Books by Jayanta Mahapatra

Poetry

Shadow Space (1997)
The Best of Jayanta Mahapatra (1995)
A Whiteness of Bone (1992)
Temple (1989)
Burden of Waves and Fruit (1988)
Selected Poems (1987)
Dispossessed Nests (1986)
Life Signs (1983)
Relationship (1980)
The False Start (1980)
Waiting (1979)
A Rain of Rites (1976)
A Father’s Hours (1976)
Svayamvara and Other Poems (1971)
Close the Sky, Ten by Ten (1971)

Poetry Translations

Tapaswini (Co-translator) (1998)
Verticals of Life (1996)
I Can, But Why Should I Go (1994)
Song of Kubja and Other Poems (1981)
Wings of the Past (1976)
Countermeasures (1973)

Prose

The Green Gardener (1997)
Orissa (1987)
for Ayesha and Nikhil

“A beheaded puppet is a sadder sight than a dead human being.”

— Camilo Jose Cela
Acknowledgement

Several poems in this book appeared first in the following publications:

Ariel
Himal
The Hudson Review
The Kenyon Review
Journal of Indian Writing in English
Journal of the Poetry Society of India
The New Yorker
Planet: The Welsh Internationalist
The Poetry Review (London)
The Sewanee Review
TriQuarterly
Verse

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## Part II
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Rain, all night.
Capacious, like the body of a woman.
And the heat, intolerable.
A cow lows once.

Strong smells of fish and palm-toddy in the air.
One doesn’t wish to say anything at all.
How will one cross over?
The water, running out from the feet, ends up nowhere.
The mountain’s entire weight rests on the earth’s body.

The saints are all silent inside their own truths.
Moss broods silently in the cracks of the stone.
Four-year-old Pratick is silent inside his screams.
Nobody answers him although they surround his fears.

And this evening, too, silent as yesterday,
swaying on its darkness inside the arithmetic of rain.
Into the moist eyes
of the young woman clerk, returning home,
a herd of shadows has entered
but somehow isn’t able to come out.

How shall the evening star
give forth its light through the clouds?
Somewhere a garden spider
is busy, silently spinning its web.
Your sigh, too, has curled itself up
and lies asleep on a mat in the darkened room.
Only twilight,
that begins nowhere and ends nowhere
touches me like nothing does.
Its femininity, quickened with childishness,
stands out apart;
it brings in loss, beauty, the nearness of soul.
Someone I have forgotten
pauses in that warm darkness of sparrows
that crowd back at dusk, their bodies
no more tensed for flight. Nests are full.
Stubbled fields across the river
stretch out their hands, secret allegiances
in the bones of those long dead.
My life doesn’t seem real.
If I have claims,
they smile with extraordinary kindness.
Was this twilight simply an idea,
working it out through the years, from man to man,
an immobility between death and life?
Born of this sad gold, the night
opens one more cage, loosening
the animals of reveries through the trees,
so that we would be quiet
and our silence would have no consequences.
Collaboration

The mango tree my father and I planted
drifts blindly along the monsoon rain,
the air underneath its branches
is deep, cold and clear.
His dead face is poised vaguely somewhere
in the soft talk in the corridors
of my childhood I haven’t left behind.
Dogs bark in this lost hour of mine.
We were so close to each other that time.

Windows open in the tree today
with an inflection of farewell.
Maybe no one will have to pretend any longer.
Neither I nor the rare air of promise.
The leaves fall, beautiful as life itself.
And rain grazes on in the light of dead things.
Traveller

Every evening
the bells of the temple close by
rest their easy weight on the bones;
it's time again to wonder
what I'll do with what I learn.
A warm vapour rises
from the darkening earth like a hope.
Somewhere, inside a room,
a girl is dying in her mother’s arms.
Elsewhere, someone
revenge himself for his broken life.
I look at people. At my little misery.
Beyond, at a jasmine’s sad sweet smile.
Movement here has purpose:
It is not cold and tired.
The deer chasing the new growth of grass.
The drum thumping against the sky.
The woman with her knees drawn to her chest.
And the wind that deceives itself
it has tellingly carried the scream of the girl
who is dying in her mother’s arms.
My knowledge and my time
fail to quiet to night
unlike the flutter of birds.
I try to wear this weight lightly.
But the weight of the unknown buries me.
One Clear Night

The end of a love comes near,
a shadow grows long across the land,
our best literature twists to its tragic air.
There is this mist which moves and moves,
consuming the awe of the cold, stony sky:
it walks, earth’s coffin on its shoulders.

Over the hills to the lonesome sal trees
the shadows of the night play God once again
over the fields; the morning’s orchids bloom
with new forgiveness as Freedom, the puppet,
sways to the pull of unseen masters.
And death walks as always without haste,
into the sun, to the growth of all things.

These years will only make us feel betrayed;
as ageing men who will only turn out the light
and pretend to be asleep when he comes up here:
the mist in his eyes, the flames he carries
at the back of his heart, the shadow that he drags
under the slow wings of his saffron cloud.

Across the void, all day it is night inside;
in loneliness alone, God takes a different way home.
And I can find myself lying about my life.
But tonight grief and I can stand together,
our voices no more raised in disparate words
as when we first tried to understand each other.