing line is the poem's boldest move: "along ever new paths of death I shall go on to worship you" treats dying itself, repeated infinitely, as preferable to a single changeless immortality — I kept "narrow, blind well" for saṅkīrṇa andha amaratā-kūp exactly as compound and claustrophobic as the Bengali makes it.

DID YOU COME THAT DAY

Was it you who came that day, oh,
was it you, in my gathering?
There was a flute in your hand,
a wondering smile on your lips,
that day when Falgun rose up wild
in a splendor drunk with abandon.
Was it you, oh, was it you who came
that day, in the fresh morning —
in that gathering of new youth?

Whatever work I had that day,
you made me forget it all.
What game did you play,
where did the hours slip away —
wave upon wave, within my heart
you set a red lotus swaying.
Across my thrilled soul
you passed your restless, wandering eyes,
and made me forget all my work.

After that, alas, I do not know when
sleep came upon my eyes.
When I rose up, awake,

clouds had covered the sky,
and I lay alone beneath a tree,
on a bed of crushed and fallen leaves.
While you and I had been together,
gathering flowers in the grove,
sleep had come upon my eyes.

That day's whole gathering has broken apart now,
today, in the pouring, rushing rain.
There is no one left on the road,
I have shut fast my door,
my soul lies alone, stretched upon the ground,
in this Bhadra month now brimming full.
Is it you who has struck upon my door —
with what tenderness shall I receive you,
today, in this pouring, rushing rain?

So you have come, smeared grey with ash,
wearing the form of an ascetic.
Your dimmed, weary eyes
still flicker like smoldering fire,
and from your matted, drenched hair
water falls, dripping down.
From outside, you have brought with you
the darkness of the storm,
wearing the form of an ascetic.

I bow to you, O terrible, silent, empty one,
come into my broken dwelling.
On your brow, the mark of ash
looks like a streak of fire,
in your hand, an iron staff
rings against an iron ring.
Do not go back empty-handed, O guest,
without taking all that is mine.

Come, come, into my broken house.

Note: The poem's turn happens between its fourth and fifth stanzas, where the same visitor who arrived in spring (Fāgun) with a flute and a smile — an unmistakably Krishna-like figure — returns, unrecognized at first, as a tapasmūrti, an ash-smeared ascetic with matted hair and an iron staff (imagery drawn from depictions of Shiva). I preserved the visitor as ungendered and unnamed throughout, as the Bengali does through its verb forms, since the poem's power depends on the reader not being sure, until the ash and the iron staff appear, that the two visitations are the same being wearing two faces of love — one playful, one terrible.

ALAS, IF NOT THE SKY

"Alas, if not the sky, then who could ever hold you?
O sun, I only dream of you — I have no power to serve you."
So the dewdrop spoke, weeping,
"I have no strength, O sun,
to hold you bound to me.
Without you, this small life of mine
is nothing but a drop of tears."

"With my vast light I fill the whole world with radiance,
and yet, to a single drop of dew, I can still give myself,
I am still able to love it."
Coming into the dewdrop's own heart,
the sun spoke, smiling,
"Grown small, I will stay and fill you through,
I will shape this brief life of yours
into the very likeness of a smile."

Note: A small fable built on a single physical fact — that a dewdrop, catching the light, seems for a moment to hold a whole sun inside it. The dew's despair plays

on scale (a "small life," kṣudra jīban) against the sun's answer, which reframes smallness itself as an act of love ("grown small, I will stay and fill you through") rather than a diminishment — I chose "shape... into the likeness of a smile" for hāsir mata kari, since the Bengali's closing image is specifically the sparkle of sunlit dew as a smile, not merely brightness.

O OCEAN OF HUMANITY

O ocean of humanity, I sit and wonder in my mind
who it is that churns you in this vast churning,
across endless years. In search of what jewel
do the hosts of gods and demons keep forever waking,
within your fathomless depths, this restless whirlpool,
in sin and virtue, joy and sorrow, hunger and thirst,
in foaming, breaking waves? O, give, give up
whatever lies within your womb — still this agitation.
On that blessed morning when your inmost goddess of fortune
rises at last, bearing the vessel of nectar in her hands,
into a wondering world, and taking up the wedding-garland,
places it, a bride, around the throat of the Lord of Three Worlds —
on that day this great churning will come to rest,
and the ocean's fierce, unceasing weeping will fall still.

— Almora, 22 Jyaishta, 1310

Note: The poem maps the myth of Samudra Manthan — the churning of the cosmic ocean by gods and demons for the nectar of immortality, from which the goddess Lakshmi finally emerges to become Vishnu's consort — onto the restless mass of humanity itself. "Ocean of humanity" (janasamudra) becomes the ocean of milk; history's suffering (sin, virtue, hunger, joy) becomes the churning; and social peace becomes the still-awaited emergence of the goddess. I translated tribhuban-nāth, "Lord of the Three Worlds" (an epithet for Vishnu), literally rather

than naming Vishnu outright, since Tagore leaves the mythic reference implicit rather than explicit.

O SILENT KING OF MOUNTAINS

O silent king of mountains, your sky-piercing song
goes on surging, in falling and rising and trembling tones,
from the gate of morning toward evening's western nest,
along some impassable, arduous road, in search of I know not what utterance!
Your unbearable, swelling passion, rising to its own furthest edge,
seems, in some sudden moment, to have lost its own voice,
to have forgotten every melody — a Sama-chant fallen silent,
and now, forever gazing into the void, it pours down instead a stream of falling
water.

O mountain, that untamable, fiery force of your youth,
which once longed to hurl itself upward, to die into the clouds —
that heat is lost now, that furious motion has come to its end —
your aimless striving has turned itself to ancient stone.
You have found your own limit, and so today, your heart grown silent and calm,
you have given yourself over, wholly, into the limitless.

— Almora, 26 Jyaishta, 1310

Note: The poem reads a mountain's silence and its waterfalls as the residue of some ancient, exhausted passion — a "Sama-chant fallen silent" (sāmagīt śabdahārā, referring to the chanted hymns of the Sama Veda) that has collapsed into mere falling water. Its closing paradox — that only by accepting a fixed limit does the mountain finally belong to the limitless — echoes the boundless/bounded pairing from the very first poem in this sequence; I kept "limit" and "limitless" as the same root-pair in English for that reason, even though sīmā/sīmābihīner aren't repeated as insistently here as they were there.

O TRAVELER, WHERE ARE YOU GOING

"O traveler, where
are you going, toward whom?"
—The night has passed, the sun is rising,
I am going to bathe in the sea.
In the first hint of dawn, in the frosty wind,
in the wide, open song of birds,
I have left my bed and risen, awake,
I am going to bathe in the sea.

"Let me ask you this —
where does that sea lie?"
—Where this river, flowing on unceasing,
mingles into the blue water.
There the sun rises in ever new likeness,
and there, behind it, hides —
the sea of the pilgrim-bathing
for this scorched and weary soul.

"Traveler, in your company,
how many pilgrims go?"
—I count them, friend, but never find their end,
they travel by water, by land.
Their lamps burn on, the whole night through,
beneath the darkened sky.
Their song sounds on, the whole day long,
across the water, across the land.

"Tell me, then, that sea —
how much farther can it be?"

—"How much farther," "how much farther,"
that is the very thing I ask of everyone.
Its sound comes to me on the southern wind,
in a deep and thunderous voice.
Sometimes I think, "it is near," sometimes, "it lies far" —
how much farther can it be?

"Traveler, look up at the sky —
the day's heat is growing."
—If the pain grows, still I will not turn away,
I will not let my fervor die.
O you who are fearful, thirsting, scorched,
sing on your song of triumph.
Above my head, in the sun's fierce rays,
let the day's heat go on growing.

"What will you do, going on and on,
if evening falls upon you on the road?"
—In hope of morning, in the cool, gentle wind,
I will sleep in the lap of the road.
The dawn will rise, fresh and tender,
amid the murmuring song of birds.
And my bathing in the sea will find its fulfillment
when the new morning comes.

Note: Structured as a call-and-response between an unnamed questioner and the traveler-pilgrim, the poem's real subject is the questions themselves — each one (how far, how many, what if evening comes) receives an answer that refuses certainty and keeps walking anyway. Tirthasnān, "pilgrimage-bathing," names a specific ritual (bathing at a sacred river or sea confluence) rather than ordinary swimming, so I kept "pilgrim-bathing"/"bathe in the sea" throughout to preserve that the journey is devotional, not recreational, even though the destination sea is never named or reached within the poem.

O WORLD-GOD

O God of the universe, in what form
have you shown yourself to me today?
I saw you in the eastern sky,
I saw you in my own homeland.
Your brow is the blue vault of heaven,
forever bright with a spotless light,
the Himalaya, like a silent blessing,
is your hand raised in reassurance.
The ocean, touching your feet,
is forever stealing the dust from them,
the Ganges, your necklace and ornament,
sways upon your breast.
I opened my heart and looked outward,
and beheld, in this one instant, today —
you have merged, O God of the universe,
into my own eternal homeland.

I heard the mantra of your praise
in the hermit-groves of ages past —
piercing through the hearts of immortal sages,
sounding across the three worlds.
At dawn, O God, in the young sun,
when you show yourself in the rising sky,
your face veiled in a covering
woven of golden rays —
then, across India, I hear, on every side,
mingling with the birdsong of the forests,
rising from an ancient, silent throat,
the chant of the Gayatri.
I opened my heart and stood outside
and heard, in this one instant, today —

rising up out of the past, O God,
your song, here in my own homeland.

With closed eyes I listened — I do not know
in what year yet to come —
lifting up your conch of blessing,
India sounds it out in joy.

Drowning out the war-cries of the earth,
piercing through the clatter of merchants' wealth,
an Om rises up beneath the vast sky,
acknowledging no obstacle.

On the hundred-petaled white lotus of India's heart
stands Bharati, at your feet,
and in the tune of that song, surging into the void,
a wondrous, mighty utterance.

With closed eyes I looked toward the time to come,
and heard, in this one instant —
your conch of blessing and victory
sounding in my own homeland.

Note: The poem builds the homeland itself into the body of a god — brow as sky, hands as the Himalaya, feet touched by the ocean, the Ganges worn as a necklace — a technique closer to hymn than to landscape description. Bhāratī, in the third stanza, is both a name for the goddess of learning (Saraswati) and, read another way, simply "the spirit of India" personified as a woman standing at the god's feet — I left the ambiguity as the Bengali leaves it, rather than picking one reading over the other.

O BHARAT, TODAY IN THIS NEW YEAR

O Bharat, today, in this new year,
hear this poet's song.

At your feet, in fresh delight,
I have brought my offering of worship.
I have brought the strength of our bodies,
I have brought the devotion of our minds,
I have brought the resolve of our faith,
I have brought our very life.
I have brought our finest offering,
to give it up to you.

We have no golden platter,
we do not even have enough to eat;
whatever we have, we have brought, arranged
in a fresh leaf-cup.
Today there is no need for pomp and show,
this is the poor man's worship, a poor man's offering —
I shall rid myself of endless poverty
by rolling in the dust of your feet.
Your grace, rare even to the gods,
I shall receive in this leaf-cup.

You are no king, O great ascetic,
you are the beloved of my very soul.
I shall throw off these begged-for ornaments and wear
your own upper-garment instead.
In poverty itself lies your wealth,
in silence itself lies hidden
your mantra of fiery words —
give us that alone.
I shall throw off others' finery and wear
your own upper-garment.

Give us the mantra of fearlessness,
your own mantra beyond all sorrow.
Give us the mantra of immortality,
give us, oh, a new life.

That life which once dwelt in your hermit-groves,
that life which once dwelt upon your royal throne,
that free, radiant, and mighty life —
let us take it, filling our hearts entire.
Give us that mantra of yours
that carries us across death, that steals away all fear.

Note: A companion piece to the earlier "New Year's Vow" poem, addressed again to Bharat (India) as a mahātapas, "great ascetic," rather than a king — the offering here is deliberately poor (a leaf-cup rather than a golden platter), turning material poverty into a mark of sincerity rather than shame, in keeping with the Swadeshi movement's ethic of self-reliant simplicity. Uttariya, the "upper-garment" the poet wants to wear instead of borrowed finery, refers to the plain unstitched cloth draped over the shoulder in traditional and ascetic dress — I kept it literal rather than translating it as "shawl," to preserve its association with renunciation rather than warmth.

O KING, YOU HAVE GIVEN ME

O king, you have given me
the charge of playing the flute
here at your lion-gate —
I have not forgotten it, I have not forgotten,
and yet, now and then, I do forget,
gazing and gazing at who comes and who goes,
from where they come, to where they go.

No one wishes to stop.
Bearing their loads upon their heads, they walk straight on,
looking neither right nor left.
The bird sings on the bakul branch,
flowers bloom in your courtyard —

they cannot see it, they do not care to hear it,
as they hurry off to whatever village.

I take up my flute and play.
For a moment they sit down by the roadside,
setting down their burden, forgetting it.
That which has always, forever been there,
they suddenly find, as though it were some lost treasure,
and say, "Look, what flowers have bloomed here.
How the bird sings, its whole heart open."

O king, keep me, then,
forever, without rest,
here at your lion-gate.
Those who pass by saying nothing,
carrying their burden of joy and sorrow,
let them, if only for a moment, filled with wonder,
stand still in the middle of the road,
here at your lion-gate.

Note: A quiet allegory of the poet's own calling: the flute-player is stationed not to lead people anywhere, but simply to make weary travelers pause and notice what was there all along — a bird, a flower — treating it, once heard, "as though it were some lost treasure" (hārā-dhan). The *siṃhaduṃyār*, "lion-gate" (a grand entrance-gate, traditionally flanked by lion statues), I kept untranslated-in-spirit rather than softened to "gateway," since its grandeur is part of the poem's quiet joke — great pomp of architecture, and the poet's whole task is only to make people notice small things.

O HIMALAYA, DEITY-SOULED

O Himalaya, soul of the gods, on peak after peak, even today,

Hara and Gauri, one undivided being, seem again and again
to take on their manifold forms, spreading themselves across summit after
summit.

There I see, seated in eternal meditation, the ever-still Lord of Creatures,
his silence impassable, unbearable — the piled matted hair, the crash of snow,
receiving in wordless stillness the fall of light at every dawn and dusk
as a golden lotus-petal of worship. That hard, stone body,
magnificently poor, empty, unadorned, clothed only in the sky,
see what play has wound itself, limb by limb, around him —
song has encircled his silence, a foaming, restless dance
has embraced his stillness; that very hardness, that emptiness, is kissed
by a tender, deep-green beauty in leaf and flower forever new,
in shadow and sunlight, in the play of clouds. Round the Lord of Mountains
stands wound Parvati, image of all sweetness, O snow-mountain, in your house of
stone.

— Shantiniketan, 6 Ashadh, 1310

Note: The poem reads the Himalaya as the physical body of Shiva and Parvati
fused into a single being (abhedāṅga Hara-Gaurī, "Hara-Gauri of undivided form"
— an image close to the classical Ardhanarishvara, the god depicted as half-male,
half-female). Shiva appears in his ascetic aspect — Paśupati, "Lord of Creatures,"
stone-still, unadorned, "clothed only in the sky" (digambara, literally "sky-clad,"
the traditional description of a naked ascetic) — while Parvati appears not as a
separate figure but as the mountain's living greenery, its "restless dance" of leaf
and cloud-shadow. I rendered digambara as "clothed only in the sky" rather than
the more clinical "naked," since the Bengali word itself is a poetic compound (sky
+ garment), not a plain descriptor.