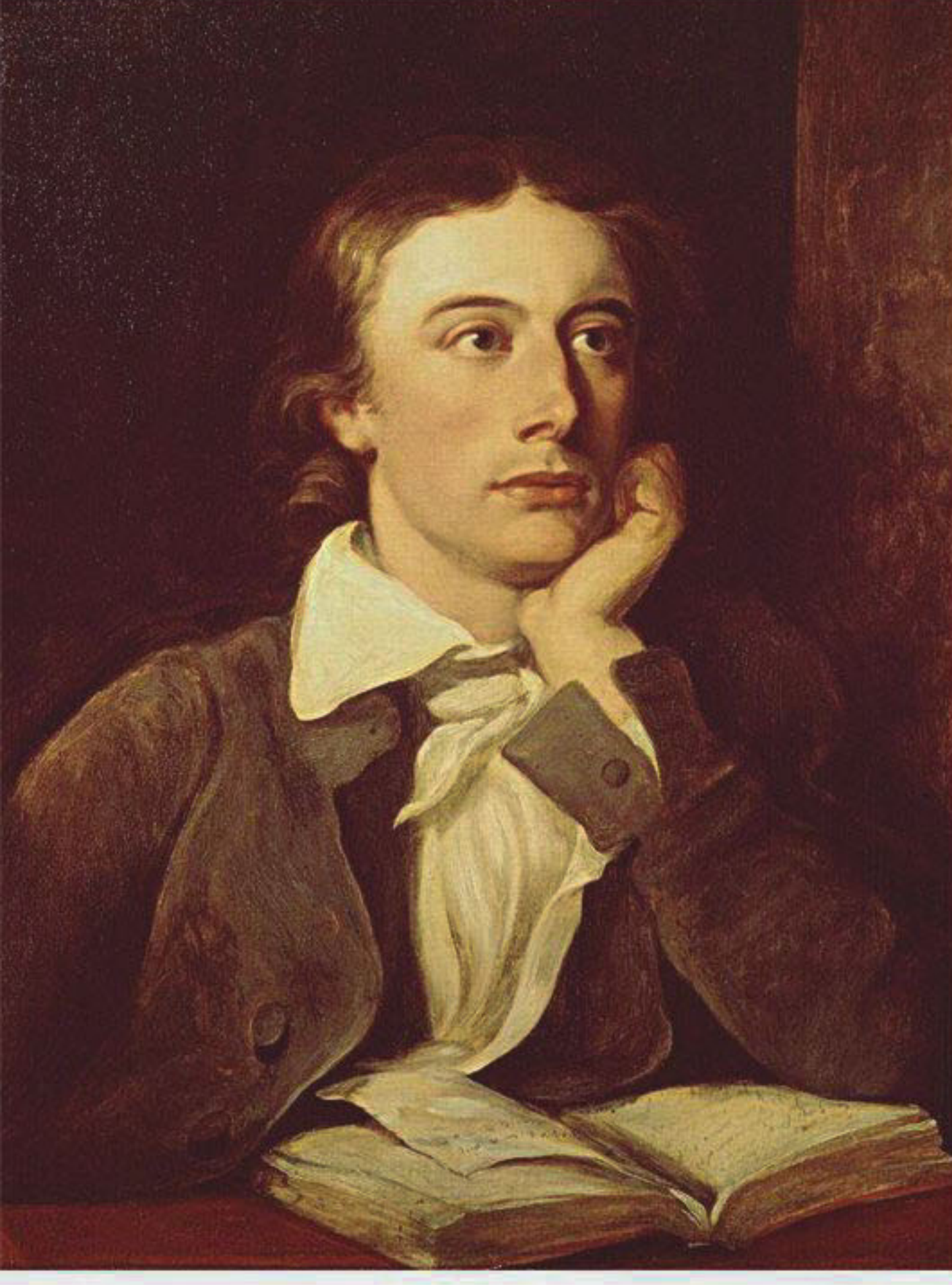


TAGORE AND KEATS

SADIK ISLAM

John Keats (1795-1821) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), two great idealists, belonged two different times and places and did not use the same language, but astonishingly enough, possessed similar types of sensibilities and idealistic vision. Their *bhakti* (devotion) and spiritual illumination or *maya* had in it deep understanding of life. The frailty of love, poignant morbidity, insatiable passion,



Portrait of John Keats by William Hilton. National Portrait Gallery, London.

doubt on ephemeral life and disharmony of the world filled up their oeuvres with profound agony. So they leave the mundane life and take refuge to imagination. But eventually they go through some kind of metamorphosis and come back to accept the realities of life.

As a poet emphatically that of nature

and creative imagination, Tagore starts his divine journey infusing his ideas with floating clouds:

'My mind is a companion of the clouds
Flying into the horizon, in the infinity of space.'

Beauty, to Tagore is an illumination, the state of attaining the ultimate spiritual bliss. Infinite being expresses His beauty mixed with nature; Tagore states it in 'Sadhana'.

Keats shows psycho-aesthetic interest in 'To Fanny', an eulogy to his beloved Fanny Brawne. The poem is also mentionable for having Keats's signature spirituality:

'My muse had wings/ And ever ready was to take her course'

On the other hand, Tagore's famous lines 'Shimar Majhe Aushim Tumi' (Within limits you remain limitless) has become the byword for Romanticism. Tagore is bemused by the feeling of unseen:

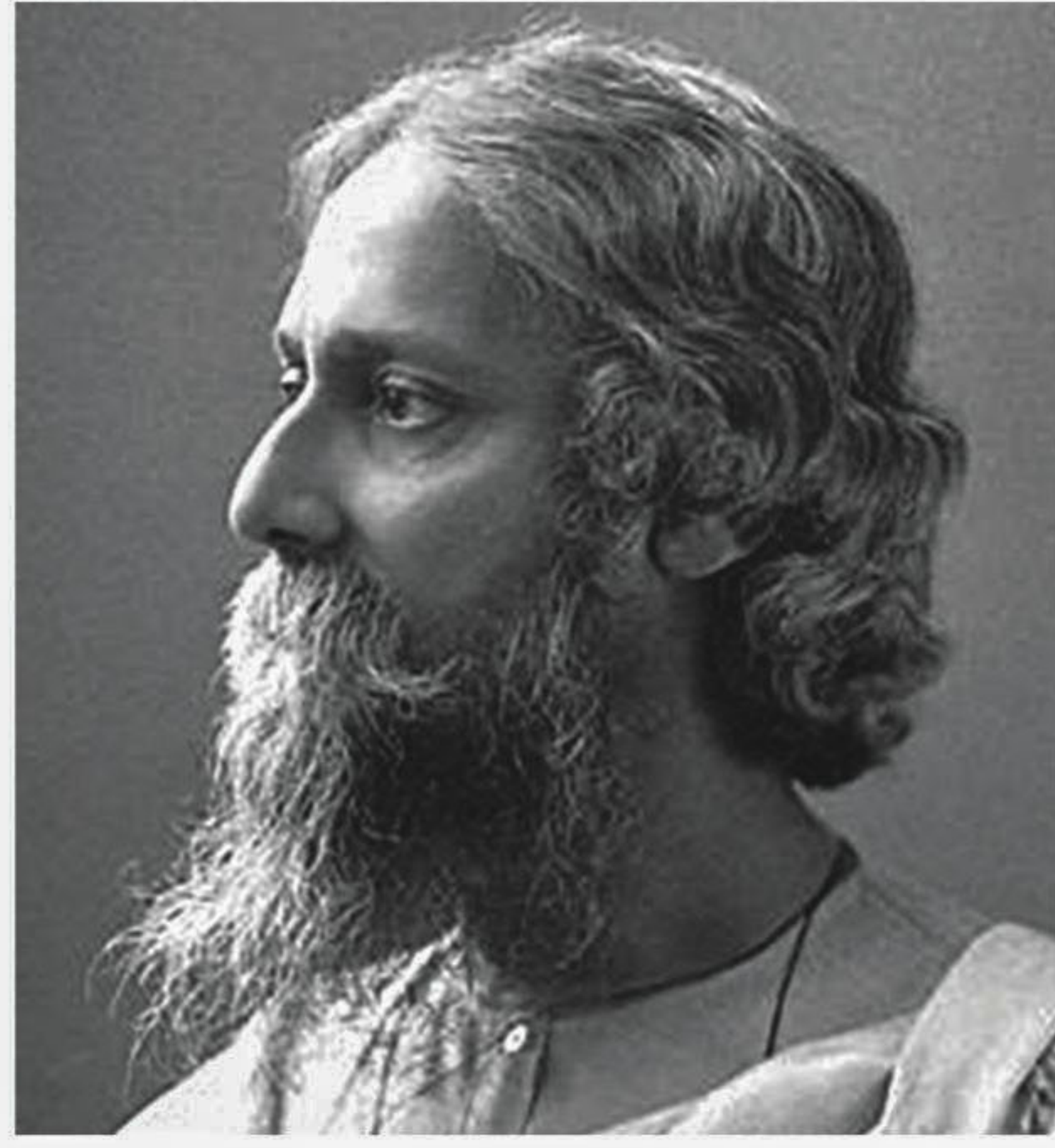
'You, the formless, engage in a play with form
Endowing me with your beauty which is so mellifluous.'

No-one can offer such extraordinary lines on imagination as Keats in 'Endymion'. It is the stamp of his romantic imagination. Silence here becomes music:

'To his capable ears. Silence was music from the holy spheres.'

It is no less than obvious that Tagore and Keats possess an innate instinct to fly high to be merged into the infinity to experience eternal bliss.

In fact, Keats's fancied mental flight begins in 'Ode to Psyche', and eventually, in the 'Ode to Autumn' the poet comes back to materiality. In the 'Ode to a Nightingale', the elfish song of the bird cannot entice the poet anymore: 'adieu! The fancy cannot cheat anymore'



Rabindranath Tagore

Later, in 'Endymion' Keats shows profound doubts about the falsity of his hollow vision. These lines stand as a proof of Keats's recognition of mortal realities:

'I have clung
To nothing, lov'd nothing, nothing seen
Or felt but a great dream!'

In the poems of 'Chitra' an eternal woman engulfs Tagore's whole existence as if he has found his most coveted 'Jibandebata' or the 'life-deity'. In many of Tagore's works rendezvous with the formless is his main interest.

Eventually, Tagore also has a somersault; in the poem 'Matir Daak' Tagore is not in love for the

transcendental one but discovers joy and beauty in the real world. With a confident manner of withdrawal, Tagore allows reality and denounces deceptive imagination emphatically:

'It is merely an idle illusion
It is only a play of clouds'

Like Keats's evasive Nightingale, Tagore's bird's song becomes mute in 'Kalmrigaya':

'The garden looks arid,
The birds do not sing.'

Tagore confesses the inevitability of melancholy. Earthly truth gives a blow to his spiritual obsession. He shows strong stoical traits by accepting pains and death:

'There is sorrow there is death,

Yet there is peace, yet there is bliss.'

The most important message is served is that delight and melancholy of joy and sorrow are two inseparable parts of our lives. Sorrow and anxieties do not belittle the possibilities of life rather they are necessary for happiness's sake. Joy is not perfect or complete without acute feeling of sorrow. Likewise, Keats in his sonnet "Why Did I Laugh Tonight?" calls death the highest gift of life: 'Death is Life's high meed.'

In 'Gitanjali' Tagore accepts death as a fulfillment of life:

'And because I love this life, I know I shall love death as well.'

Tagore in his celebrated song-poem 'Poush' praises the beauty of Poush. Tagore like Keats in his hyperbolic adulation and gladness immortalise a bright Poush day which recalls Autumn of Keats.

'Poush calls you all to its festival-come, come away.

Miraculously, its baskets fill with ripe harvests this day!

Tagore's 'On the bank of Roop-Naran' shows the sharp transformation of the great thinker. 'I knew for sure this world's no dream/ and I learnt to love this harshness -it never betrays'. His thoughts are now devoted not to visionary flights but to harsh realities of life, and the focus and attitude show him reconciled to the real world he lives in.

Tagore on the way to muse acutely over life comes to know the purposes of joy and sorrow, beauty and decay, permanence and transience and attain a poetic Nirvana. As the grave confusion of Keats is over, there is a satisfactory reconciliation between imagination and reality, immortality and mortality, as well as idealism and materialism. Life may be short and perishable but is not insignificant, rather it is delightful and death is its fruition.

Dreams

NAWSHIN NAWAR ULLAH

I clawed at my throat; my nails digging into my skin. The pressure of my nails was good enough to leave some crescent shaped bruises. I just wanted the pain to end. I could not take it anymore. They even tried to tear away the last thing of value that I have--something that defined freedom to me. They tried to take away words from me.

Writing was my only escape route. It was what that still kept me tethered to this planet; it kept my soul attached to this hollow, otherwise, lifeless vessel. They wanted to control me. Everything I had. I feared to think. I feared that somehow they would learn my thoughts and even try to control them.

It was only months ago, when they forbid me to read. They burnt my books and along with it burnt everything that is magical that I had, memories they withheld. I knew it would be coming. I knew they would start going through my diary.

My only last escape; and they were ready to lock it down as well. A surge of anger washed through me as I opened my door to find her leaning down to make sense of my soul. I was perplexed, infuriated and baffled.

I was not in control of myself when it happened. My fingers seemed to tingle with fire. She tried to explain everything. But she had taken things far beyond explanation. I was done being considerate and understanding. Her sight seemed to prick my skin. And I- I pushed her! The minute I saw my hands shoving her away, I knew now things went beyond repair. We couldn't fix this. Not in a million years.

Her face crumpled. It was what I feared the most. She was dead. So was I. Her shoulders slumped and she turned to disappear behind the darkness of the house.

She was gone; gone for now. I knew she wouldn't return. Now more than ever I wanted her to scream at me, to beat me,

strangle me. But she did nothing. I sat in the darkness of the room hoping it would swallow me up. I cried; my mouth gaped open, the muscles contracted in attempt to make out a scream. But I couldn't find my voice.

I wanted the agony and pain to return. But only guilt lingered, feasting on whatever energy it found behind every wounded tissue that I had. Unable to decide on my next action, I lay on the cold floor hoping my mind would go numb and mask my pain for the night. I waited; I prayed for the pain, the torment, the agony to go away and the sleep find its way. I was blessed, and my prayers were heard. Slowly and silently, I drifted into a silent slumber.

Soon I found myself back in the Ice Queen's World. I was running through a series of mazes with icy shackles on my ankles, and the other end of the chain was tied to the Ice Queen's throne. I kept running...



INSANE

KAY

Your nails are long
That can draw blood from human flesh
Your laughter a raucous shriek
That draws fear into the heads of decent folks
Body beautiful, semi naked
flaunting a sensual flame
Faces turn in shame
You a woman... tearless, numb with pain
Thwarted, rejected and exploited
and yet unbowed?
Is declared insane.



“ব্যঙ্গ-সৃষ্টিতে অসাধারণ প্রতিভার প্রয়োজন। ... বন্ধু আবুল মনসুরের হাত-সাহায্যে দেখে বিস্মিত হলাম। ভারত কান মলে রস সৃষ্টির ক্ষমতা আবুল মনসুরের অসাধারণ। এ যেন পাকা গুস্তাদী হাত।”

-কাজী নজরুল ইসলাম



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চট্টগ্রাম: বাতিঘর (০১৭১৩৩০৪৩৪৪), প্রথমা (০১৭১১৬৪৯৪২২)