

Elegant, graceful, and heart-warming stories

AUTHOR: ALICE MUNRO

REVIEWED BY DR. SHIBLI JABIR

THE book, "Family Furnishings", is the most recent collection of short stories written by Alice Munro and includes 24 stories written between 1995 and 2014. This book is a companion volume to her earlier Selected

mony to her loving imagination, craftsmanship, and ability to touch the reader's heart.

Rather than offer a story-by-story commentary, I will highlight a few points from the most notable and crafty stories. The first one "Love of a Great Woman" is the lengthiest and has an interesting structure. Enid is a practical nurse who works at the home of Rupert Quinn, a trader taking care of his sick and dying wife. Enid and Rupert went to the same high school but their lives then took different paths. The story takes a sudden twist when the body of an optometrist, Mr. Willens, goes missing and was soon found in the lake along with his car. Everyone assumes that the optometrist took the wrong turn on the road while driving his car and drowned in the lake. However, Mrs. Quinn, before she dies confides in Enid that the optometrist was actually killed by her husband in a fit of rage when one day he comes back from work and finds him with his wife, apparently visiting her on a house call. Finally, Enid decides to take her chance to see how far he will go with her and tell him that she knows about the incident. She invites him to take her out on a boat ride, and tells him also that she does not swim. Will he kill her; will they end up romantically tied? The story leaves many of these possibilities open, and ends in a mystery.

In "Working for a Living", Munro provides a brief history of her family. The story is also her tribute to her father who at many stages of his life was a

farmer, a furrier, and then a factory worker. Her admiration for her mother, who was sick towards the final years of her life, was equally glowing. For a year, her mother worked towards selling the furs that her father produced, and was successful. Munro writes, "... she had known the right way to go about it, never pushing too hard. She had the true instinct for mixing friendship and business considerations, the instinct that all salespersons have."

"Wood" is the story of a craftsman and his wife, who is bed-ridden afflicted with

helpless. The wife appears from nowhere (almost out of heaven) to the area of the forest where he was struggling to get back to seek care.

In "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", she paints the moving story of a man who, in spite of his wayward ways, goes to extraordinary lengths to please his wife, who is losing all her memories as she is ravaged by fast-onset dementia. Grant is a professor of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic literature, and someone who gets his way with young women, particularly his students. However, when he

visiting a friend after a minor quarrel with him. He tries, in many ways, to put the guilt on her for storming out of the house in the midst of his verbal abuse, with utterances like "you brought it all on yourself", and "I did it to save them the misery. The misery of knowing that their mother had walked out on them". Suddenly the bus stops, the passengers get down, and find a young man lifeless on the ground, seriously wounded due to an accident. The woman nurses the victim and he starts to breathe again.

"Hired Girl" is the experience of a young woman Elsa of limited means who works as a live-in maid. The story describes the slights and lack of empathy that she sees in Mrs. Montjoy's family. It is known that this story mirrors Munro's own life. According to a memoir written by her eldest daughter, Alice Laidlaw, Munro had worked as a maid for an affluent family in Toronto. The story also reveals her social consciousness and her keen awareness of inequities in modern society.

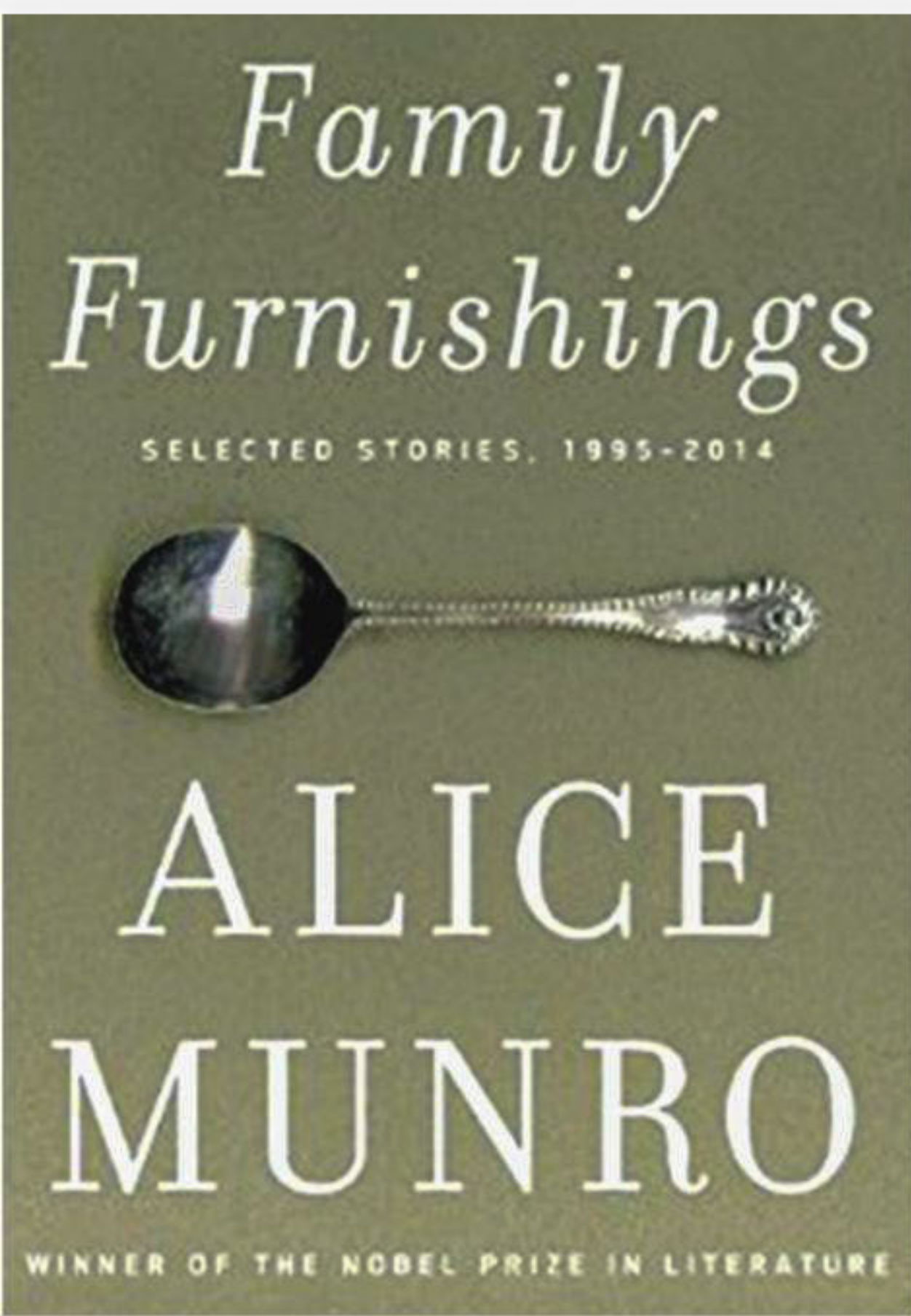
"Passion" is about the importance of passion in life and love. Alice Munro's style is in full display in this story in all its regalia. The story starts with Grace, now a middle-aged woman, who came to visit a town where she spent her youth many years ago. Munro does not reveal at the beginning the reason for Grace's visit, but takes us back in little steps. Grace came from a humble family and gave up the prospect of marriage to Maury who comes from a well-to-do family. Munro recounts an

episode which highlights the lack of physical passion in the relationship between Grace and Maury. They never kissed each other or displayed any other emotional intimacy. Then one day, Neil, his elder brother, takes her out as they gathered for Thanksgiving. He is a doctor and touches her in the process of giving her first aid for an injury, and she sees the power of passion. The writer hints that Neil also probably missed it in his relationship with his wife.

And even at the end, it is not clear what brought Grace back; to see Mrs. Travers who gave her a check for a thousand dollar with which she used to start a new life? Or to visit the place where she took a bold step in her youth that changed the course of her life, or to remember the man Neil, a married doctor and Mrs. Travers's son, who was part of her life changing decision, but died the very night their lives got intertwined?

Alice Munro and her short stories are magical and touch many aspects of societal values and display her take on love, parenthood, and womanhood. It is always an amazing experience reading one of her short stories which I have been doing for more than ten years. After her Nobel, I wanted to go back to many of her iconic stories. As I turn the pages of this new collection, my expectations were more than met and I rejoiced in Alice Munro's elegant, graceful, and heart-warming stories.

The reviewer lives and works in Boston, USA.



Stories (1968-1994). Alice Munro, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2013 and has been called the Chekhov of our time, has written fourteen books of short stories. Her stories are a testi-

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unknown diseases. At the beginning of the short story the reader learns that Roy, a hardworking upholsterer and refinisher of furniture, is taking care of his wife and working hard to make ends meet. He decides to branch out into wood-cutting to make some extra money. Munro in her inimitable way interjects some comments the sick wife makes which might make the reader deduce as Munro's lack of sympathy for her. "She no longer drives her car. The warmth and glow were drained out of her face and brown eyes. ... she lost most of her interest in television." Then, one day the tide turns. Roy goes to the forest to chop trees, but is injured and

realizes that he is losing his wife, his first love, he undertakes some heroic efforts to comfort her. It is one of Munro's most acclaimed short stories and touches on the "progress of love"; the story was made into a movie under the title "Away From Her".

"Dimensions" is one the saddest but Munro ends it in a positive note with a "deux ex machina" maneuver. A young woman goes to visit her husband, the father of her three dead children in jail. It's a long bus ride and she reflects on how she found herself in the current situation. Her husband, in a fit of rage, and to punish her, kills the children while she was out



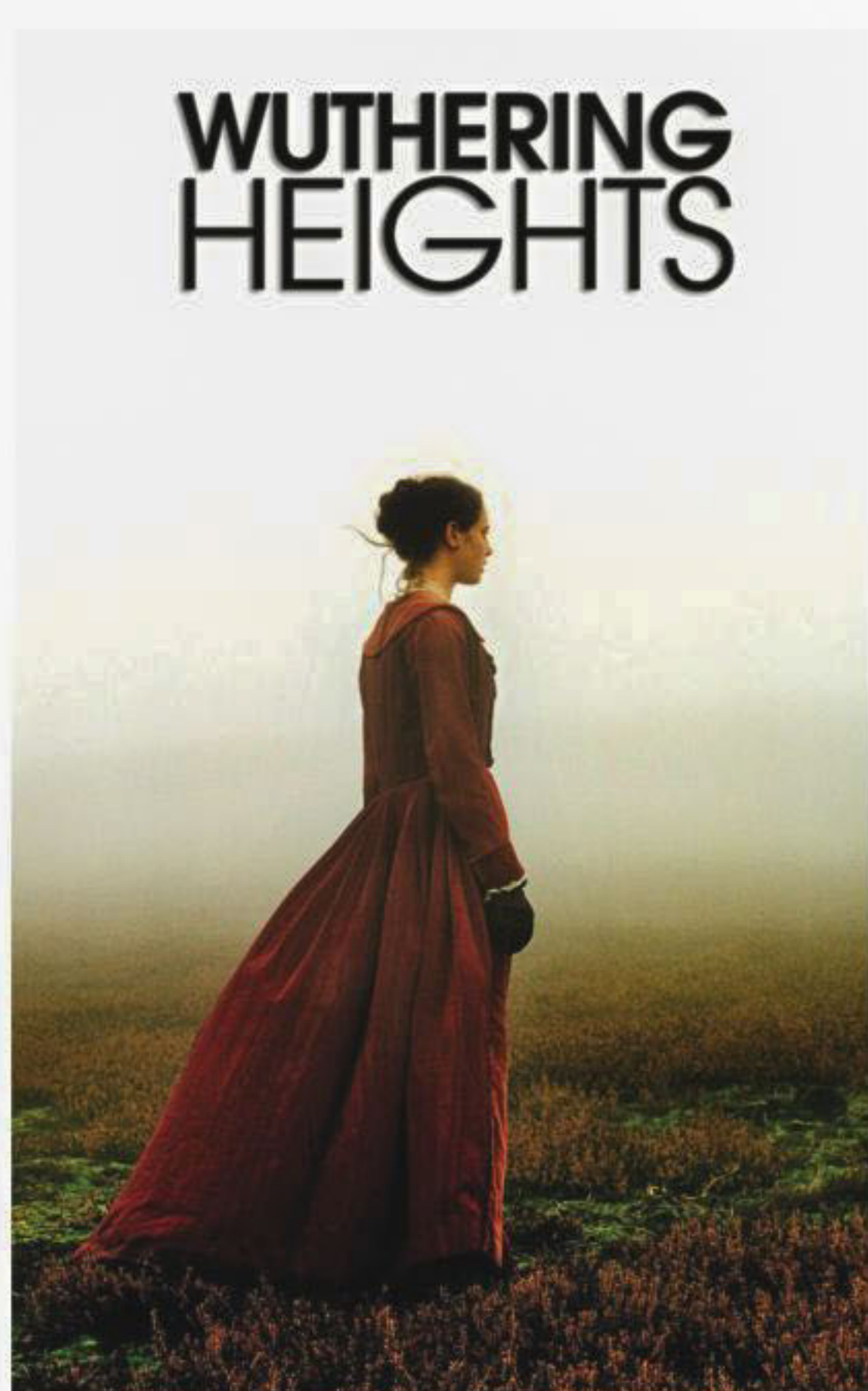
Love story packed with passion and vengeance

AUTHOR: EMILY BRONTE

REVIEWED BY MAHFUZUL HASIB CHOWDHURY

WUTHERING Heights is one of the best-known novels in the history of English literature. This novel tells a love story packed with passion and vengeance. In Wuthering Heights Emily Bronte portrayed a profound and tempestuous love story between Catherine and Heathcliff. Catherine belonged to an elegant, rich family while Heathcliff was an urchin. He was taken home from Liverpool by Mr. Earnshaw, Catherine's father. Catherine soon fell in love with Heathcliff and Heathcliff started liking her too. But Catherine's elder brother Hindley could not stand Heathcliff's intimacy with Catherine. He often talked to Heathcliff in a very unfriendly way and looked down upon him as an outsider. Even he turned Heathcliff into a slave. He forced Heathcliff to work like a ploughboy and a domestic serf. But all these hostile deeds by Hindley failed to keep Catherine and Heathcliff apart from each other. As Hindley's maltreatment towards Heathcliff kept on mounting, one night Heathcliff disappeared. This incident hurt Catherine. Hindley soon got Catherine married to Edgar, who belonged to an aristocratic family living at Thrushcross Grange. Hindley did not at all care about his sister's love for Heathcliff. Heathcliff reappeared in the story after three years. He looked much stronger and more handsome than before and there is a hint in the novel that he had made a good amount of money while he had been away. He came back to take revenge on Hindley. He did so by inducing Hindley to become extremely addicted to wine. Hindley borrowed a lot of money from Heathcliff to buy wine but could not pay the money back later on. Heathcliff took advantage of this situation and grabbed all the assets that earlier belonged to Hindley. After that, Heathcliff pretended to be in love with Isabella, Edgar's younger sister. Isabella grew a soft corner for Heathcliff too. Heathcliff married Isabella not out of love; rather he wanted to extract revenge on Edgar by tormenting his sister. Heathcliff was so furious with Edgar because Edgar had taken Catherine away from his life. That's why he treated Isabella in an abusive and violent way.

Catherine was not happy in her marital life with Edgar, even though they had a daughter. Catherine could never stop loving Heathcliff. When she was a young girl, her love for Heathcliff was not granted by her elder brother. She missed Heathcliff all the time, even after her marriage with Edgar. Her marital unhappiness and constant remembrance of Heathcliff made her so sick that soon she died. On the other hand, Isabella could no longer tolerate Heathcliff's torture and one day she escaped to London. After some years she also passed away. To judge from a feminist point of view, Catherine died with immense pain in her heart which was caused by the fact that she was forcibly separated from the man she had loved since her childhood, while Isabella was exploited as a tool for revenge by Heathcliff's intense vengeance.



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Wuthering Heights is also regarded as an evidential book for tracing the plight of women in Victorian England from a literary point of view. The portrayal of the deprivations suffered by Catherine and the social injustice that Heathcliff had to undergo during his boyhood at the hands of Edgar illustrate sad instances of gender discrimination and class inequity in England during the 19th century. Wuthering Heights is one of the most popular books in the world on remorseful romance and it has been translated into most of the major languages of the world.

The reviewer is Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Metropolitan University, Sylhet.

Tales of Tagore in Latin America

AUTHOR: RAZU ALAUDDIN

REVIEWED BY RIFAT MUNIM

TAGORE'S reception outside India is quite an interesting subject. He was an insatiable globetrotter who had travelled vastly on both sides of the Atlantic. The ways in which he and his works were and are still being received, interpreted and reinterpreted underlie the culture-specific, historical dimensions of an ever-changing world, understanding which is as much important as appreciating any other aspect of his work.

His travels through Europe and the US have been sufficiently documented and reflected upon. Even the unkind reception he was accorded in China in 1924 has been dug out with the accuracy of historical analysis by Pankaj Misra. But vast swathes of his travels in Latin America, a continent that dominates world literature today, are left broadly untouched.

Razu Alauddin has recently opened a new window on this subject: Tagore's tour of Latin America, a window that has remained partly open. The only mentionable beam of light that has passed through it so far is that of Tagore's relationship with Argentine author, Victoria Ocampo -- a literary friendship that has been explored at some length by the likes of Shankha Ghose and Ketaki Kushari Dyson, among others.

But Razu in his book *Dakkhine Surjodoy* (Sunrise in the South) tells us there were many more characters in this story and hence many more chapters -- all of which reveal a world where Tagore is not a half-forgotten name, as he is in the west now, but still has a luminous presence.

No sooner had Tagore arrived in England in 1912 with a self-translated English manuscript of *Gitanjali* than he swept the western literary world off its feet, as if it were a ground all prepared for him, as if every writer there were already aware of his indefatigable literary potential.

This unexpected tide had its pitfalls; it ebbed as suddenly as it had come, never to rise again until a hundred years later. His rise to fame and fall from grace in Europe do not say much about the intrinsic value of his writing. But they do

tell us about the European discourses prevalent in those times, some of which found in him a sage and a mystic who perfectly fitted in their emerging anti-colonial campaign and some found an overtly "sentimental" poetic voice, not too uncharacteristic of the orient. On the other hand, some (Marxists of Frankfurt school) saw in him -- vis-a-vis Ghore Baire (Home and Abroad) -- a zamindar, loyal to the British Raj, making a last-ditch attempt to strengthen his own class position against the rise of a middle class supporting the nationalist movement (Swadeshi Andolon) in India.

But this is not what Razu's book deals with. Razu tells us what a different experience Tagore had

Argentine, Chilean and Peruvian journals, magazines, books and newspapers, he also shows the extent of Tagore's influence upon the younger generation of Latin American writers, painters and thinkers.

One of the most intriguing snippets is about a prolonged rivalry between Pablo Neruda and Vicente Huidobro, two of Chile's most prominent poets, centring one of Tagore's lyrics from *The Gardener*. Neruda published *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, his second volume of poems, in 1924 at the age of 18. Ten years later a Chilean magazine called *Pro* published an anonymous article in which Neruda was accused of plagiarising the poem (numbered 16 in the volume) titled "In my Sky at Twilight" from "Tumi Sondhyar Meghmala", which, one of Tagore's most celebrated songs, had been available in Spanish translation since 1917.

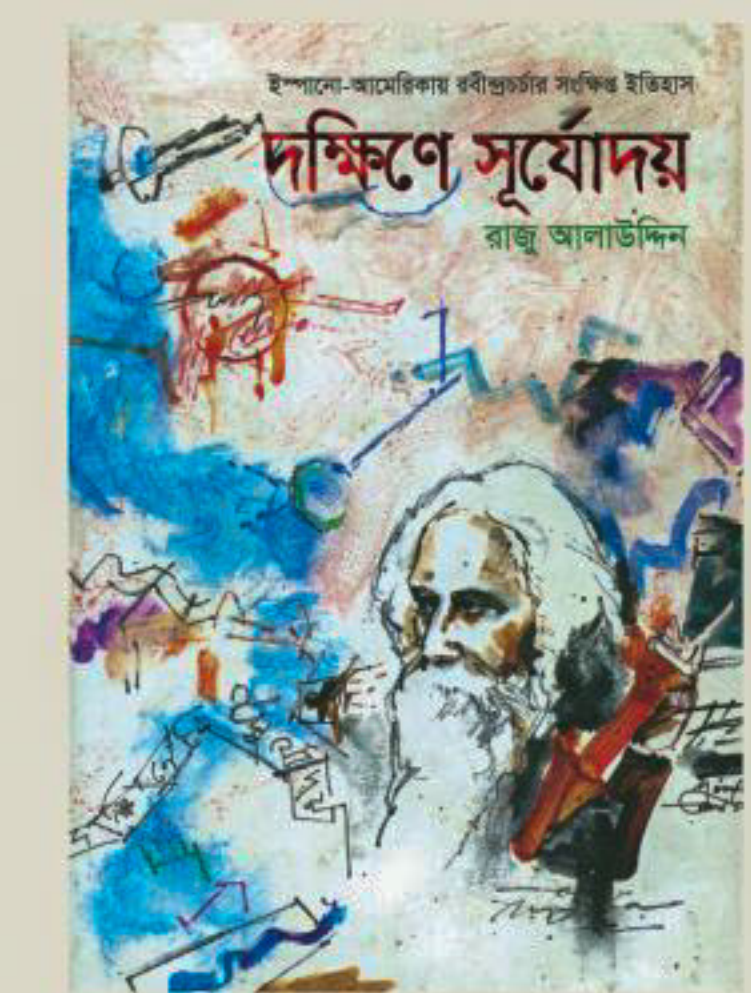
Later, other literary supplements and magazines picked up this debate, many of them calling Neruda a literary thief. Although there was no evidence of anyone pulling the strings, Neruda came to believe that the broadside launched against him was Huidobro's doing.

According to Razu's findings, Neruda had not acknowledged it in the 1st edition of *Twenty Love Poems* that his poem was a free-floating translation of one of Tagore's songs. However, after the debate started and lingered, Neruda added in the later editions an appendage saying, "This poem is a paraphrase of the 30th poem of Rabindranath Tagore's *The Gardener*."

Razu's book, which is full of such snippets, is a substantial contribution to the subject of Tagore's reception in Latin America. But the more important reason why it should have a prominent place in literary research is that it has opened up the avenue to comparative studies between Bengali and Latin American authors.

It is only expected that more illuminating books with such fresh angles are to follow suit.

The reviewer is a journalist and a writer.



had in Latin America. Tagore interacted with most of its prominent literary figures and had a huge influence on the future generations of its writers. But unlike in the west, he has never ceased to be one of the major 20th century voices in Latin America even though his work there was seen through an extra layer of translation, all of which was done from English. This fact necessitates a massive project to bring out all of Tagore's major works in Spanish from the original Bangla, rather than from another translated version.

In the book, Razu gives us the many titbits of Tagore's meetings and exchanges with writers such as Ocampo, Neruda and Borges. Browsing through many influential