In order to capture the scope of the plays and to suggest their spiritual, or at least, philosophical implications, I felt it was important to employ some kind of heightened language form, one that could be both poetic and vernacular at the same time. For these reasons I have chosen to write in iambic pentameters. The iambic pentameter is a marvellous device which allows for both lofty abstraction and profane directness. It has the extra advantage of forcing the writer to be succinct and inventive. There is much pleasure to be had, listening to modern day speech in iambics.

I feel that what made Tagore great, and worthy of revival now, was his understanding of human complexity. His plays, novels and stories invariably contain complex, contradictory, three-dimensional characters; - a compromised, yet idealistic rebel leader *(The Home and the World)*, a ruler who has to put her own spiritual enlightenment on hold in order to rule *(The King and the Queen)*, a sincere lover who becomes aware of the unworthiness of the object of her affections *(Red Oleander)*.
Extract in iambic pentameters
from Natir Puja
(an improvisation from Marjorie Sykes translation, 1950)

An old Buddhist legend is retold by Tagore to investigate the personal conflict between individual devotion, enlightenment and duty to society. Lokesvari, the queen to Raja Bimbasana. Bimbasana was the Buddha’s patron and convert and has given up his kingdom to his son Ajasattra, and now lives as a devotee of the Buddha.

Lokesvari is conflicted because she clings to the old ways and duties of her Kshatriya caste. She becomes disenchanted when her younger son also renounces his worldly position to become a Buddhist monk.

In this scene she talks with her servant girl Mallika. They have just paid a visit to the younger son...

Mallika = MAL; Lokesvari = LOK;

MAL; You got to see your son, Maharani, so why this rage?

LOK; My son? My son? That shell was not my son, That carapace with his face stuck on it Was hardly him. I’d rather he were dead!

MAL; Oh shush, my queen! What low state are you in To say things any mother would regret?

LOK; But did you see how when we talked just now He looked at me with the stultified blank gaze That only religious zealots and addicts have? There was no recognition; as if I’d been erased. He looked right through me! I am his mother! Is there nothing he remembers from his childhood? No glimmer of the dependency we shared,
Bound together as one entity, enshrined
In mutual adoration for each other?
There was no evidence of my sweet boy there.
And this is more than a mother can bear.
He’s gone from me, so might as well be dead.

MAL; But most men do forget about all that
As soon as some excitement comes along.
It might be war, young girls or some religion
That scoops them up into a fierce obsession,
So they ignore what went before, as if
It played no part in how they came to be.

LOK; My son is not most men. He is a prince.
He has responsibility towards a line.
He has a duty to protect his people.
Where he comes from is important if
He is to rule with credibility.
He can’t just throw that in, and join a sect!

MAL; But if he gains the enlightenment he’s after,
Won’t that make him somehow better?
More fit to rule? To make decisions
With compassion and, dare I say it, wisdom?

LOK; Ha! The only knowledge he’ll be getting
Is how to kowtow to his spiritual Master!
Some charlatan, who thinks it’s good to starve
And spend your days in vain self-contemplation,
Considering the ways to divert power
From its rightful place – inside our family –
To some extremist bunch of holy crooks.

MAL; Well, I thought when I saw him, he looked happy.
As if he’d had the lights turned on inside.
And being with him was actually uplifting.
It was as if....

LOK; .... Oh no, not you too!
This claptrap’s so contagious.
Can’t you see? It’s bullshit!
Listen, if there was any light inside him,
It was me who put it there! My mother's love!
My milk! My life! My flame given all to him.
A reflection of the energy I gave him.
Shame on him! To claim he is reborn!
To deny the pain of bringing him to life
To dump the struggle we went through together.
His actual birth was not some airy poem,
But fleshy, torn and soiled with real blood.
And now he dares to think this new fixation
Is anything to do with giving birth?
You're right, Mallika, this is a man's religion;
This cult where decent women are abandoned
By sons who are not sons and worthless husbands
Who abscond from their daily tasks and rituals
To wander round in falsely tattered robes
Making out they're mendicants and hermits,
Crying “Alms!” and “Bless you!” and even “Peace be with you!”
As if they knew the meaning of existence,
As if they've somehow cracked that golden egg.
But at the end of the day, they all come home for supper
Don't they? Expecting to be fed!
And who is it that feeds them? We do, like fools!
Well, no more Mallika, I tell you!
It's a treacherous enemy, this man's religion,
It's taken my son, and I wish them all dead.
Extract in iambic pentameters
from *Dak Ghar*
(an improvisation from the translations of Debrata Mukherjee, 1914, Marjorie Sykes, 1950, and Ananda Lal, 1987)

Amal, a young boy, has been adopted by Madhav after his parents died. In this scene, Amal is ill, perhaps dying, and Madhav consults a Doctor. Later Gaffer appears.

Madhav = MAD; Doctor = DOC; Gaffer = GAF;

**MAD;** D’you know, before I took this refugee boy in,
The only thing I cared about was work.
I never questioned why I felt compelled
To work late every night and most weekends,
To push for tougher jobs and higher pay,
To shove all competition out the way.
And for what? Some superannuated pension?
My wife and I had plenty in the pot,
Our property portfolios were full,
Our homes were decked with furniture we got
While on some cruise or fancy trip.
The food we ate, the company we kept
Were seen by us as things we could control.
And yet, there was no purpose to our lives.
My wife was for adoption, I had doubts.
The idea of investing all ones hopes
Into some child who’s not even your own,
Seemed mad to me. But now this refugee boy
Has blown that selfish theory into air!
He’s the only goddam thing for which I care!
And just to think of him in pain, or even
Dying; it’s almost more than I can bear.
So Doctor tell me, now you’ve looked him over
Is he alright? Or is there something sinister?
**DOC:** Well firstly, his resistances are weak. His auto-immune system is badly shot.

**MAD:** Yes, yes, auto-immune’s the usual suspect. So what would you suggest, a supplement?

**DOC:** Well, slightly more than that, the boy needs rest And proper medication and some quiet. He went through quite a lot before he got here...

**MAD:** I know all that! Presumably you mean That he should take some high-grade pharmaceutical, No doubt designed to make a healthy profit For overpaid execs in Switzerland. Do we have to take that route? Why don’t we try Some alternatives? I’ve heard that seaweed’s good. Or that if you get the perfect combination Of vitamins, the body heals itself.

**DOC:** I can only tell you things the way I see them. If you want a Herbalist, then be my guest. I’m sure there’re those who’ll happily take your money And give you the advice you want to hear. But I’m thinking of the boy...

**MAD:** ....Yes, he’s what matters

**DOC:** And he really ought to be confined to bed. And given drugs, yes, ones that have been tested And found to be effective in his case. I’m sorry if my advice disappoints you, But that’s my diagnosis, so Good Day.

**MAD:** No, wait! So; keep him in a darkened room Is what you’re saying. Give him powerful drugs. Prevent him getting over stimulated. Don’t let him go outside to run and play.

**DOC:** Well, not quite yet. The air’s too damp at night, By day the sun’s too hot, the rain’s too cold,
The sticky dust would compromise his lungs
And the last thing that you want’s an asthma attack.
No. Inactivity, that is the cure.
And two of these, three times a day. Goodbye.

**DOC gives MAD a bottle of pills and leaves.**

**MAD;** Thank you. Goodbye. I'll call you if I need you.
Oh God, I don’t know how to cope with feelings.
I wasn't built to care for someone else,
My wife did that....

**GAF enters**

**GAF;** ....Hello son, how’s it going?

**MAD;** Oh no, it’s you. What is it now, old man?

**GAF;** That’s not very nice. I’ve come to see my grandson,
Is he better? Would he like to play?

**MAD;** Firstly, he’s not actually your grandson,
He’s just a boy I happen to have saved.
And secondly, you’ll just get him excited
With your juvenile and hyper-active games.
Why can’t you understand how much he’s been through
And give him space to process what he’s seen?

**GAF;** Hmm. That doesn’t sound much fun. Have you tried asking
What he feels like doing now he’s here?

**MAD;** Look, the Doctor said just now he can’t go outside.
He has to have complete and utter rest.
He has to concentrate on getting better,

**GAF;** By lying in a bedroom doing nothing?
Just staring at the ceiling getting bored?

**MAD;** If that’s what it would take to make him normal,
Then, yes. The sun’s too hot, the rain’s too cold,
And God knows what the sticky dust might do!
Then, when he’s well, perhaps a course of therapy
Would help to smooth away his troubled past.

**GAF;** Oh no! Poor kid! I’ll tell you what I’m thinking;
I’ll come back with some playing cards and crayons,
Toy soldiers and a sticker book or two.
He might as well enjoy it if he’s housebound.
I’m sure I’ll find some happier things to do.

**MAD;** You don’t get it, do you? The boy is fragile!
It’s touch and go for him at every step.
I can’t be doing with your interference.
Just let me handle this! It’s best you go.

**GAF;** Yeah, right. I’m leaving now, but I’m returning;
I think a bit of love is what’s required.
As a business man, you won’t know how to do that,
So think of me as an employee you’ve hired.

**MAD;** Dad! Please! Just leave!....

**GAF;** .... Alright, I’m going.
But see you when I get back from the shops.
I think I’ll also get a Woopee cushion,
And put it on your chair to make him laugh.
If this is it, he might as well go singing,
Not frightened by the fast approaching dark.
Nigel Planer

Nigel Planer is a playwright, actor and singer. He has been a published and performed poet, songwriter and novelist.

He has had two plays on radio 4; On the Ceiling, starring Phil Daniels, and The Magnificent Andrea, starring Roger Allam. (“quite simply, well, magnificent” Radio Times)

His first stage play, ‘On the Ceiling’ transferred from Birmingham rep to the West End. His second; ‘Death of Long Pig’ was premiered at the Finborough theatre in London in 2009.

He has also written two novels, ‘The Right Man,’ and ‘Faking It’, a best-seller about parenthood, ‘Good Enough Dad’ and the spoof theatrical biography ‘I An Actor’ (with Christopher Douglas) as well as publishing a short collection of poetry, ‘Unlike the Buddha’.

Nigel regularly teaches and runs workshops for actors and for writers at places as diverse as the Arvon Foundation, the Actor’s centre, the National Opera Studio, Lamda and the Institute of Group Psycho-Analysis. In 2011 he was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Arts from Edinburgh Napier University.