60 Study Guide

60 by Rabindranath Tagore

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Contents

Introduction

It is not known to any certain degree when and where Rabindranath Tagore published the Bengali version of the poem known as "60." This title is derived from the poem's numerical placement in his English translation of *Gitanjali,* which was first published in England in 1912. This English volume, although it shares the name of one of Tagore's earlier volumes of Bengali verse, is actually comprised of poems from several of Tagore's previous volumes of Bengali poetry. As a result, scholars have been unable to trace the origins of most of the poems in the English *Gitanjali* . In addition, Tagore heavily altered the structure and, in some cases, the content of the poems when he translated them into English. Because of this, it is appropriate to use the year 1912 for the purpose of dating the poem's creation.

The English *Gitanjali* was a landmark event that happened almost by accident. Tagore translated a group of his poems into English to pass the time while he was sick, then showed his translations to some influential English writers and editors, including William Rothenstein and William Butler Yeats□both of whom helped to publish and promote the English *Gitanjali* . A year later, Tagore made history by becoming the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Westerners were initially enamored of Tagore's poems for their peaceful, mystical qualities, which contrasted sharply with a world on the verge of a harsh, global war. "60," which features children playing on a universal seashore, contrasts metaphysical and religious ideas with the human world to demonstrate the blissful ignorance of children, who do not know about the adult world. The poem also emphasizes the idea of unity, underscoring Tagore's lifelong goal to unite Eastern and Western traditions□a challenge at the time in British-controlled India. Generally speaking, Bengali readers know Tagore for his body of work, while many Westerners still associate Tagore only with *Gitanjali* . A current copy of Tagore's "60" can be found in the latest paperback English edition of *Gitanjali,* which was published by Scribner Poetry in 1997.

Author Biography

Tagore was born on May 7, 1861, in Calcutta, India. He was the youngest of fourteen children. His father, Debendranath Tagore, was a writer, scholar, and religious reformer, and Tagore rarely saw him, although he felt his influence. Tagore's education initially consisted of private tutors, although he eventually attended several different schools in Calcutta. However, he skipped class often, preferring to commune with nature rather than sit in a classroom. When Tagore was twelve, his father took him on a mountain retreat to the Punjab and the Himalayas. During this four-month journey, Debendranath educated the author himself, reading works from several languages, including English. Modern European writers, particularly the romantics, became one of Tagore's main influences.

Other influences included the Vaishnava poets of medieval Bengal and his classical Indian heritage. Tagore wrote poetry from an early age and published his first poetry collection, *Kavi-Kahini,* in 1878. Over the next three decades, he published more than sixty additional volumes, including poetry, plays, songs, short stories, sermons, essays, and novels. He also founded an experimental school at Santiniketan in West Bengal, where he hoped to blend Eastern and Western traditions, and wrote in support of India's independence and the abolishment of the Indian caste□or social hierarchy□system. However, when he spoke out against the violence of militant Hindus fighting for India's independence, his popularity waned, and he retreated into his personal writing.

Ironically, it was at this point that Tagore came to the attention of the rest of the world. Although Bengali readers knew Tagore for his variety of achievements, most non-Bengali readers were introduced to Tagore with his English translation of *Gitanjali* (1912), which included the poem, "60." With the help of some influential English writers and editors such as William Butler Yeats and William Rothenstein, this collection made Tagore an instant success. Following the immense popularity of the volume, which was reprinted in 1913, Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and he was invited to speak around the world. Unfortunately, many English-speaking readers are still unaware that Tagore's other works often receive higher praise from Bengali readers.

Initially, after the English publication of *Gitanjali,* many readers and critics thought of Tagore as a mystic, given the content of the poems in the English *Gitanjali,* and given Tagore's saintly appearance. Perhaps because of this, Tagore's later poetry volumes that were translated into English were not received as well as *Gitanjali* . During his lifetime, these English volumes included *The Gardener* (1913); *The Crescent Moon* (1913); *Balaka* (1916); *The Fugitive and Other Poems* (1919); *Fireflies* (1928); and *Syamali* (1936). Tagore continued to write up until just before his death on August 7, 1941, in Calcutta. Since his death, many volumes of Tagore's fiction and nonfiction have been published. Some of the most recent include *I Won't Let You Go: Selected Poems* (1992); *The Collected Poems and Plays* (1993); *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* (1994); and *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates Between Gandhi and Tagore, 1915-1941* (1997).

Poem Text

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet.
The infinite
sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is
boisterous.
On the seashore of endless worlds the children
meet
with shouts and dances.
They build their houses with sand and they play
with
empty shells. With withered leaves they weave
their boats and
smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children
have their play
on the seashore of worlds.
They know not how to swim, they know not
how to cast
nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in
their
ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter
them again.
They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not
how to
cast nets.
The sea surges up with laughter and pale
gleams the smile
of the sea beach. Death-dealing waves sing
meaningless ballads
to the children, even like a mother while
rocking her
baby's cradle. The sea plays with children, and
pale gleams
the smile of the sea beach.
On the seashore of the endless worlds children
meet. Tempest
roams in the pathless sky, ships get wrecked in the
trackless
water, death is abroad and children play. On the
seashore of
endless worlds is the great meeting of children.

Plot Summary

Paragraph 1

Tagore's "60" is a prose poem, so it uses paragraphs in place of poetic stanzas. The first paragraph begins with the line: "On the seashore of endless worlds children meet." Based on the phrase "endless worlds," one can see that this poem may have some metaphysical, or supernatural, qualities. The idea of endless worlds suggests a universal or infinite quality of some sort. In addition, Tagore introduces the image of a seashore in this sentence.

He could be talking about an actual seashore, but the metaphysical context suggests that Tagore is talking about a symbolic one. A symbol is a physical object, action, or gesture that also represents an abstract concept, without losing its original identity. Symbols appear in literature in one of two ways. They can be local symbols, meaning that their symbolism is only relevant within the context of a specific literary work. They can also be universal symbols, meaning that their significance is based on traditional associations that are widely recognized, regardless of context. In "60," the symbols are universal. Tagore is talking about a seashore, which is the opposite of the sea. The sea traditionally represents infinity□an idea that Tagore has already suggested with "endless worlds." Following this line of thinking, the opposite of infinity, or heaven, is the mortal, human world. So, the seashore could represent this human world.

The next line addresses the idea of infinity directly: "The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous." Once again, Tagore could be simply describing a day at the beach, where children meet on the beach, the sky is calm, and the sea is choppy. The next line□"On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances."□certainly supports this idea of children playing by the sea. This line also repeats part of the first line, so that the paragraph is bookended by the same image□a technique that Tagore uses throughout the poem. However, looking at the poem symbolically, one can find significance in many of the images. First of all, besides the idea that the sea represents infinity, water in general is a symbol for life or creation, in a feminine sense. Likewise, the "infinite sky" traditionally symbolizes heaven, and is often associated more generally with the male forces of creation.

So, taken together, the sky and sea represent male and female creation forces. Next to these two cosmic forces, the seashore, representing the human world, seems almost insignificant, except for the presence of the children.

Paragraph 2

The second paragraph describes the children in more detail. The first line notes that they "build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells." When sand is used to build a house, it suggests impermanence, since the "vast" ocean will just wash away

these sand houses with the tide. This idea of impermanence is reinforced by the idea of empty shells, since the animals that inhabited the shells have died and left only their shells behind. In general, however, shells are linked to the water from which they come, so they share water's creation meaning, especially in the feminine sense.

The second sentence notes: "With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep." The withered leaves suggest death, as do the boats, since journeys across water have traditionally been associated with death. So far, Tagore's symbolism seems to be pointing to a cycle of birth and death, although it is still too early in the poem to understand why this might be. The last sentence states: "Children have their play on the seashore of worlds." In the first stanza, the children were meeting "with shouts and dances;" now, they are playing.

Paragraph 3

The middle paragraph gives more information about these children. "They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets." The children are ignorant about the ways of the world, unlike the "Pearl fishers" and "merchants" who are forced to make a living. Instead, the children engage in idle activities that have no economic purpose: "children gather pebbles and scatter them again." The last sentence in the paragraph reaffirms the fact that the children are not concerned about money. They do not seek "hidden treasures," and they do not know "how to cast nets." This is a surface reading of the middle paragraph. However, once again, when one looks at the symbolism of the paragraph, it takes on a deeper meaning. Traditionally, a "net" symbolizes the power of the gods to trap humans and hold them in the mesh of life. Since the children know nothing of nets, Tagore could be saying that they are not yet bound to life, as adults are bound. The pearls that the pearl fishers search for are also significant. Pearls have many symbolic meanings. If Tagore is indeed using pearls in a symbolic way, he is most likely including them as a sign of the permanence that is lacking elsewhere. Mortals like the pearl fishers seek out these symbols of permanence because most other aspects of their lives are not permanent. Also, at one point, pearls were thought to be the tears of the gods. Both of these interpretations fit in with the religious tone of the poem.

Paragraph 4

In the fourth paragraph, the focus shifts from the children to the sea, which is suddenly very active: "The sea surges up with laughter and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach." Although Tagore uses terms like "laughter" and "smile," one should not be fooled. The sea is dangerous, as the next line notes: "Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle." Once again, Tagore is giving the sea an image of feminine creation, or motherhood. However, this image has an ominous undertone because the unsuspecting children are at risk, even though they do not understand the danger of the "death-dealing waves." As if to reinforce the juxtaposition of innocence and death, the last sentence notes: "The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach." One can imagine

the children playing in the waves of the sea, unaware that this may be dangerous and perhaps fatal.

Paragraph 5

The final paragraph repeats the first line of the poem: "On the seashore of endless worlds children meet." Since the first line, the situation in the poem has changed drastically. The "restless water" has churned up into "death-dealing waves." In the second sentence of this paragraph, Tagore notes: "Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships get wrecked in the trackless water, death is abroad and children play." In the sky, which was "motionless" in the beginning, a "tempest" now rages. It is interesting to note that the sky is "pathless." Not even a tempest can disturb the permanent quality of the sky. Likewise, not even "wrecked ships" can leave a mark in the water, which is "trackless." The poem does not indicate whether or not Tagore is referring to the children's toy boats that have been wrecked or the ships of the merchants and pearl fishers. One suspects the latter, since this image is more tragic, and is consistent with the rest of the sentence, which states that "death is abroad." Yet, the "children play." No matter what natural catastrophes have taken place over the course of the poem, Tagore ends with the certainty that "On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children." Given the heavy symbolism of creation, life, and death evident in the poem, Tagore seems to be underscoring the blissful ignorance of childhood, which makes children more susceptible to death, but which is more peaceful than the stressful adult world.

Themes

Mortality

Throughout the poem, Tagore includes images and symbols that suggest the idea of human frailty. In the beginning of the poem, the children meet on the seashore, but "the restless water is boisterous," an ominous sign that something bad could happen. The children use "withered leaves," which represent the dead parts of a tree, since leaves die after they fall from a tree. They use these leaves to "weave their boats," which they set adrift "on the vast deep." The deepness of the ocean also suggests mortality, since the ocean's vastness is permanent and can easily capsize the boats or drown the children, especially since "They know not how to swim." While the children play, the adults in the poem, represented by the "Pearl fishers" and "merchants," are intimately aware of their need to survive. Even if the "restless water" does not kill them, they could starve if they do not find enough pearls or sell enough goods to feed themselves. The death imagery in the poem becomes even more prominent near the end of the poem, when Tagore envisions the sea beach gleaming a "pale" smile.

Paleness is often associated with sickness and death, so if the beach is gleaming, it could be a bad portent. In fact, as the next line notes, the sea contains "Death-dealing waves." By the end of the poem, a tempest is raging, "ships get wrecked," and "death is abroad."

Innocence

While adults like the pearl fishers and merchants are aware of this imminent death, the children in the poem are blissfully innocent. They meet "with shouts and dances" while the water is getting churned up around them in the beginning. The children's world, like the restless water, is chaotic. "They build their houses with sand," unconcerned that the tide may wash them away. They "smilingly" send their toy boats out on the ocean, unaware that the boats will probably "get wrecked in the trackless water." They are unconcerned with the "Deathdealing waves," which "sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle." The adults in the poem cannot afford to be this innocent or ignorant. Their lives are organized, rigorous, and full of survival tasks and skills like swimming and casting nets. The children's innocence shields them from understanding the sea's warning sounds. However, this ignorance also makes the children more susceptible to death, which is "abroad" even while the "children play." So, while the children enjoy a more peaceful existence, the trade off is that they lack the natural, self-preserving fear of death that comes with the knowledge of adulthood. As a result, they literally frolic with the waves, which could kill them at any moment.

Unity

Tagore repeats the first sentence or a variation of it four times in the poem: "On the seashore of endless worlds children meet." No other line or phrase is repeated this many times in the poem. When a poet singles out a sentence like this and repeats it several times, it generally means that he or she is trying to reinforce an idea. In this case, Tagore is underscoring the idea of a meeting. This meeting is among children, who have traveled from "endless worlds." This idea suggests a meeting of such importance that it transcends physical or other boundaries. Since Tagore's lifelong quest was to reconcile Eastern and Western traditions, a desire that he wrote and spoke about at length, it makes sense that he would have children from all lands do this in his poem. After all, if children, who are the future of any society, are risking death and destruction to travel to a meeting, then perhaps someday they can meet as adults, too. Looked at in this way, Tagore could be using the word "worlds" to mean nations. It is a common practice in English for somebody to refer to a distant nation or land as a different world, especially if its customs are radically different from one's own.

Style

Tagore translated his Bengali poems from verse poetry into prose poetry, a controversial decision that drastically changed the style and content of each poem. A prose poem is a form of poetry that is a hybrid between prose and poetry. Prose is characterized by the use of full sentences and paragraphs that tend to proceed uninterrupted in a linear fashion until they are complete. Authors use blocks of prose description to develop concrete, complete ideas. Poetry, on the other hand, often proceeds in a nonlinear fashion, using fragments of thoughts, feelings, and images to convey a certain message to the reader. When the two forms are combined into a prose poem, as they are in "60," the effect is unique. The poet is able to develop complete ideas using uninterrupted sentences, but these sentences are full of flamboyant, literary techniques common to poetry. For example, the middle sentence of the fifth paragraph says: "Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships get wrecked in the trackless water, death is abroad and children play." Grammatically speaking, this is a complete prose sentence, composed of a series of four separate statements. In a prose piece, Tagore could use this same structure to describe virtually anything, even something as mundane as how he spent his day: "I went to the post office, bought stamps, saw a friend, and ate lunch." The difference between these two sentences is immediately apparent. The latter sentence contains four separate actions in a series, but it is flat and boring, and lacks the kind of vivid imagery, symbolism, and shocking juxtaposition of raging tempests, destroyed ships, impending death, and children playing. To put it another way, prose poetry like that used by Tagore in the English *Gitanjali* poems seeks to elevate the conventions of prose to the literary level of poetry.

Historical Context

Indian Nationalism and the Bengal Partition

As much as Tagore and others like him preferred to spend their time in contemplation of their God, the political situation in India often affected them or their poetry. In "60," Tagore writes: "Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships get wrecked in the trackless water, death is abroad and children play. On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children." Images like these, while certainly containing religious significance, also speak of instability in general. They also hint at the idea of a coalition, a "great meeting." For Tagore, these themes often came from issues associated with the British control of India. Mary M. Lago says, speaking generally about Tagore's life and work in her chapter on "Tagore's Traditions" in *Twayne's World Authors Series Online* : "The basic theme . . . was constant: the search for ways to keep civilization, in the East and in the West, unified in a world increasingly divisive and contentious."

Tagore was an activist at the time that he wrote many of the poems in *Gitanjali* . In 1905, Tagore joined the nationalist movement to block the partition of Bengal. Prior to this event, certain groups had opposed British rule, but many citizens did not get involved. However, when the British government attempted to divide the province of Bengal, in an administrative move that was meant to increase the government's efficiency in the province, it did not take into account local sentiment. The British government ignored petitions signed by tens of thousands of citizens, who grew to millions during protest rallies. However, Tagore did not believe in violent protest, and when militant nationalists turned to terrorism, Tagore withdrew his support and retreated to his peaceful, religious writings. As E. J. Thompson notes of *Gitanjali* in his book, *Rabindranath Tagore: His Life and Work* : "We may feel that in such books and such a man we have the earnest hope that the enmity of East and West will be reconciled."

Imperialism, Alliances, and the Escalation to World War I

When *Gitanjali* was published in 1912, the unity that Tagore was seeking was apparent among many nations, but this unity ultimately led to the start of World War I. The imperialistic drive of many nations in the late nineteenth century had created a number of massive colonial empires. Just as Great Britain ruled India, other smaller or weaker nations were ruled by larger or stronger powers in similar ways. In an attempt to prevent conflicts, these large colonial empires created alliances with each other. However, while this idea worked in theory, all of the world's great powers at the time□including Great Britain, France, Italy, the United States, Japan, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Russia, and Germany□felt it necessary to fortify their armies, which sparked an arms race and fostered a sense of distrust. By the early 1910s, the various great powers were suspicious of each other.

Kristine M. Rogers, in her essay for *Rabindranath Tagore: Perspectives in Time,* is one of many critics who believe that this unstable political climate helped inspire the warm reception of Tagore's *Gitanjali* . Rogers says, "Certain poets and artists in England, among them William Butler Yeats and William Rothenstein, found comfort against the menacing portents of the First World War in Tagore's translations of some of his religious poetry." In any case, this tense situation exploded in the Balkans, when the Austro-Hungarian archduke, Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated by a young Bosnian who had support from a Serbian nationalist group. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia and the intricate system of global alliances, which had been meant to avert war, pulled all of the great powers into it.

Critical Overview

When Tagore first published the English *Gitanjali* in 1912, it featured an introduction by the celebrated Irish poet William Butler Yeats, who notes: "I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me." This was just one of the many glowing comments that Yeats made about the volume, which he helped Tagore publish. This lavish praise, coupled with the fact that the volume led to Tagore becoming the first Asian to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature (1913), whipped the public into a frenzy. Critics and readers both agreed with Yeats's comments, praising the book and buying enough copies to warrant several printings. For example, in an influential 1913 article on Tagore for the *Fortnightly Review,* Ezra Pound notes: "There is the same sort of common sense in the first part of the New Testament, the same happiness in some of the psalms." Pound also says that Tagore "has given us a beauty that is distinctly Oriental." This tendency to associate Tagore with the Orient, coupled with the mystical quality of his *Gitanjali* poems, reinforced the idea of Tagore as a mystic□an idea that Yeats had helped to create. Not everybody agreed with this assessment. In his 1915 article about Tagore in *America,* Joyce Kilmer notes: "I wish that Mr. Yeats would stop calling Mr. Tagore a mystic. It is so silly! Mystics don't commune with the Infinite and then sell their communings to a magazine." Still, even Kilmer agreed that Tagore was a great writer: "No one will deny that Mr. Tagore is an able literary craftsman. He is not, as he has been called, the greatest living poet, but he is the most versatile writer living."

However, this tide would soon turn. As K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar notes in his foreword to *Rabindranath Tagore: His Mind and Art,* "after 1919, there was a reaction against Tagore and an indifference to his later work." The same popularity that launched *Gitanjali* into literary history also doomed Tagore's reputation as a writer of anything other than mystic poetry. As Mary M. Lago notes in her chapter on "Tagore's Lyric Poems" in *Twayne's World Authors Series Online,* most non-Bengali reviewers reinforced Tagore's reputation as a mystic. Lago says, "A theme repeated frequently by reviewers was that of the contrast between Tagore's Eastern philosophy and outlook, to which was attached the catchall label of 'mysticism.'" In addition, most non-Bengali readers assumed that *Gitanjali* represented the best of Tagore's poetry.

However, as Lago also notes: "Many Bengali critics consider it over-sensuous, so much given to musings and digressions about beauty that it falls short of the standard of his best work.'" Once the thrill of Tagore's initial introduction to the West wore off, even loyal supporters like Yeats withdrew their support of Tagore.

Tagore's popularity steadily declined in the next few decades. According to Melvin D. Palmer, in his essay for *Rabindranath Tagore: American Interpretations,* interest in Tagore picked up after 1956. As Palmer notes, part of this was due to the centenary publication of Tagore's English works, "but it also coincided with a larger turning to the East that swept America in the sixties and still shows some signs of life." Noted writer Hermann Hesse says in a 1957 essay: "I would be happy if I lived to see his triumphant re-emergence after the testing period of his oblivion." However, while Tagore's

popularity has increased in recent years, there is still a tendency to associate him with mystic poetry, or, even worse, with *Gitanjali* alone.

Sujit Mukherjee, in his 1964 book *Passage to America: The Reception of Rabindranath Tagore in the United States, 1912-1941* further explores the irony of Tagore's reception: "Instead of being only an introduction abroad to his work, the volume became the yardstick of all that came afterwards, especially of his poetry."

Some critics have, in the second half of the twentieth century, attempted to view Tagore's entire body of work in an effort to make an unbiased assessment of the author. In 1961, in the centenary volume of Tagore's works, Buddhadeva Bose compares Tagore's vast body of work to that of Goethe. However, as Bose notes, "unlike Goethe, he has left no supreme single achievement by which we could justifiably judge him." Likewise, Palmer notes in 1981 that an unwarranted bias favoring *Gitanjali* still exists among many critics. Palmer says, "there persists a certain blindness to the possibility that his early poems in English did not uniformly merit the great attention they received."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
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Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses the structure that Tagore uses in his poem.

When authors write prose poems, they do not need to pay as much attention to structure as when they write verse poetry. Blocks of prose can be as long or as short as the author wants, since the poetic elements like imagery and symbolism are what help to elevate the prose to prose poetry. However, when Tagore translated "60" into a prose poem from its Bengali-verse source, he paid close attention to the structure. Perhaps this is one reason why those who have commented on the poem like it so much. At first glance, the poem does not appear to be any different than many of Tagore's other nature poems. In her essay "Tagore's Lyric Poems," Mary M. Lago observes that "Nature is the touchstone, again and again, and it is a rare poem by Tagore that does not reflect in some way the skies, rivers, and landscape of Bengal." From the reviews of the few critics who have commented on "60," it seems that the poem is more than just one of Tagore's many reflections on nature. In his essay on Tagore for *Rabindranath Tagore: American Interpretations,* Melvin D. Palmer notes: "Only rarely do I find lines in Tagore that satisfy my hunger. One such is this, from *Gitanjali,* 60: 'On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children.'" Likewise, in his book *Passage to America: The Reception of Rabindranath Tagore in the United States, 1912-1941,* Sujit Mukherjee comments on "60," which was also included in Tagore's later collection, *The Crescent Moon* : "One outstanding piece from *Gitanjali* included here under the title 'On the Seashore' is this volume's sole distinction." Finally, Yeats singled out this poem to conclude his laudatory introduction to *Gitanjali* . By examining the structure of the poem, one can see why this poem has received almost universal praise. First, in broad terms, the poem is perfectly symmetrical in its thematic structure. The center line of the third paragraph□the exact center of the poem, in fact□anchors the poem in place. This sentence reads: "Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again." This sentence stands on its own in the poem. No other sentence mentions the pearl fishers or merchants. However, every other sentence in the poem has a complementary sentence within its respective paragraph.

Continuing the example of the third paragraph, the paragraph starts with the following sentence: "They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets." Compare this with the last sentence of the third paragraph: "They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets." The first half of each unit mimics the style of the other, while the second half of each phrase is identical: "they know not how to cast nets." Moving from the center of the poem outward to paragraphs two and four, one can see that these two paragraphs are also symmetrical. Once again, the first and third sentences of each paragraph mirror each other in some way. In the second paragraph, the idea of playing on the sand is repeated in both the first and third sentence.

In the fourth paragraph, the phrase "pale gleams the smile of the sea beach" is repeated in the first and third sentences. So is the motion of the sea. In the first

sentence, the "sea surges." In the third sentence, the "sea plays." This symmetrical pattern continues in paragraphs one and five.

The symmetry is also apparent between corresponding paragraphs, not just sentences. In other words, while the first and third sentences of the first paragraph mirror each other, the first paragraph also mirrors its symmetrical partner, the fifth paragraph. When one looks at the poem as a whole, the symmetry of the paragraphs is as follows. Paragraphs one and five both feature the children meeting under a calm and violent sky. Paragraphs two and four feature, respectively, the children playing and the sea playing. And the lone middle paragraph describes the children's ignorance of adult, worldly ways. This pattern helps to emphasize the change in tone from calm to threatening.

If this were the only structural consistency, Tagore's poem would be considered neat and organized. However, Tagore takes it one step further. In addition to following a theme pattern in his sentences and paragraphs, he also follows a length pattern. Within each paragraph, the syllable length of each sentence can be described as long, medium, or short. No two sentences within any paragraph match each other in length, so there is always one long, one medium, and one short sentence. When one uses these designations to label each paragraph, another pattern emerges. For example, in the first paragraph, the first sentence is: "On the seashore of endless worlds children meet." This sentence is eleven syllables long, as compared to the middle sentence, which is twenty-two syllables long, and the last sentence, which is seventeen syllables long. This pattern of short / long / medium is repeated in the third and fifth paragraphs, and reversed in the second and fourth paragraphs. While this careful analysis of sentence length may not seem necessary, it does underscore Tagore's inventive structuring. Poets generally do not engage in such strict exercises of structure unless they have a purpose. In this case, Tagore is giving each paragraph an ebb and flow pattern that mimics the waves moving from the sea to the shore and back. This ebb-and-flow pattern also holds up if one adds up the total number of syllables in each paragraph. The first, third, and fifth paragraphs are all medium length, while the second paragraph is short and the fourth paragraph is long. This structure gives the poem stability, which contrasts nicely with the instability discussed within the poem. In commenting on the "organic structure" of the poem, Mukherjee observes that the whole is "controlled by contrasts that evolve out of the central opposition between the helpless children and the mighty sea." It is as if Tagore wishes to give his readers unstable and dangerous imagery, like the restless sea, but at the same time he wants to reassure them that it is okay. As Mukherjee notes, the idea of playing, as evidenced in the joyous meeting of children, is set up as a powerful ideological weapon against the fear of death. According to Mukherjee, "In the power of play lies the eternal triumph of life, as long as 'on the seashore of endless worlds there is the great meeting of children.'"

Tagore's focus on stability may also point to the political situation in India at the time. Although India was controlled by the British and torn by conflict, Tagore had high hopes that India would someday be independent and stable. He also hoped that he and other Indians would be able to reconcile the conflicting Eastern and Western ideals of his time. In his book *Rabindranath Tagore: His Mind and Art,* B. C. Chakravorty discusses one of Tagore's Bengali poems, which may or may not be the source of the English

"60." Since Tagore radically changed his Bengali versions when converting them into the English *Gitanjali,* scholars do not usually know which Bengali poems correspond to the English poems. However, most critics agree that Tagore retained the essence of the Bengali version in each English translation, and the seashore location of this Bengali poem sounds similar to the location in "60." Thus, Chakravorty comments about the Bengali poem: "Tagore conceives India as the meeting ground of different nations of the world." Everybody has "joined together on the seashore of humanity□that is India. From time immemorial India has cherished the ideal of unity."

Whether or not this poem is talking about the same seashore, Chakravorty's comments are relevant to "60," since they indicate that Tagore's forced stability of the structure might signify his desire for political and cultural unity.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on "60," in *Poetry for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Singh discusses Tagore's international literary and social influence, explaining how the poetic mastery of Tagore's Song Offerings, *in which "60" appears, won the praise of poets like W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound.*

Rabindranath Tagore, Indian poet, playwright, novelist, short-story writer, essayist, and philosopher wrote mostly in his mother tongue Bengali, but also in English. He founded at Santiniketan an international university, Vishva Bharati, which was to be a bridge between the cultures of the East and the West, and whose motto is: "where the whole world forms its single nest." A patriot to the core - "I shall be born in India again and again, with all the poverty, misery, and wretchedness" - Tagore sided with England on the eve of World War II in 1939, declaring that "no Indian can wish England to lose the war she is fighting for the sake of liberty."

Although a versatile writer, painter, and musician, Tagore was essentially a lyric poet and as the author of *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*) he acquired international fame. W. B. Yeats said of *Song Offerings* that it was a work of supreme culture which had stirred his blood as nothing had for years. Ezra Pound regarded Tagore as "an artist pure and simple, an author whose voice has almost as many nuances as one can expect from Voltaire and whose sense of humour is as delicate as that of any poet living in Paris." He was also struck by what he calls "a saner stillness" in Tagore's poetry as well as by "its subtle underflow."

The songs in *Song Offerings,* the poet's colloquies with God, seek to define and at the same time to transcend the dichotomy between "I" and "Thou," or the Vaishnava duality between the divine and the human, between the contemplator and the contemplated. Like Kabir, Tagore brings to a most intimately personal realization of God a musical as well as a lyrical skill, an imagery at once realistic and evocative, and a wealth of symbols and concepts from the most disparate faiths and philosophies.

"Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure," he tells God the Lover and the Master, "This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it with fresh life." Desire and inspiration, joy, and dedication merge into one another, and the music so born is both prayer and poetry, ecstasy and confession: "When thou commandest me to sing it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look at thy face, and tears come to my eyes." The joy of singing makes the poet forget himself and "I . . . call thee friend who are my Lord." Poetic and artistic technique burns itself out at the altar of a devotion that knows no pride and has a rhythm and a music all its own. But the real song that the poet wants to sing remains unsung and the poet spends his days in "stringing and mastering my instrument." There is that silent communion with his lord and lover to sustain and inspire him, and he feels that the object of his adoration is "on every side," "in everything" and "at every moment." However, even though every moment seems to be ripe for the meeting between the poet and his lover, it never really takes place; for that would indeed be the end of his quest and yearning, the soul substance of his song. But such is the intensity of his yearning that it turns what is

intangible into something concrete and fully realized. It is, in fact, this interplay between the tangible and the intangible, which enables the poet to express "the-life-throb of ages dancing in my blood," as well as to retrieve something from what is perpetually threatening to dissolve and to give it a new meaning and a new rhythm. Thus even death ceases to be a challenge, and the poet is eager to "dive down into the depth of the ocean of forms," "to die into the deathless."

If *Song Offerings* is Tagore's masterpiece and his most characteristic book, it is because none of his subsequent volumes of poetry— *The Gardener, The Crescent Moon, Fruit-Gathering, The Fugitive and Other Poems,* for instance, or even the posthumously published poems *Wings of Death*, achieves the kind of freshness and subtlety of creative inspiration, together with technical mastery, of this book; nor do they add anything to the poetic and mystical philosophy so superbly expressed in *Song Offerings* . Among Tagore's more important plays are *Chitra ngada* (*Chitra*), *Daghar* (*The Post Office*), *Raja* (*The King of the Dark Chamber*), *The Cycle of Spring,* and *Raktu-Karabi* (*Red Oleanders*) - all of which centre upon the conflict between the vital urge represented by the human personality, and the impersonal and mechanical force represented by industrialization, with the ultimate triumph of personality.

Among Tagore's novels, *Gora* and *Ghare-Baire* (*The Home and the World*) are the best known. Both are novels with a political and social background. As a short-story writer too Tagore was a pioneer in Bengali literature and he published several collections of short stories— *The Hungry Stones and Other Stories, Mashi and Other Stories, Broken Ties and Other Stories,* and *The Runaway and Other Stories* . Tagore's short stories are studies in psychology or impressionistic sketches depicting the village life in East Bengal. Some of Tagore's better known short stories from these volumes "Kabuliwala," "Home-Coming," "Number One," and "Laboratory."

Of his literary, political, and philosophical essays the ones most worthy of note are *Sadhana, Nationalism, Personality, Creative Unity, The Religion of Man,* and *Crisis in Civilisation* . A celebrated article of Tagore's is entitled "The Call of Truth" (March 1921); it is addressed to Ghandi and sums up Tagore's political creed. While hailing Ghandi as "the wielder of that rod which can awaken India in Truth and Love," Tagore criticized his campaign for non-co-operation, which included a call to the nation to spin and weave their own clothes and to burn foreign cloth. "What irony of fate," Tagore wrote in a letter from Chicago, "that I should be preaching co-operation of cultures between East and West on this side of the sea just at the moment the doctrine of non-co-operation is preached on the other side!"

Ghandi rebutted his arguments and defended non-co-operation as a "protest against an unwitting and unwilling participation in evil, a struggle against compulsory co-operation, against one-sided combination, against the armed imposition of modern methods of exploitation masquerading under the name of civilization." For all his optimistic faith and idealism - he described pessimism as "a form of mental dipsomania" and never suffered from it himself. Tagore ultimately accepted Ghandi's views about exploitation. For, shortly before his death, he wrote: "I look around and see famished bodies crying for

bread. I have seen women in villages dig up ground for a few drops of drinking water, for wells are even more scarce in Indian villages than schools."

Tagore traveled practically all over the world and met most of the eminent writers, thinkers, and artists of his day. A few months before his death, the University of Oxford conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters.

Source: G. Singh, "Tagore, Rabindranath," in *Reference Guide to World Literature,* 3d ed., edited by Sara Pendergast and Tom Pendergast, Vol. 1, St. James Press, 2003, pp. 985-97.

Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Mirza and Mirza discuss the spirituality of consciousness in Tagore's poetry as the poet advanced through romantic, mystic, and realist phases.

The complexity of Rabindranath Tagore's genius and the extraordinary range of his intellectual and artistic interests have been noted by scholars in India and the west alike. While hailed primarily as a poet, Tagore excelled as a dramatist, essayist, novelist, short story writer, and, in nonliterary endeavors, as painter, philosopher, educator, musician, social reformer, and ambassador of good will to cultures as diverse as China, the U.S., and Latin America. Tagore's creative versatility serves to conform his own belief that most great artists function at higher levels of awareness, often experiencing a natural, spontaneous urge for total Self-realization, which in Vendata (the highest aspect of Hindu philosophy) is called Unity Consciousness.

This principle of unity (*Sahitya*) is the focal point of Tagore's aesthetic philosophy; derived from the root *Sahit,* meaning "to be with," the word *Sahitya* is the Sanskrit term for both "unity" and "literature." In his book *Sahitya* (1908) Tagore emphasizes that man's sense of oneness with the rest of creation is the root of all aesthetic delight; the poet is essentially restating the Vedantic view of art, which holds that artistic expression has its basis in states of consciousness and that the highest creative expression can only follow from the artist's own direct experience of pure consciousness (*Turiya*). In *Sahityer Pathe* (1926) the poet states, "Aesthetic delight is such a sense of harmony beyond the object that it does not delay in merging with our consciousness. In this case the revelation of truth of the object is the same as the revelation of my consciousness." The distinguishing characteristic of all great artists, according to Tagore, is their ability to enlarge their own consciousness to the point that it becomes one with the Universal Self, thereby intuiting or reflecting all other selves.

In this regard Tagore considers the writing of poetry to be a spiritual discipline, a kind of *via purgativa* . Thus he shares the Hindu view of art as *Sadhana* the process of spiritual training which transforms consciousness in such a way that the artist (individual self) can no longer be separated from his art (Universal Self). In *The Cycle of Spring* (1917) Tagore states: "The secret of all art lies in self-[as opposed to Self] forgetfulness. The poet or artists sets free the poet or artist in us." Tagore emphasizes the ability of art to raise the consciousness of not only the artist, but the perceiver as well: "True art withdraws our thoughts from the mere machinery of life, and lifts our souls above the meanness of it. It releases the self from the restless activities of the world and takes us out of the noisy sickroom of ourselves."

Critics generally recognize three major stages in the poetic development of Tagore: 1) "romantic" poetry expressing a vague longing for essence transcending the mutability of matter (pre- *Gitanjali,* 1878-1908); 2) "mystic" poetry describing the synthesis of matter and spirit (*Gitanjali,* 1909-1915); 3) "realist" poetry defining the role of duality in the human experience (post- *Gitanjali,* 1916-1941). Tagore's early poetry, of which *Chitra* is a good example, consists largely of verse narrative, miscellaneous poems, songs, and

poetic drama. *Gitanjali,* for which Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913, consists primarily of his prose translations of selected lyrics from the 1910 Bengali version of *Gitanjali* and *Gitalipi* . *Gitanjali,* which literally means "Song Offerings," is a long, free-verse poem which depicts the author's growth of consciousness from "drunk delight" (*Ananda*) in creation as a child, at the start of the poem, to the acceptance of and thus transcendence of the cycle of birth-and-death (*Samsara*) when he is an old man at the end. Tagore's later poetry, from *Fruit Gathering* (1916) on, far exceeds his earlier poetry both in volume and quality. Tagore left much of his later work untranslated, but what we do have in English reveals a poet keenly aware of the fragmentation experienced by modern man, yet confident in man's ability to achieve unity through the creative processes and the evolution of his awareness.

Source: Gail Mizra and H. A. Mirza, "Tagore, (Sir) Rabindranath," in *Reference Guide to English Literature,* Vol. 2, *Writers H-Z,* 2d ed., edited by D. L. Kirkpatrick, St. James Press, 1991, pp. 1303-05.

Critical Essay #5

In this excerpt, Thompson gives a sometimes mixed, but overall positive, review of the poetry and short stories of Tagore.

[Though] Rabindranath has never ceased to learn, and is as great a thief as any in all literature, it is in the pre- *Manasi* period that we must look for influences. First, of course, are the Bengali Vaisnava lyrists. The poet's own authority compels this statement, for did he not in the *Bhanu Singha* songs carefully catch their very notes? And he has never ceased to praise them, has translated them, and always refers to them as his masters. Be it so, then; one must suppose that they are. Yet I have always been rebellious under the importance he ascribes to them, and I believe he does them too much honour. I will say frankly that I am sure they have not influenced him to anything like the extent he has persuaded himself. He is grateful to them because they put him in the way of finding his gift of pure song, and therefore he is more filial than he need be, mistaking for parent those who are only among his chief teachers. . . . Rabindranath's real master has been Kalidasa. He never misses a chance of paying Kalidasa homage, either by explicit panegyric or by the subtler way of paraphrasing or quoting. . . . Frequently, when the strain is ostensibly a Vaisnava one, and the theme is Krishna and Radha, the real mood is not Vaisnava at all, but, as obviously as possible, is Kalidasa's. The two poets [Kalidasa and Rabindranath], the greatest India has ever produced, differ as strikingly as they resemble each other. The one is the poet of mountains, rejoicing in their strength and vastness. The other is the poet of rivers and of quiet places. But the two between them so completely represent Indian landscapes, that any third poet hereafter must seek some other way to fame. Both are passionate lovers of the rains, and have given us picture after picture of them which is perfect in faithfulness and charm. Both, again, love the gentler beautifies of Nature and character; and both are at home in symbolism and mingle with easy grace in the affairs of Gods and Immortals.

A very important strain in Rabindranath's work is the influence of folk-tale and folk-poetry other than Vaisnava. This is responsible for many charming moments, and also for occasional moments of dullness, when it contributes to that cult of the trivial which is the defect of his great quality of interest in the smallest things. The great epics, too, have given him thoughts and incidents that have touched him to fine issues. . . . He was called, while in his teens, the Bengali Shelley, and he has translated Shelley, and has acknowledged him as an influence. The *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,* he says, was like a transcript of his mind in his youth. 'I felt as if I could have written it. . . . Shelley's mythopoea, his compound adjectives, his personifications, his unhappiness, especially his vague, poetical unhappiness - these things fill *Evening Songs* .

From Keats's *Odes* he learnt, if my guess is right, to build up magnificent stanza - forms in his own tongue, by which he enriched it immensely. His stanzas are very many, and carried Bengali poetry far beyond the metres introduced by Hemchandra Banerji. . . . But a stronger influence than Keats was Browning. This influence came as he entered upon maturity. It is very marked in the new psychological interest of many poems in

Manasi, it is present in that first group on non-symbolical plays, it is present most strongly and nobly of all in the short dramatic dialogues of the later nineties, *Gandhari's Prayer [Gandharir Avedan]* and *Karna and Kunti* . In his novel, *The Home and the World,* he has made a striking adaptation of the scheme of *The Ring and the Book,* telling the one story through different minds.

But, in the case of a wide and desultory reader like Rabindranath, it is not possible to say where he found the suggestion for this or that idea or phrase. It is enough, that he has 'taken his own where he found it,' and has laid under contribution German, and French, and Russian literature, as well as Sanskrit and English.

It must be admitted that he has written a great deal too much, and that the chief stumbling-block in the way of accepting him among great poets is the inequality of his work. . . . There is a recurrence of a certain vocabulary, of flowers, south wind, spring, autumn, tears, laughter, separation, tunes, bees and the rest, which sometimes is positively maddening. This sort of thing is most apparent when he is least inspired, but it is by no means absent from his best work. . . . Even in much of the noblest work of his later years, his incorrigible playfulness, the way in which, often when most serious, he will fondle and toss with fancies, spoils some splendid things. . . . From all this comes sometimes a sense of monotony, which hides from the reader the richness and versatility of his work. This is the great weakness of his earlier work, that which finishes with *Chaita li* . One is often surprised, on analysis, to find how much of even his most exquisite work is built upon themes well-worn with him. . . . *Moon, Spring, sigh, eternal separation, night and full moon, laughter, flute, unrest, tears, weeping, Hope,* - these are the old performers. . . . There is many a passage in Rabindranath when you might call the roll, and, if one of these were present, all the rest would click their heels and answer. Here, in the supreme inspiration of *Urbasi,* they are transfigured into unsurpassed loveliness, which no criticism can touch. Yet, as the flawless Idea which lives in God's presence suffers loss with the judgment of us mortals for the faulty embodiments of that perfection which we see and have made, so even on the best of the poems of his early period some shadow falls from memory of the many passages which have their accidents without their essential of inspiration.

Yet this fault really witnesses to a great strength, his wonderful abundance of imagery. . . . Here we get very close to the heart of his genius, and can confidently claim for him the title of great poet. No poet that ever lived (I shall use this phrase again) has had a more constant and intimate touch with natural beauty. He can use, at his best, the same images and pictures, the oldest ones in the world, a score of times in as many lines, and each time with freshness and charm. His wealth here is inexhaustible, and it is manifest in prose as in verse, and today, after his swift advance in mastery of the tongue, is almost as manifest in English as in Bengali.

[Too] many suppose that Rabindranth is a poet of softer beauty, evading the sterner. But this was never the case, even in his early work; at any rate, was never the case after *Evening Songs* . In *Manasi,* for example, in one of the grandest and most terrible sea-storms in the world's literature - written, not by and Englishman, but by a Bengali.

He has a thousand pictures, all distinct from each other, and all perfect, of every Indian season. Autumn is a favourite of his, as she deserves to be; and he personifies her as Lakshmi, the gracious goddess. Noon in the summer heats is another favourite; and he can make the page quiver with its tense, blinding quietness.

Again, no poet that ever lived has shown such a power of merging not only himself but his human figures with their landscape. Here he is absolutely great, and absolutely original. Sometimes, the mingling is a matter of subtle and exquisite perception of the intimate inter-relation between mind and matter. . . .

This rich, individual gift of his nowhere finds more satisfying expression than in his short stories. . . . [There are] outstanding qualities of the best stories . . . which put him among the world's greatest short story writers. First among them is their range and variety. This writer or that has surpassed Rabindranath in some quality or other. But where are we to find a writer of stories so different and so good as *Hungry Stones, Living or Dead, Subha, Cloud and Sun, The Kingdom of Cards, The Trust Property, The Riddle Solved,* and *The Elder Sister* ? Four of these eight are of the deepest tragedy, a very unusual feature in an Indian writer; two are of tragedy of a less mixed and absolute kind, but sufficiently poignant, with irony salting the bitterness and with tender laughter softening the pathos; one deals with a realm of sheer phantasy, two are ghostly; several are masterly psychological studies. It is strange that his stories have received so little fame in the West; they are the most under-rated of all his work.

Source: Edward J. Thompson, Excerpt from *Rabindranath Tagore: His Life and Work,* in *Rabindranath Tagore: His Life and Work,* edited by Kalidas Nag, Y. M. C. A. Publishing House, 1921, pp. 112 ff.

Critical Essay #6

In this essay, Pound gives a favorable overview of the poems of Tagore.

The appearance of "The Poems of Rabindranath Tagore" is, to my mind, very important. The movement of his prose may escape you if you read it only from print, but read it aloud, a little tentatively, and the delicacy of its rhythm is at once apparent. I think this good fortune is unconscious. I do not think it is an accident. It is the sort of prose rhythm a man would use after years of word arranging. He would shun cacophony almost unwittingly.

The next easiest things to note are the occasional brilliant phrases, now like some pure Hellenic, in "Morning with the golden basket in her right hand," now like the last sophistication of De Gourmont or Baudelaire.

But beneath and about it all is this spirit of curious quiet. We have found our new Greece, suddenly. As the sense of balance came back upon Europe in the days before the Renaissance, so it seems to me does this sense of a saner stillness come now to us in the midst of our clangor of mechanisms. There is in [Mr. Tagore] the stillness of nature. The poems do not seem to have been produced by storm of by ignition, but seem to show the normal habit of his mind. He is at one with nature, and finds no contradictions. And this is in sharp contrast with the Western mode, where man must be shown attempting to master nature if we are to have "great drama." It is in contrast to the Hellenic representation of man the sport of the gods, and both in the grip of destiny.

If we take these poems as an expression Bhuddistic thought, it is quite certain that they will change the prevailing conception of Bhuddism among us. For we usually consider it a sort of ultimate negation, while these poems are full of light, they are full of positive statement. They are close in temperament to what we are usually led to call Taoism.

Briefly, I find in these poems a sort of ultimate common sense, a reminder of one thing and of forty things of which we are over likely to lose sight in the confusion of our Western life, in the racket of our cities, in the jabber of manufactured literature, in the vortex of advertisement.

There is the same sort of common sense in the first part of the New Testament, the same happiness in some of the psalms, but these are so apt to be spoiled for us by association; there are so many fools engaged in mispreaching them. . . . If these poems have a flaw - I do not admit that they have—but if they have a quality that will put them at a disadvantage with the "general reader," it is that they are too pious.

Yet I have nothing but pity for the reader who is unable to see that their piety is the poetic piety of Dante, and that it is very beautiful. . . . I do not think I have ever undertaken so difficult a problem of criticism, for one can praise most poetry in a series of antitheses. In the work of Mr. Tagore the source of the charm is in the subtle underflow. It is nothing else than his "sense of life." [Rabindranath Tagore] has given us

a beauty that is distinctly Oriental, and yet it is almost severe, it is free from that lusciousness, that overprofusion which, in so much South-Oriental work, repels us. His work is, above all things, quiet. It is sunny, *Apricus,* "fed with sun," "delighting in sunlight."

One has in reading it a sense of even air, where many Orientals only make us aware of abundant vegetation.

Source: Ezra Pound, "Rabindranath Tagore," in the *Fortnightly Review,* Vol. 99, No. DLX, March 1913, pp. 571-79.

Adaptations

Tagore's *The Crescent Moon: Prose Poems* was produced as an audiobook in 1996 by Amber-Allen Publishing. The book is read by Deepak Chopra.

Tagore's *Gitanjali* was produced as an audiobook in 1994 by Sound Horizons Audio-Video. The audio book, entitled *Gitanjali: Offerings from the Heart,* is read by Deepak Chopra.

Three of Tagore's short stories, "Sampati," "Monihara," and "The Postmaster," were adapted for film in India by Satyajit Ray and released in 1961 under the title *Teen Kanya* (the title means *Three Daughters*). A subtitled version containing only "The Postmaster" and "Sampati" was released in the United States in 1963 by Columbia Tristar Studios. The film, titled *Two Daughters,* is available from Columbia/ Tristar Home Video.

Topics for Further Study

Research the relationship between Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, and compare the religious, philosophical, and political beliefs of these two Indian leaders. Also, write a short biography of Gandhi.

When Tagore received the Nobel Prize in 1913, he made an infamous speech to his countrymen in India. Research this speech and write a short report giving some reasons why he might have said what he did. Find a complete copy of this speech and deliver it to your classmates.

Poets since ancient times have incorporated images of the sea in their poetry. Find one other poet, from any point in history, who uses vivid imagery of the sea in his or her poetry. Read a poem by this poet, and compare the sea imagery in this poem to Tagore's "60."

Research how the various levels of Indian society treated their children around 1912. Imagine that you are a child in this time period and write a journal entry describing what your typical day is like. Use your research to support your ideas.

Compare infant mortality rates in India in 1912 to infant mortality rates in India today, and discuss the likely reasons behind any similarities or differences.

Compare and Contrast

Early 1910s: India struggles to win its independence from Britain, who rules over the subcontinent. An English viceroy is in charge of the daily affairs of government.

Today: India is a democratic state. It features a parliamentary form of government. The elected members of the federal and state parliaments in turn elect a president, who serves a five-year term.

Early 1910s: The entire subcontinent is united under British rule, and most political threats and conflicts occur from within the borders of the subcontinent.

Today: The subcontinent is divided into three separate states□India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. India and Pakistan, which is predominantly Muslim, have a long-standing border dispute. In 1998, this dispute erupts when India performs nuclear weapons tests, prompting a response from Pakistan, which conducts its own nuclear weapons tests.

Early 1910s: Although Indians subscribe to many different religions, the majority are Hindus.

Today: The majority of Indians still subscribe to Hinduism. At the end of the twentieth century, Hindu groups begin a massive nationalist movement, placing pressure on non-Hindus to conform to Hinduism.

What Do I Read Next?

Some critics consider E. M. Forster's controversial *A Passage to India* (1924) to be one of the author's greatest novels. The book, which was published in the racially tense times when India was still under British control, examines whether or not it is possible for members of the two cultures to be friends.

In Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet,* originally published in 1923, the author and mystic offers his philosophy on many topics, including love, marriage, and religion. The narrative takes place in a sandy, timeless place that is similar to the metaphysical location in Tagore's "60."

Carol E. Henderson's *Culture and Customs of India* (2002) explores what life is like for Indian residents today. The book includes sections on every major aspect of Indian life, including food and dress; women, marriage, and family; and religion.

Although Tagore's poem features idealistic images of children, the reality of many children's lives on the Indian subcontinent are often very harsh, especially for girls. In her memoir *Meyebela: My Bengali Girlhood* (2002), exiled writer Taslima Nasrin writes about what life was like for her growing up in a Muslim family in Bangladesh.

Jeffrey Paine's *Father India: How Encounters with an Ancient Culture Transformed the Modern West* (1998) examines the many ways that India's culture, including politics and religion, has influenced the Western world. Paine examines these influences in a broad sense and also discusses how India affected Western individuals such as William Butler Yeats.

In addition to his poems, Tagore also wrote many prayers. Herbert F. Vetter collected and edited several of these prayers in *The Heart of God: Prayers of Rabindranath Tagore* (1997).

Tagore was deeply influenced by the nature of his native India, which often inspired his writings. In *The One and the Many: Readings from the Work of Rabindranath Tagore* (1997), William Radice offers new translations of Tagore's poems along with corresponding photos of India and its people.

In recent years, critics have begun to pay attention to Tagore's non-verse works, most notably his short stories. Tagore's *Selected Short Stories* (2001), translated by Sukanta Chaudhuri, includes several of Tagore's tragic stories.

Further Study

Chatterjee, Bhabatosh, *Rabindranath Tagore and Modern Sensibility,* Oxford University Press, 1996.

Chatterjee collects a number of essays that address the changing perceptions of Tagore's work throughout the years. These essays discuss common issues in Tagore's work and raise new issues that have yet to be explored.

Dutta, Krishna, and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man,* Bloomsbury, 1995.

In this biography, Dutta and Robinson examine all aspects of Tagore's life and offer commentary on his major works, including the English *Gitanjali* .

James, Lawrence, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India,* St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Much of Tagore's poetry, including "60," contains direct or indirect references to the political situation in India, in which he was intimately involved. James's book discusses the rise and fall of British rule in India, including how it affected citizens in both countries.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

PfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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