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More Signs of Donne

Signs, voiceprints, echoes. . . . Donne persists, turning up sometimes as bidden guest in direct address or as a character in a fiction, sometimes as line or phrase in poem or prose. Whether as quotation or provocation, as iconic figure signifying soul stress or more carnal matters, Donne remains an ongoing presence in the literary imagination. We hope to highlight such sightings and soundings—like those discussed in the following essay—in future volumes of *John Donne Journal.*

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Donne's Love Poetry and Tagore's Novel *Shesher Kobita*

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Rabindranath Tagore's 1929 novel *Shesher Kobita* (literally, "The Last Poem")—*Farewell My Friend* in K. R. Kripalani's translation—took shape, ostensibly, from his dissatisfaction with the way love was conceived by his contemporaries. In this novel, the irrepressibly poetical young man Amit Ray falls in love at first sight with the inwardly driven, educated woman Labonya. From the very first moment, Amit wants their love to shed rituals and to hurry along: "To increase the speed one must lighten the weight of form," says Amit.[1]

[1]Tagore, *Shesher Kobita*, translated into English as *Farewell My Friend* by K. R. Kripalani (1946; rprt., Kolkata: Visva-Bharati Publishing Department, 1999),

Andrew Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress," mocking the putative mistress's plea for time, echoes in Amit's love logic, as it does in some of Tagore's lyrics meant to be sung.[2] But it was not Marvell's poem alone that inspired Tagore's celebration of love's supreme moment in *Sesher Kobita*. He also drew upon a similar conception of love that John Donne explored in his verse.

By itself, the love story in *Shesher Kobita* was something new, even daring, in early twentieth-century Bengali novels, where lovers did not meet in private, hold hands, and rest their loving heads on each other's shoulders—nor did heroes and heroines in Bengali novels of that time make every moment of their meetings an occasion to enunciate love's philosophy in enthralling poetry and poetic prose.[3] One can see, too, in

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p. 32. Page references are to this edition. I have referred to the original Bengali text where I have adopted my own translation.

[2]Marvell's poem left a sigficant impression on Tagore, which can be seen in some of his other lyrics as well. I have made this point in my article, "Cross-cultural Transactions: Rabindranath Tagore, John Donne, and Peter Damian," *ANQ* 22.4 (2009): 33–42.

[3]According to Mrs. Nirmal Kumari (Rani) Mahalanabis, a friend and biographer, *Shesher Kobita* took its start from an apparently casual remark of Tagore's that the young writers of his day "did not understand the romance part of love" (in courtship and marriage). He then, half in jest, outlined on the spot a story of Romantic love. Nothing would probably have come of it had not Rani placed a notebook and pens on his desk and coaxed him to sit at it. First he wrote a few lines, and then worked steadily at it. This anecdote is reproduced in the final volume of Tagore's works, *Rabindra-Rachanabali*, ed. Rabindra Kumar Das Gupta et al., 16 vols. (Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, 2001), 16:897–900.

Tagore was 67 then, but wrote incessantly, including a fairly long novel (*Yogayog*) being serialized in a monthly magazine (*Vichitra*), besides a series of new love poems, and soon the new work in progress began to be serialized in *Prabasi* and finished in eight installments between August 1928 and April 1929, as we learn from Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee's biography of Tagore, *Rabindra Jiboni*, 3 vols. (1952; rprt., Kolkata: Visva-Bharati Publications, 1961), 3:336.

The conservative critics of the time were up in arms against the novel, and an anonymous reviewer attacked the novel's so-called libertinism, accusing it of "that alien mentality and imitative culture" in *Shonibarer Chithi* [*The Saturday Journal*] (November 1931), as quoted in *Rabindra-Rachanabali*, 16:900.

Amit's readiness to argue by paradoxical reason and flights of fancy, shades of Donne's logician lover. What is even more germane to the Donnean kernel of thought in *Shesher Kobita* is the need to present love, even though the lovers are removed from each other in the end, as that which itself cannot be removed.

That said, it is not the lovers' story so much, but a war of poets, which dominates the better part of the novel. Amit is a rebel against Tagore's poetic reign, and he loses no opportunity to carry the battle to Tagore's court. While addressing, for example, a literary meeting on Tagore, Amit reads aloud an un-Tagorean poem, supposedly by the writer "Nibaron Chakraborty," who is actually Amit's alias. This and other poems by the latter are like dramatic utterances. Colloquial in diction and style, they feature qualities that Tagore would have noticed in Donne's love poetry, but that differ greatly from Tagore's usual style of contemplative lyricism.

At this point, it becomes quite obvious that a literary game is being played. The well-educated, modern-spirited protagonist provides Tagore with an artful ploy to pre-empt his critics and announce his new style. Seen in this light, the novel's self-reflexive core becomes quite apparent; it unfolds an inner story that shows Tagore trying to create a new love poetry and freeing himself thereby from Romantic-Victorian poetry, his longtime preference.

A further paradox is that Amit's poems are in reality Tagore's own poems, which he was writing simultaneously with the novel and later published in 1929, as a book of verse titled *Mohua.*[4] All the poems attributed to Nibaron Chakraborty, and the two farewell poems at the end dedicated by the parting lovers to each other, are in fact *Mohua* poems. Ultimately, the novel and the poems it incorporates are

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Between this review and what Tagore himself said critically of love in the Bengali novel, *Shesher Kobita* situates itself as a new kind of love story with an "alien mentality."

[4]"Mohua" is the name of a fruity springtime flower that is sweet to eat and somewhat intoxicating. Tagore declined to say why he chose this title, but for those who were struck by this new flow of love poetry from the pen of the aging poet, the name was symbolic. This collection of Tagore's poetry has been translated by Aurobindo Bose as *The Herald of Spring: Poems from Mohua* (London: John Murray, 1957). Unless otherwise noted, I quote from Bose's translation of the poems in *Mohua*.

interactive, shaping, and, in the process, being shaped by each other.[5] *Shesher Kobita* is, indeed, a novel not about a young pair's failed love affair, but about how Tagore in his late, but ever fresh, career embarked on viewing love from a hitherto unexplored angle in his poetry.

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As he appears to us in the opening chapter, Amit is a fashionable man-about-town. He dresses rakishly and habitually, even outrageously, speaks in riddles and paradoxes, as if for no other pleasure than that of shocking conformists and imitators (pp. 9–10). One can detect here a likeness to Donne both in his youthful reputation as rakish man-about-town and in the style he flaunted in his love poetry, no doubt as a revolt against the conventional imagery and mellifluous style of the Petrarchan imitators of his time.

In a recent article on the relationship between Donne's verse and Tagore's novel, Raymond-Jean Frontain analyzes Tagore's "use of Donne to explore the tension between the private world of two lovers and the oppressive world of social convention," and concludes that "analysis of the Donnean philosophy of love in *Shesher Kobita*—in particular, of the new 'language . . . of togetherness' called for by the novel's protagonist—allows us to supplement the existing narrative of the mid-twentieth century 'Donne Revival.'"[6] To Frontain's analysis I would add that Amit's forthright attack on Tagore's sweet style is doubly significant. First, it is reminiscent of how Donne altered the Petrarchan conventions of Elizabethan love poetry, and what modern poets like Eliot did to Romantic conventions of poetry. Amit wants there to be similar transformations in Bengali poetry, which—he claims—is still under the spell of "old Rabindranath Tagore," who is "outdated" (as Amit says vengefully) in the same way as Wordsworth, Tagore's favorite Romantic, had been in the latter part of his long life (p. 14). Second, Amit's tirade is in reality a ploy to introduce Tagore's new style. We must understand

[5]Prabhat Mukherjee comments briefly that "*Shesher Kobita* is a poem written in prose and *Mohua* is its poetic form" (3:342).

[6]Frontain, "Donne, Tagore, and Love's Passing Moment," *Papers on Language and Literature* 47.1 (2011): 45–61, quotation from p. 48.

this game. Amit's, and also Labonya's, interest in Donne's poetry is a clue to the change that Tagore now wants in his poetic style.

There are, indeed, intimate and generic ties that the novel shares with Donne's poetry. On one occasion, alone with Labonya, Amit "whispers" rather than "blurts out" to her, as Frontain observes, the dramatic opening lines of "The Canonization," lines which would normally be read "as an exasperated outcry."[7] This apparent misreading by Amit leads Frontain to identify in this scene a relational dynamic between Amit and Labonya in this moment that is also true of their interactions in other love scenes in the novel: "In effect, Amit's whisper invites Labonya to join him in a private world of love inhabited only by the two lovers . . . holding the outside world at bay."[8] As Frontain develops his analysis further, he makes a strong case for "the extent to which he [Tagore] crafted from Donne's *Songs and Sonets* the philosophy of love that is at the heart of *Shesher Kobita*."[9] To Frontain's astute observations on this essential connection between Donne's poetry and Tagore's novel, I would like to offer an allied effort to understand how the Donnean discourse in *Shesher Kobita* is also self-reflexive in terms of how it reveals exactly what Tagore was experimenting with in this poetic novel.

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Early in their relationship, while they are in fact still strangers to each other, Amit crashes his car into Labonya's vehicle on a slope. To make amends, Amit drives Labonya to her house, where he notices that she possesses a volume of Donne's collected poems. This surprises and pleases him, for, in his student days at Oxford, Amit too was a Donne enthusiast, and the lyric poetry of Donne and his contemporaries was his chief topic of discussion as an undergraduate (p. 29). This is thus how Tagore introduces Donne explicitly into the narrative framework of *Shesher Kobita*.

From that moment onwards, Amit celebrates, in poetry and poetic prose, every moment he spends with Labonya, every look and every smile on her face. Although he lacks the words to articulate these precious

[7]Frontain, p. 53.
[8]Frontain, pp. 53–54.
[9]Frontain, p. 55.

moments of love for her, Amit at last finds a kind of solace in the words of others: "You know what," says he, "there are times when one's self is transformed . . . and the difference between 'I wrote it' and 'he wrote it' is but *maya* [illusion]." Then he goes on to say something whose import cannot be overstated: "this morning all on a sudden the idea occurred to me to search for a line from the literature known to me *that would look to be something that I had just written*, a line quite beyond other poets."[10]

Unable to check her curiosity, Labonya urges him to utter the verse he has found. Amit responds by *whispering* to her the dramatic opening line of "The Canonization": "For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love."[11] Labonya's heart trembles at both this subtle revelation of the feelings that Amit has for her, and his enjoining her to passive, silent acquiescence. But Amit puts her at ease by saying that he would never have thought of Donne if he had not seen his poetical works on her own desk. Thus, Tagore implicates Labonya, too, in the Donnean discourse—and for good reason: her farewell poem, with which the novel ends—and in which she ceases to hold her tongue, but speaks freely of her own feelings—echoes Donne's "A Valediction forbidding mourning."[12]

Another point of interest emerges from what Amit says in the next chapter, when the pair has become closer. He stays up into the wee hours of the morning, turning page after page in *The Oxford Book of Verses*, in search of a love poem, but—as he says—in vain, even though formerly,

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[10]The quoted passage is my translation from the Bengali text of *Shesher Kobita* in *Rabindra-Rachanabali*, 9:738, emphasis added. The passage is translated a little differently by Kripalani: "sitting here this morning, I said to myself, let me pick out a line from all the literatures known to me such as I alone could have written—this very moment" (p. 36).

[11]Donne, "The Canonization," in *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), line 1. All quotations of Donne's verse are from this edition.

[12]Amit does not actually quote from any poem other than "The Canonization." For the general theme of lovers praising their love in a private space, however, there are—besides the echo of "A Valediction forbidding mourning" in the farewell poems at the end of the novel—other echoes. An example of the latter is Frontain's perception of a Donnean shadow, that of "The Extasie," falling over Tagore's lovers as they recline against a slope in wooded seclusion and talk of love (p. 53).

such poems stared at him from every other page. "It's now clear to me," says Amit, "that the whole world is waiting for me to write" (p. 46). Interestingly, Tagore's biographer claims: "When *in course of searching for love poems*, [Tagore's] mind went back to the youthful world, then in a few days (8 to 31 August [1928]), he composed as many as 27 poems."[13] However, "back to his youthful world" Tagore did not go, for he was writing a new poetry of love. Amit's follow-up remark on the same page is a revelation and reflects, no doubt, Tagore's own happy re-discovery of Donne's love poetry: "My mind to-day is all fire. By that fire I am reading again all that I have ever read. How little of it survives! Most of it will be burnt to ashes. I must stand up in the noisy market-place of the poets and protest—Don't you shout and bluster. Say the right word and say it softly. / 'For God's sake [sic] hold your tongue and let me love!'" (p. 46).

This inspiration that Amit took from Donne's love poetry in trying to write verse that would speak his own love is the crux of this self-reflexive novel. The acclaimed author of hundreds of love poems of exquisite sensibility, Tagore is now—in the 1920s—searching for a different genre, perhaps even to burn to ashes his illustrious past. Tagore had hardly expressed his admiration more emphatically for any other English poet, even though one would argue that—as an inheritor of the Romantic-Victorian tradition of lyrical sweetness and poetic idealism—the old Tagore was nearer to Edmund Spenser, so to speak, than to Donne. To be sure, Amit plays the game of tweaking Tagore as being passé often enough in the novel.

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Although reluctant to accept the determined anti-Romanticism of the Anglo-American poetry of the 1920s, Tagore himself began to experiment with a new verse style in the 1930s. The poem that Amit, at the end of his presidential speech, reads as written by "Nibaron Chakrabarty" anticipates that later verse:

[13]Prabhat Mukherjee, 3:325; emphasis added.

I am the Unfamiliar,
I burst upon the respectable rabble
Like fate's ribald laughter.

Shackle me with chains?
Assail me with scriptures?
I shall blow them to bits
And freeing myself give freedom to you.

My words like a mighty fist
Shall stun the obtuse mind
And my frenzied rhythm shall confuse
The seekers of easy salvation.

They will beat their brows
And one by one, in terror; in rage, in tears
Shall bow to the triump of the Unfamiliar.
(pp. 15–16)

This is a poem colloquial in diction, dramatic in style, and staccato in rhythm: altogether a self-directed attack by Tagore on his own style. Amit declares in triumph, "this day Nibaron Chakravarty has arrived on earth" (p. 46). It is worth noting that Amit's sparring with Tagore does not stop here. In the same chapter (chapter 6) where he is whispering Donne's lines to Labonya, he reads out to Labonya another Nibaron Chakraborty poem:

O Unknown, how will you loosen my grasp
Ere I have known you?
In a blind moment,
In an awakening wrapped round with slumber,
When the night was dissolving into dawn
I saw your face,
My eyes fastened on yours I asked where you lay hid,
In what secret nook of self-forgetfulness.
The knowledge of you
Will not come easily,
Not by sweet words whispered in the ear.
Victory shall be mine
Over your doubt-choked speech;
In proud strength I will lift you

Out of doubt, out of shame,
Out of the strife of misgiving,
Into the pitiless light.
Bathed in tears you shall awake
And know yourself in a trice.
The bond shall break,
In giving you freedom I shall find my own.
"O Unknown,
The day is spent, the dusk descends, time will not wait;
In one sharp sudden swoop
Let the flame of the knowledge of you burn high and bright,
And let my life be poured into it as an offering!"
(pp. 39–40)

Amit explains to Labonya why he prefers its red-hot feel, so conspicuously absent, he tells her, in the verse of "your poet" (meaning Tagore's lyrical poetry): "this is not a *mere lyric*, it's the *hard*, pitiless core of *life*" (p. 40, emphasis added). I should like to note here that Kripalani's translation of this poem has not quite reflected the Bengali poem's deliberately colloquial style and direct address to the woman, aesthetic choices that would have impressed Tagore in Donne poems.

Labonya is not quite the silent woman of Donne's dramatic monologues, and at this moment she steps into life and turns the tables on Amit's habit of overwhelming her with poetic utterances. Amit's love, which he turns into beautiful moments of poetic flight, is self-feeding, and Labonya does not find it to be a good augury. Tears come to her eyes as she realizes that "the frame of Amit's mind was literary, each experience rolling a wave of words to his mouth" (p. 49). So she asks the all-important question: "Don't you think, Mita, that the day the Taj Mahal was completed, Shahjahan must have rejoiced at the death of Mamtaz? Her death was necessary to immortalize his dream" (p. 49). Labonya could not have been more perspicacious.

In chapter 8, Amit recites yet another of his Nibaron Chakraborty poems—an ode to the bridal chamber[14]—but Labonya tells him: "Don't begin already to build to our love a monument in verse—at least wait till it dies" (p. 80). This is exactly the point: she is clay on Amit's wheel,

[14]The poem is titled "Basor Ghor" in *Mohua* and is translated literally as "Bridal Chamber" by Bose (*The Herald of Spring*, p. 39).

churning out of his love for her a new love poetry. It is a case of the material cause versus the final cause. Substitute the beloved with the novel itself, and it becomes an analogue, an experiment in a dual composition of prose and poetry, whose purpose is to explore what remains of love and marriage when they suffer rupture.

Amit's own remark about "Bridal Chamber"—that the poem is a counterpoint to Tagore's ode to Emperor Shajahan and his Taj Mahal dedicated to his dead wife, Mumtaz (p. 79)[15]—can serve as an epigraph to *Shesher Kobita.* "Rabindranath is always harping on the things that pass away," says Amit, "he does not know to sing of what abides" (p. 80). Amit thus throws into relief the new philosophy of love that he has garnered from Donne's love poetry and anticipates his and Labonya's farewell poems at the end. The novel wraps around and fits into the poetry it celebrates. Beyond this poetry this love story does not go. This is why Tagore must break up the lovers and structure the novel so that it begins its denouement through poems of parting whose sadness is transcended by a higher philosophy of love.

But before that happens, Amit is a happy man, for he sees no impediments yet to his marriage with Labonya, though clouds have begun to gather in her mind, unbeknownst to Amit. In high spirits, he now asks her to recite one of her own poems. Labonya recites a short and sorrowful "Tagore" poem ("I brought you no happiness"), which strikes Amit like a bolt from the blue:

> "I brought you no happiness. Only the gift of freedom
> I leave behind at the luminous end of the night.
> Naught else remains—no importunity,
> No piling of abjectness from moment to moment,
> No vanity, no piteous crying, nor proud laughter.
> Nor looking back. Only the offering of freedom
> Have I filled today from my own great annihilation."
> (p. 71)

This is a sad requiem, quite unexpected, when Amit is on the eve of making arrangements for the marriage.[16] Labonya resumes the note of

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[15]This is poem no. 7 in the *Balaka* collection.

[16]In *Rabindra Kavye Paschimalok* [*The Influence of the West on Tagore's Poetry*] (Kolkata: Lekhok Somabesh, n. d.), Kalisadhan Mukherjee mentions the source

sad farewell when Amit is again eagerly talking about their impending marriage. She begs him tearfully to forgive her "if a day comes for parting" (p. 81). Such hints and vacillation are against Amit's nature, but he now gets the message. He reacts as if he were in a silent movie. He slowly moves toward a tree and sees "scattered there the broken walnut shells" (p. 81), an almost Shakespearean image of ruin and emptiness in nature. Poet and novelist are contending in the same person.

Amit sees a volume of Tagore's 1916 *Balaka* collection of poems lying on the dust, perhaps fallen from Labonya's hands. The significance of the mention of *Balaka* is clear: the eponymous poem in this collection is an ode to life's unfulfilled quest, symbolized by the refrain "Not here, but somewhere else, in the bosom of the Far-away."[17] Amit lifts the book with care from the dust, and the melancholy raga Bhairavi, the musical vehicle of a great many Tagore songs, begins to play in his mind (p. 81). Yet, it is Donne's philosophy of the "lovers' infiniteness" in their impending hour of parting to which the novel ultimately leads.

Tagore makes Labonya accept a lover she had spurned in the past, and Amit, likewise, returns to a woman whom he had deserted. This part of the novel sounds a bit hurried, but it serves as the *raison d'être* for ending the story with the farewell poems Amit and Labonya address to one another after they have moved on to dutiful but apparently joyless marriages. Amit's brief valediction "in the unseen chamber of my heart you abide forever" (p. 104) anticipates the argument in Labonya's valediction: that what she is giving her present lover is only daily driblets, a finite act of giving, whereas her gift to Amit—in reality, his gift to her (invoking the famous Donnean riddles in "Lovers Infiniteness")—is imperishable and unchanging, though she herself is borne away by "the changing tide" (p. 105).

Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that, as a poet, Tagore explored the love poetry of John Donne to resolve the question of what remained of

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of this poem in Donne's "The Will." Although he has not explained why he thinks this is so, the reason may be that, in either poem, the theme is the lover's earthly bequest. In any case, this poem, like "Bridal Chamber," is a marriage poem by implication (p. 201).

[17]Tagore translated only a few of these *Balaka* poems, but Aurobindo Bose has produced a complete translation of the collection under the title *A Flight of Swans* (London: John Murray, 1955). I quote here line 2 of Bose's translation of the individual poem from this collection that is itself also entitled "Balaka."

love when it was gone. Before *Shesher Kobita*, Tagore faced this question in many a love song—Dantesque, Petrarchan, Shelleyan—but now, in this novel, he gives to it a distinctive Donnean flavor.

Labonya's restraint, in the face of the surge of Amit's verse, gives way at the end to providing the answer. Kripalani's re-titling of the novel in his English translation (*Farewell My Friend*) is perhaps an unconscious master-stroke—the love story is a tag to Labonya's poem, titled "Biday" ("Farewell") in *Mohua*:

> Can you hear the wheels of Time
> Rolling in ceaseless motion
> On the breast of darkness where stars
> Like gaping wounds wail
> And the human hearts wake up in fear?
> Dear friend, these ruthless wheels
> Have torn me from your side
> And flung me far away,
> Across a thousand deaths,
> On the peak of a strange dawn.
>
> What I was is whirled away
> In the dust of time,
> And no way is left for return.
> Could you see you would not know me now—
> My friend, farewell.
>
> And yet in the respite
> Of an idle day in Spring,
> When the fallen bakul flowers
> Raise their moan to the sky,
> And a sigh from the forgotten past
> Rustles through your being,
> May be if you look within you'll see
> A bit of me clinging to some corner of your mind,
> Revealing a forgotten twilight,
> Giving shape to a nameless dream.
>
> No, not a dream!
> The supreme truth of my being this,
> My Love, death-conquering,
> My gift to you imperishable, unchanging.

Let me be borne away
By the changing tide—
The gift remains.
My friend, farewell.

No loss is yours in losing me,
An image of clay.
If of that mortal dust
You have fashioned a goddess,
Let the goddess remain for you to adore
With the evening star.
No gross touch of the actual me
Shall disturb the play of your worship,
No hot breath of passionate ardour
Sully its flowers consecrate.

To the rich repast of your fancies
I shall not come with my earthen bowl
Wet with hungry tears.
Who knows, even now your words may fashion
Out of the fragments
Of what remains of me in your memory
A new creation dream-enchanted,
That weighs not as a burden
Nor makes claims.
My friend, farewell.

Grieve not on my account,
Wide is the world and many its tasks.
My cup of life not yet discarded
Shall fill again—
Let this faith sustain me ever.
I may yet be blest
If there be one whose anxious, eager heart
Waits for my footsteps.
I long to give myself to him
Who can see in the infinite compassion of love
The actual me, of good and ill blended,
Who can make the dark night gracious
With flowers plucked in the moonlight.

> What I gave to you
> Is yours by right everlasting.
> What others receive
> Are the daily driblets the heart yields
> To tender solicitude
> O my princely, peerless friend,
> What I gave to you was your own gift—
> Fuller your acceptance, the deeper my debt,
> My friend, farewell.
>
> (pp. 104–106)

This sad music of farewell, while celebrating love as a never-ending journey in infinite time, has shaped the novel and filled it with echoes of Donne's poetry. Indeed, one wonders whether the love story led up to this poem or followed from it.[18]

Frontain has analyzed the Donnean content of this last poem in some detail;[19] nevertheless, it rewards still further interrogation. In the poem's opening query to the forsaken lover, asking if he can hear the sound of the chariot of approaching Time (although it is not an invitation, but a valediction, to love), there is a clear echo of Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress," in which the speaker tells the mistress to beware of "Times winged chariot hurrying near."[20] However, the love that cannot die, even though the lovers are separated in the sublunary world, is a recognizable Donnean theme—a point made effectively by Frontain.[21] Further, here there is a Donne-like employment of paradox as an argument: "Of the love I gave you," says Labonya in the last part of her poem, "you got freehold and unrestricted possession, endless and perpetual; but here my giving is by inches, from sad moment to moment, my heart offered as a cup to drink from. But O my love without parallel, for you are rich with

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[18]As we already know, this poem, as also the other poems in *Shesher Kobita*, was being simultaneously composed for a separate collection of love lyrics in a new key (*Mohua*). The interaction between the novel and the poems was inevitable.

[19]Frontain, pp. 57–58.

[20]Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," in *The Oxford Book of Seventeenth-Century Verse*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson and G. Bullough (1934; rprt., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), line 22.

[21]Frontain, p. 57.

my love, what I gave you is only what I had received from you, the more you took, the more you put me into your debt."[22]

There is still one more point that deserves mention. Tagore must have shared the received opinion that Donne's love poems were addressed to his wife and could therefore be seen to celebrate marriage with a higher philosophy. The two marriage poems briefly mentioned above, the one by Amit and the other by Labonya, have other companion pieces in *Mohua*. Tagore had considered publishing the marriage poems from the novel and *Mohua* as a separate collection of verse about married love, which by itself indicated what was new in Tagore's love poetry. They show a mix of the theme of parting and of marriage and what never dies therein, Renaissance commonplaces certainly, yet expressed by Donne in his unique style.

"Bridal Chamber," briefly mentioned above, is actually an *aubade*, a genre known in Indian poetry as *prabhati* (dawn) poetry. The scene is reminiscent of Donne's "The Sunne Rising," an *aubade* in its own right:

> Busie old foole, unruly Sunne,
> Why dost thou thus,
> Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us?
> Must to thy motions lovers seasons run?
> Sawcy pedantique wretch, goe chide
> Late schoole boyes, and sowre prentices,
> Goe tell Court-huntsmen, that the King will ride,
> Call countrey ants to harvest offices;
> Love, all alike, no season knowes, nor clyme,
> Nor houres, dayes, moneths, which are the rags of time.
>
> Thy beames, so reverend, and strong
> Why shouldst thou thinke?
> I could eclipse and cloud them with a winke,
> But that I would not lose her sight so long:
> If her eyes have not blinded thine,
> Looke, and to morrow late, tell mee,
> Whether both the'India's of spice and Myne
> Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with mee.

[22]This is my prose translation of the original Bengali. Kripalani translates this last part of the poem somewhat differently (see p. 314 above).

> Aske for those Kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
> And thou shalt heare, All here in one bed lay.
>
> She'is all States, and all Princes, I,
> Nothing else is.
> Princes doe but play us; compar'd to this
> All honor's mimique; All wealth alchimie;
> Thou sunne art halfe as happy'as wee,
> In that the world's contracted thus.
> Thine age askes ease, and since thy duties bee
> To warme the world, that's done in warming us.
> Shine here to us, and thou art every where;
> This bed thy center is, these walls, thy spheare.

The correspondence can be seen in reverse in the opening lines of Tagore's poem: "I will have to leave thee / When the night becomes distressed / At the approach of the morn."[23] There is also the theme of eternity, which Tagore read into Donne's love poetry: "They are gone—the lovers. / In ever new guises / They return at thy call" (p. 80). In the last line one can also discover the lingering trace of Tagore's former love of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetry.[24]

Another poem in the same collection, "Sondhan" ("Search"),[25] begins with these interesting lines: "Under the profound shadow of your eyes / I seek the buds of your inmost thoughts." These lines and the face-to-face position of the lovers that they convey cannot but call to mind that famous conceit in "The good-morrow": "My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares" (15).

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[23]Here my translation differs a little from Kripalani's: "Thou [Bridal Chamber] shall perforce be deserted / When the night grows unquiet / At the sound of the chariot wheels of dawn" (p. 80).

[24]Cf. Shelley's *Adonais*: "The One remains, the many change and pass" (*Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, 2nd ed. corrected by C. M. Matthews [Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970], line 460).

[25]I acknowledge my debt to Kalisadhan Mukherjee, who traced this poem and Labonya's bequest poem in particular to Donne (p. 201). I would not otherwise have noticed these poems. Mukherjee, however, only identifies the echoes of Donne's poetry in a quick-fire style; he does not explain the significance or implication of those echoes between Donne's verse and Tagore's novel.

Still another poem from *Mohua* is "Porinoy" ("Marriage"),[26] short enough like the others, but with a touch of the Donnean conceit of the pair of lovers, singly, only half, but together, one, as in "A Valediction forbidding mourning." Tagore conveys the same idea, though in a different way. To paraphrase lines 3–5 of "Porinoy": in the separated self, the One cannot be seen; only in the marriage of two can there be found the One and Eternal, that is, the spirit's true home. As the poem continues, it should be noted, it blends this echo from Donne with poetic pantheism, retaining a trace of the concept of the music of the spheres, as in these lines:

> (Marriage is a declaration of faith, because)
> To gift oneself away is the ultimate gift,
> For it answers *the call that sounds all over the sky*,
> As does the flood of beauty that sweeps the garden,
> And the light of the stars keeping vigil at night,
> And the reveille sung by the sun at dawn.
> (6–11, emphasis added)[27]

This conceit appears again in yet another *Mohua* poem—"Fear Not": "We've seen each other in each other's eye, / And seen the world too therein" (19–20). This is not a stand-alone conceit in the poem, which is, like Donne's, a dramatic monologue, on a high note, declaring the world of the lovers as private domain and, so ensconced, defying death (Donne, too, does that): "If in midstream our rudder breaks apart and our sails are torn to shreds / We will face death then without fear / Because I am with thee and thou with me" (15–17).[28] It is one world made of "thou and me," as in Donne's poem, "thou and I / Love so alike" (20–21), that is the moot point here.

This and the other marriage poems discussed here recall the impression that Donne's love poetry had on Tagore, that is, one of situating love in an inner space, as a form of mystical worship. In his

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[26]With respect to "Porinoy," I have turned to the Bengali text available in *Rabindra-Rachanabali*, 2:819–820.

[27]This is my translation. Compare "trepidation of the spheares" in stanza 3 of "A Valediction forbidding mourning."

[28]With respect to "Fear Not," I have turned to the Bengali text available in *Rabindra-Rachanabali*, 2:778–779. The translations are mine.

introduction to his translation of *Mohua*, Aurobindo Bose quotes a telling passage from Tagore's letter to a friend about "the concept" of love that he had sought to realize in this collection of his poems: "Through the union of the inner and outer world, love, in all its beauty and adornment, is built up in the inner sanctuary of the mind."[29] Perhaps it is best to end this essay with these words of Tagore.

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[29]Quoted in Bose, *The Herald of Spring*, p. 19.