RABINDRANATH TAGORE
1861–1941

One of the great intellectuals of the twentieth century, Rabindranath Tagore is the preeminent figure in the history of modern literature in Bengali, the language of the state of West Bengal in eastern India, and of the neighboring nation of Bangladesh. Based on the enthusiastic reception in the West of *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings, 1912), a volume of his poetry in English translation, Tagore won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. By the end of his life, he had written more than fifty collections of poetry and composed and set to music over two thousand songs. Both poetry and songs (the latter include the national anthems of India and Bangladesh) continue to be cherished by Bengali audiences, and the Nobel Prize led to the translation of Tagore's poetry into many European and Asian languages. However, poetry was only one manifestation of Tagore's multifaceted genius. In the period during which India emerged from colonial domination to independent nationhood, Tagore pioneered or brought to maturity the major forms of modern Bengali literature, including the novel, the essay, the short story, and drama. His literary activity was organically related to social, artistic, and humanitarian projects aimed at fostering humanism and the spirit of international understanding.

Tagore was born into an illustrious Hindu family from Calcutta, the capital of British India in the nineteenth century. The Tagores were pioneers of the Bengal Renaissance, a movement led by Bengali intellectuals who were in many ways shaped by English education, but who at the same time reacted with profound ambivalence to colonial rule and the imposition of Western cultural norms on Indians. Through their writings and through the institutions they founded, the leaders of the Renaissance sought to refashion Indian society to meet the challenges of the modern world; but they wished to do so without losing the moorings that the highest values and ideals of traditional Indian culture provide. Tagore's father, Debendranath Tagore, was one of the first leaders of the Brahmo Samaj, a major Hindu social reform organization that was founded on just such a blend of Western and Indian ideas.

Each of Debendranath Tagore's fourteen children made significant contributions to Bengali literature and culture. None of them, however, equaled Rabindranath, the youngest, in breadth and importance of achievement. Rabindranath Tagore founded Shantiniketan, a school, and Visva-Bharati, an international university, as alternatives to colonial education. He traveled widely in Europe, Asia, and America, speaking out against the evils of colonialism, wars based on narrow nationalism, and abuses of human rights all over the world. When Mahatma Gandhi led the Indian people in their nonviolent (and ultimately successful) struggle for freedom from British colonial rule in the period between the two world wars, Tagore stood by Gandhi and his movement but pointed out the dangers of focusing on exclusively nationalistic goals, arguing instead for a new world order based on transnational ideals. In all of Tagore's writings, as in the poems and the short story presented here, we discern the universalistic humanism that informed his public life, combined with a profound sense of beauty.

The 1912 collection *Gitanjali* consists of Tagore's own prose translations of his poetry, mainly of songs and poems he had written when he was grieving over the deaths of his wife, two of his young children, and his father, whom he had lost in quick succession. It is unfortunate that Tagore's international reputation as a poet rests in the main on the *Gitanjali* collection and on others that followed soon after, also translated by the author. The *Gitanjali* poems do not convey the impressive range and variety of Tagore's poetry, nor do the prose translations do justice to the poetic qualities of his writing. In fact, the early translations, along with W. B. Yeats's characterization of the *Gitanjali* poems in his preface to the first edition of the collection, led to the mistaken perception of Tagore's poetry as a combination of a vague romantic

lyricism and an equally vague Eastern mysticism. However, recent translations from a greater range of Tagore's poetry have been more successful in conveying the concreteness and vigor of Tagore's poems, their accessibility to the modern reader, and the complexity of their stance toward the material and spiritual planes of experience.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Tagore almost single-handedly brought Bengali poetry into the modern age. Although he drew upon earlier lyric traditions in Sanskrit and Bengali with great sensitivity, from the very beginning his poems were distinguished by their intensely personal voice and innovative use of language, meter, rhythm, and imagery. Tagore constantly experimented with the Bengali language, investing words with a creative tension between rich, older associations and new shades of meaning. He invented new meters and rhythms, pressing diverse sources into service, ranging from Sanskrit poetry to nursery rhymes. Equally fascinated by music and poetry, he often crossed the boundary between lyric and true song. While in his early work Tagore moved easily between intricately structured lyric verse and longer poems with a very loose structure, in his later poems he often abandoned meter altogether, writing what he called "prose poems." Poem 20 from the collection *On My Birthday,* written in a period when the poet had begun to try his hand at painting, reflects Tagore's preoccupation, in the later part of his career, with language as pure form, devoid of all extrinsic meaning, similar to the focus on line and color in his paintings.

A deep sense of the relationship between human beings and nature is an intrinsic aspect of Indian lyricism (e.g., Kālidāsa, vol. B, p. 1267, and the Bengali Vaiṣṇava poets, vol. B, p. 2390). This essential relationship takes new forms of expression in Tagore's poetry. Tagore's innate sensitivity to nature was deepened by the long stretches of time he spent in rural Bengal. Shantiniketan, the school that he established in 1901 and on whose campus he lived, is situated in Bolpur, a rural enclave near Calcutta. In his poems, the landscapes of Bengal—the vast sky, the boats and paddies of the riverine plains of East Bengal, trees, flowers, and changing seasons—are both subject matter and the ground for mystical experience.

Though in tune with specific Indian mystical traditions such as those of the Bengali Vaiṣṇavas (vol. B, p. 2390) and the itinerant Bāul singers of Bengal, Tagore's mysticism is an expression of a unique personal philosophy, one that rejects all creeds, and is founded on his idea of a "deity of life" or "life-god" (*jīban-debatā*). In the poet's mystical religion, the divine (which is beyond gendered identity) is continuously in creative interplay with mundane life, human beings and nature, continually manifesting itself as both part of and separate from life in the world. Forever seeking contact with this life-god, human beings can experience its presence only as "Personality"—that is, the universal and the eternal spirit manifested as and rooted in the specific, the individual, the concrete, and the local. Some of these ideas are drawn from the *Upaniṣads,* ancient Indian mystical texts that formed the basis of the philosophy of the Brahmo Samaj. But the philosophy of the "deity of life" is Tagore's own and finds unique and varied expression in his poems. It is as much at the center of the description of the clerk Haripada's miserable life in a Calcutta lane (*Flute Music*) as in the surreal landscapes of *A Stressful Time* or *The Golden Boat.* In many poems, as in the magnificent *I Won't Let You Go,* precisely observed details of mundane life—a little girl tries to stop her father from leaving her, a wife lists the foods that she has packed for her husband's journey—become the springboard for a passionate meditation on a cosmos that is at once divine and human.

A different aspect of Tagore's humanism is revealed in his fiction. Bengali prose fiction emerged in the late nineteenth century as a result of the impact of English education and Western literary forms. Tagore's elder contemporary Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838–1894) wrote historical romances modeled on the novels of Sir Walter Scott, but he also used the novel as a vehicle for social critique and nationalist

propaganda. Concern about social issues, especially the need for the emancipation of Bengali women from oppressive cultural practices, dominates Tagore's major novels, beginning with *Cokher bali* (Speck in the Eye) and *Naṣṭanīṛ* (The Broken Nest), published serially in 1901. Here, as well as in his more than one hundred short stories, his preoccupation with the emotional and psychological lives of his characters and his passionate championship of the integrity of the individual strike a new note in Bengali literature.

Tagore's short stories are the first major examples of the genre in any Indian language. Between 1891 and 1895, forty-four of his stories appeared in Bengali periodicals, the majority of them in the monthly journal *Sādhanā* (Endeavor), edited by members of the Tagore family. The rest were written in the 1920s. *Punishment* (*Śāsti*, 1893) belongs to the earlier stories, which were inspired by Tagore's experience of rural Bengal during the decade he spent there as manager of the family estates in Shelidah in the province of East Bengal (now the independent nation of Bangladesh). The characters in Tagore's major fiction tend to be drawn from the Bengali middle class, which he knew well; but a number of these early stories are about the peasants and villagers with whom he came in contact during the Shelidah years. Here the great Padma River and the agricultural landscape of eastern Bengal become the focus of the love of nature and the lyrical, romantic sensibility that are characteristic of the writer's works.

The stories of this period are by no means idyllic pictures of village life. In *Punishment*, Tagore's sensitive portrayal of the complex relationships obtaining among the members of the low-caste Rui family and between them and the upper-class rural society that exploits them, suggests both realism and a sense of tragedy. The transactions among Chandara, the proud and beautiful young woman, her husband, the farm-laborer Chidam, and landlord Ramlochan Chakravarti, "pillar of the village," reveal Tagore's intimate understanding of the ways in which economic, social, and patriarchal oppression are intrinsically linked and of the ability of the oppressed to resist even the most powerful forms of oppression. However, as in his other stories and novels, his real interest in *Punishment* is in delineating the psychological ramifications of social and familial relationships. Chandara is a typical Tagore protagonist, representing the power and dignity of the human will in the face of societal degradation. And yet Tagore's world is a tragic one, populated by individuals who, trapped in what he called the "dreary desert sand of dead habit," are ultimately unable to transcend the tyranny of institutions.

Amiya Chakravarty, ed., *A Tagore Reader* (1961), and Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology* (1997), offer excellent introductions to the full range of Tagore's writing. Krishna Kripalani's *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (1962) can be supplemented with the perspectives offered in *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-minded Man* (1995), by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson. Two histories of Bengali literature, Dushan Zbavitel's *Bengali Literature* (1976) and Asit Kumar Bandhyopadhyay's *Modern Bengali Literature* (1986), provide information about the context of Tagore's achievement. Tagore's own translations of his poetry are represented in *Collected Poems and Plays* (1936). For other translations, especially of hitherto untranslated poems, see William Radice, *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Poems* (1985), and Ketaki Kushari Dyson, *I Won't Let You Go* (1993). William Radice, *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories* (1991), offers translations of thirty of Tagore's early short stories, including some of his best-known ones. For a comparison of Tagore's short stories with those of later Bengali writers on the themes of oppression and resistance, see Kalpana Bardhan, ed. and trans., *Of Women, Outcastes, Peasants, and Rebels: A Selection of Bengali Short Sories* (1990).

Punishment[1]

I

When the brothers Dukhiram Rui and Chidam Rui went out in the morning with their heavy farm-knives, to work in the fields, their wives would quarrel and shout. But the people near by were as used to the uproar as they were to other customary, natural sounds. When they heard the shrill screams of the women, they would say, "They're at it again"—that is, what was happening was only to be expected: it was not a violation of Nature's rules. When the sun rises at dawn, no one asks why; and whenever the two wives in this *kuri*-caste[2] household let fly at each other, no one was at all curious to investigate the cause.

Of course this wrangling and disturbance affected the husbands more than the neighbours, but they did not count it a major nuisance. It was as if they were riding together along life's road in a cart whose rattling, clattering, unsprung wheels were inseparable from the journey. Indeed, days when there was no noise, when everything was uncannily silent, carried a greater threat of unpredictable doom.

The day on which our story begins was like this. When the brothers returned home at dusk, exhausted by their work, they found the house eerily quiet. Outside, too, it was extremely sultry. There had been a sharp shower in the afternoon, and clouds were still massing. There was not a breath of wind. Weeds and scrub round the house had shot up after the rain: the heavy scent of damp vegetation, from these and from the waterlogged jute-fields, formed a solid wall all around. Frogs croaked from the milkman's pond behind the house, and the buzz of crickets filled the leaden sky.

Not far off the swollen Padma[3] looked flat and sinister under the mounting clouds. It had flooded most of the grain-fields, and had come close to the houses. Here and there, roots of mango and jackfruit trees on the slipping bank stuck up out of the water, like helpless hands clawing at the air for a last fingerhold.

That day, Dukhiram and Chidam had been working near the zamindar's office. On a sandbank opposite, paddy[4] had ripened. The paddy needed to be cut before the sandbank was washed away, but the village people were busy either in their own fields or in cutting jute: so a messenger came from the office and forcibly engaged the two brothers. As the office roof was leaking in places, they also had to mend that and make some new wickerwork panels: it had taken them all day. They couldn't come home for lunch; they just had a snack from the office. At times they were soaked by the rain; they were not paid normal labourers' wages; indeed, they were paid mainly in insults and sneers.

When the two brothers returned at dusk, wading through mud and water, they found the younger wife, Chandara, stretched on the ground with her sari[5] spread out. Like the sky, she had wept buckets in the afternoon, but had now given way to sultry exhaustion. The elder wife, Radha, sat on the verandah sullenly: her eighteen-month son had been crying, but when the brothers came in they saw him lying naked in a corner of the yard, asleep.

1. Translated by William Radice. 2. In Bengal, a low caste originally of bird catchers, but by the 19th century, general laborers. 3. A major river in what is now Bangladesh. 4. The rice crop. *Zamindar:* landlord. 5. A long strip of cloth draped around the body, Indian women's traditional clothing.

Dukhiram, famished, said gruffly, "Give me my food."

Like a spark on a sack of gunpowder, the elder wife exploded, shrieking out, "Where is there food? Did you give me anything to cook? Must I earn money myself to buy it?"

After a whole day of toil and humiliation, to return—raging with hunger—to a dark, joyless, foodless house, to be met by Radha's sarcasm, especially her final jibe, was suddenly unendurable. "What?" he roared, like a furious tiger, and then, without thinking, plunged his knife into her head. Radha collapsed into her sister-in-law's lap, and in minutes she was dead.

"What have you done?" screamed Chandara, her clothes soaked with blood. Chidam pressed his hand over her mouth. Dukhiram, throwing aside the knife, fell to his knees with his head in his hands, stunned. The little boy woke up and started to wail in terror.

Outside there was complete quiet. The herd-boys were returning with the cattle. Those who had been cutting paddy on the far sandbanks were crossing back in groups in a small boat—with a couple of bundles of paddy on their heads as payment. Everyone was heading for home.

Ramlochan Chakravarti, pillar of the village, had been to the post office with a letter, and was now back in his house, placidly smoking. Suddenly he remembered that his sub-tenant Dukhiram was very behind with his rent: he had promised to pay some today. Deciding that the brothers must be home by now, he threw his chadar[6] over his shoulders, took his umbrella, and stepped out.

As he entered the Ruis' house, he felt uneasy. There was no lamp alight. On the dark verandah, the dim shapes of three or four people could be seen. In a corner of the verandah there were fitful, muffled sobs: the little boy was trying to cry for his mother, but was stopped each time by Chidam.

"Dukhi," said Ramlochan nervously, "are you there?"

Dukhiram had been sitting like a statue for a long time; now, on hearing his name, he burst into tears like a helpless child.

Chidam quickly came down from the verandah into the yard, to meet Ramlochan. "Have the women been quarelling again?" Ramlochan asked. "I heard them yelling all day."

Chidam, all this time, had been unable to think what to do. Various impossible stories occurred to him. All he had decided was that later that night he would move the body somewhere. He had never expected Ramlochan to come. He could think of no swift reply. "Yes," he stumbled, "today they were quarrelling terribly."

"But why is Dukhi crying so?" asked Ramlochan, stepping towards the verandah.

Seeing no way out now, Chidam blurted, "In their quarrel, *Chotobau* struck at *Barobau*'s[7] head with a farm-knife."

When immediate danger threatens, it is hard to think of other dangers. Chidam's only thought was to escape from the terrible truth—he forgot that a lie can be even more terrible. A reply to Ramlochan's question had come instantly to mind, and he had blurted it out.

6. In Bengal, a sheet of cloth draped around the shoulders, usually worn by men but sometimes by women.
7. "Elder Daughter-in-Law"; members of a family address each other by kinship terms. *Chotobau*: "Younger Daughter-in-Law."

"Good grief," said Ramlochan in horror. "What are you saying? Is she dead?"

"She's dead," said Chidam, clasping Ramlochan's feet.

Ramlochan was trapped. *"Rām, Rām,"*[8] he thought, "what a mess I've got into this evening. What if I have to be a witness in court?" Chidam was still clinging to his feet, saying, *"Ṭhākur,*[9] how can I save my wife?"

Ramlochan was the village's chief source of advice on legal matters. Reflecting further he said, "I think I know a way. Run to the police station: say that your brother Dukhi returned in the evening wanting his food, and because it wasn't ready he struck his wife on the head with his knife. I'm sure that if you say that, she'll get off."

Chidam felt a sickening dryness in his throat. He stood up and said, *"Ṭhākur,* if I lose my wife I can get another, but if my brother is hanged, how can I replace him?" In laying the blame on his wife, he had not seen it that way. He had spoken without thought; now, imperceptibly, logic and awareness were returning to his mind.

Ramlochan appreciated his logic. "Then say what actually happened," he said. "You can't protect yourself on all sides."

He had soon, after leaving, spread it round the village that Chandara Rui had, in a quarrel with her sister-in-law, split her head open with a farm-knife. Police charged into the village like a river in flood. Both the guilty and the innocent were equally afraid.

II

Chidam decided he would have to stick to the path he had chalked out for himself. The story he had given to Ramlochan Chakravarti had gone all round the village; who knew what would happen if another story was circulated? But he realized that if he kept to the story he would have to wrap it in five more stories if his wife was to be saved.

Chidam asked Chandara to take the blame on to herself. She was dumbfounded. He reassured her: "Don't worry—if you do what I tell you, you'll be quite safe." But whatever his words, his throat was dry and his face was pale.

Chandara was not more than seventeen or eighteen. She was buxom, well-rounded, compact and sturdy—so trim in her movements that in walking, turning, bending or climbing there was no awkwardness at all. She was like a brand-new boat: neat and shapely, gliding with ease, not a loose joint anywhere. Everything amused and intrigued her; she loved to gossip; her bright, restless, deep black eyes missed nothing as she walked to the *ghāṭ,*[1] pitcher on her hip, parting her veil slightly with her finger.

The elder wife had been her exact opposite: unkempt, sloppy and slovenly. She was utterly disorganized in her dress, housework, and the care of her child. She never had any proper work in hand, yet never seemed to have time for anything. The younger wife usually refrained from comment, for at the mildest barb Radha would rage and stamp and let fly at her, disturbing everyone around.

8. God's name, repeated to express great emotion. 9. "Master" or "lord," term of address for gods and upper-class (Brahmin) men. *Tagore* is an anglicized form of *Ṭhākur.* 1. Steps leading down to a pond or river; meeting place, especially for women, who go there to get water or to wash clothes.

Each wife was matched by her husband to an extraordinary degree. Dukhiram was a huge man—his bones were immense, his nose was squat, in his eyes and expression he seemed not to understand the world very well, yet he never questioned it either. He was innocent yet fearsome: a rare combination of power and helplessness. Chidam, however, seemed to have been carefully carved from shiny black rock. There was not an inch of excess fat on him, not a wrinkle or dimple anywhere. Each limb was a perfect blend of strength and finesse. Whether jumping from a riverbank, or punting a boat, or climbing up bamboo-shoots for sticks, he showed complete dexterity, effortless grace. His long black hair was combed with oil back from his brow and down to his shoulders—he took great care over his dress and appearance. Although he was not unresponsive to the beauty of other women in the village, and was keen to make himself charming in their eyes, his real love was for his young wife. They quarrelled sometimes, but there was mutual respect too: neither could defeat the other. There was a further reason why the bond between them was firm: Chidam felt that a wife as nimble and sharp as Chandara could not be wholly trusted, and Chandara felt that all eyes were on her husband—that if she didn't bind him tightly to her she might one day lose him.

A little before the events in this story, however, they had a major row. Chandara had noticed that when her husband's work took him away for two days or more, he brought no extra earnings. Finding this ominous, she also began to overstep the mark. She would hang around by the *ghāṭ*, or wander about talking rather too much about Kashi Majumdar's middle son.

Something now seemed to poison Chidam's life. He could not settle his attention on his work. One day his sister-in-law rounded on him: she shook her finger and said in the name of her dead father, "That girl runs before the storm. How can I restrain her? Who knows what ruin she will bring?"

Chandara came out of the next room and said sweetly, "What's the matter, *Didi*?"[2] and a fierce quarrel broke out between them.

Chidam glared at his wife and said, "If I ever hear that you've been to the *ghāṭ* on your own, I'll break every bone in your body."

"The bones will mend again," said Chandara, starting to leave. Chidam sprang at her, grabbed her by the hair, dragged her back to the room and locked her in.

When he returned from work that evening he found that the room was empty. Chandara had fled three villages away, to her maternal uncle's house. With great difficulty Chidam persuaded her to return, but he had to surrender to her. It was as hard to restrain his wife as to hold a handful of mercury; she always slipped through his fingers. He did not have to use force any more, but there was no peace in the house. Ever-fearful love for his elusive young wife wracked him with intense pain. He even once or twice wondered if it would be better if she were dead: at least he would get some peace then. Human beings can hate each other more than death.

It was at this time that the crisis hit the house.

When her husband asked her to admit to the murder, Chandara stared at him, stunned; her black eyes burnt him like fire. Then she shrank back, as

2. "Elder Sister," respectful form of address for Bengali women.

if to escape his devilish clutches. She turned her heart and soul away from him. "You've nothing to fear," said Chidam. He taught her repeatedly what she should say to the police and the magistrate. Chandara paid no attention—sat like a wooden statue whenever he spoke.

Dukhiram relied on Chidam for everything. When he told him to lay the blame on Chandara, Dukhiram said, "But what will happen to her?" "I'll save her," said Chidam. His burly brother was content with that.

III

This was what he instructed his wife to say: "The elder wife was about to attack me with the vegetable-slicer. I picked up a farm-knife to stop her, and it somehow cut into her." This was all Ramlochan's invention. He had generously supplied Chidam with the proofs and embroidery that the story would require.

The police came to investigate. The villagers were sure now that Chandara had murdered her sister-in-law, and all the witnesses confirmed this. When the police questioned Chandara, she said, "Yes, I killed her."

"Why did you kill her?"

"I couldn't stand her any more."

"Was there a brawl between you?"

"No."

"Did she attack you first?"

"No."

"Did she ill-treat you?"

"No."

Everyone was amazed at these replies, and Chidam was completely thrown off balance. "She's not telling the truth," he said. "The elder wife first—"

The inspector silenced him sharply. He continued according to the rules of cross-examination and repeatedly received the same reply: Chandara would not accept that she had been attacked in any way by her sister-in-law. Such an obstinate girl was never seen! She seemed absolutely bent on going to the gallows; nothing would stop her. Such fierce, passionate pride! In her thoughts, Chandara was saying to her husband, "I shall give my youth to the gallows instead of to you. My final ties in this life will be with them."

Chandara was arrested, and left her home for ever, by the paths she knew so well, past the festival carriage, the market-place, the *ghāṭ*, the Majumdars' house, the post office, the school—an ordinary, harmless, flirtatious, fun-loving village wife; leaving a shameful impression on all the people she knew. A bevy of boys followed her, and the women of the village, her friends and companions—some of them peering through their veils, some from their doorsteps, some from behind trees—watched the police leading her away and shuddered with embarrassment, fear and contempt.

To the Deputy Magistrate, Chandara again confessed her guilt, claiming no ill-treatment from her sister-in-law at the time of the murder. But when Chidam was called to the witness-box he broke down completely, weeping, clasping his hands and saying, "I swear to you, sir, my wife is innocent." The magistrate sternly told him to control himself, and began to question him. Bit by bit the true story came out.

The magistrate did not believe him, because the chief, most trustworthy,

most educated witness—Ramlochan Chakravarti—said: "I appeared on the scene a little after the murder. Chidam confessed everything to me and clung to my feet saying, 'Tell me how I can save my wife.' I did not say anything one way or the other. Then Chidam said, 'If I say that my elder brother killed his wife in a fit of fury because his food wasn't ready, then she'll get off.' I said, 'Be careful, you rogue: don't say a single false word in court—there's no worse offence than that.' " Ramlochan had previously prepared lots of stories that would save Chandara, but when he found that she herself was bending her neck to receive the noose, he decided, "Why take the risk of giving false evidence now? I'd better say what little I know." So Ramlochan said what he knew—or rather said a little more than he knew.

The Deputy Magistrate committed the case to a sessions trial.[3] Meanwhile in fields, houses, markets and bazaars, the sad or happy affairs of the world carried on; and just as in previous years, torrential monsoon rains fell on to the new rice-crop.

Police, defendant and witnesses were all in court. In the civil court opposite hordes of people were waiting for their cases. A Calcutta lawyer had come on a suit about the sharing of a pond behind a kitchen; the plaintiff had thirty-nine witnesses. Hundreds of people were anxiously waiting for hair-splitting judgements, certain that nothing, at present, was more important. Chidam stared out of the window at the constant throng, and it seemed like a dream. A *koel*-bird[4] was hooting from a huge banyan tree in the compound: no courts or cases in *his* world!

Chandara said to the judge, "Sir, how many times must I go on saying the same thing?"

The judge explained, "Do you know the penalty for the crime you have confessed?"

"No," said Chandara.

"It is death by the hanging."

"Then please give it to me, sir," said Chandara. "Do what you like—I can't take any more."

When her husband was called to the court, she turned away. "Look at the witness," said the judge, "and say who he is."

"He is my husband," said Chandara, covering her face with her hands.

"Does he not love you?"

"He loves me greatly."

"Do you not love him?"

"I love him greatly."

When Chidam was questioned, he said, "I killed her."

"Why?"

"I wanted my food and my sister-in-law didn't give it to me."

When Dukhiram came to give evidence, he fainted. When he had come round again, he answered, "Sir, I killed her."

"Why?"

"I wanted a meal and she didn't give it to me."

After extensive cross-examination of various other witnesses, the judge concluded that the brothers had confessed to the crime in order to save the

3. A trial that is settled through a special court *sessions* in one continuous sitting. 4. Common Indian songbird.

younger wife from the shame of the noose. But Chandara had, from the police investigation right through to the sessions trial, said the same thing repeatedly—she had not budged an inch from her story. Two barristers did their utmost to save her from the death-sentence, but in the end were defeated by her.

Who, on that auspicious night when, at a very young age, a dusky, diminutive, round-faced girl had left her childhood dolls in her father's house and come to her in-laws' house, could have imagined these events? Her father, on his deathbed, had happily reflected that at least he had made proper arrangements for his daughter's future.

In gaol,[5] just before the hanging, a kindly Civil Surgeon asked Chandara, "Do you want to see anyone?"

"I'd like to see my mother," she replied.

"Your husband wants to see you," said the doctor. "Shall I call him?"

"To hell with him,"[6] said Chandara.

5. Jail. 6. "Death to him" (literal trans.); an expression usually uttered in jest.

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS
1865–1939

William Butler Yeats is not only the main figure in the Irish literary renaissance but also the twentieth century's greatest poet in the English language. His sensuously evocative descriptions and his fusion of concrete historical examples with an urgent metaphysical vision stir readers around the world. Years after the poet's death, the Nigerian Chinua Achebe borrowed three words from one of his lines as the title of a novel, *Things Fall Apart*—confident that his audience would immediately recognize the source. If the English language has a Symbolist poet, it is once again Yeats for his constant use of allusive imagery and large symbolic structures. Yeats's symbolism is not that of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, or other continental predecessors, however, for the European Symbolists did not share the Irish poet's fascination with occult wisdom and large historical patterns. Yeats adopted a cyclical model of history for which the rise and fall of civilizations are predetermined inside a series of interweaving evolutionary spirals. With this cyclical model, he created a private mythology that allowed him to come to terms with both personal and cultural pain and helped to explain—as symptoms of Western civilization's declining spiral—the plight of contemporary Irish society and the chaos of European culture around World War I. Yeats shares with writers like Rilke and T. S. Eliot the quest for larger meaning in a time of trouble and the use of symbolic language to give verbal form to that quest.

Yeats was born in a Dublin suburb on June 13, 1865, the oldest of four children born to John Butler and Susan Pollexfen Yeats. His father, a cosmopolitan Anglo-Irishman who had turned from law to painting, took over Yeats's education when he found that, at age nine, the boy could not read. J. B. Yeats was a highly argumentative religious skeptic who alternately terrorized his son and awakened his interest in poetry and the visual arts, inspiring at one and the same time both rebellion against scientific rationalism and belief in the higher knowledge of art. His mother's strong ties to her home in County Sligo (where Yeats spent many summers and school holidays) introduced him to the beauties of the Irish countryside and the Irish folklore and super-