

Specialist in Bengali Translation



By RUTH BEBERMEYER

MRS. MARY LAGO, University of Missouri instructor in English, is a translator of *The Housewarming and Other Selected Writings*, the first new collection of short stories by Rabindranath Tagore published in the United States in 40 years.

The book, translated in collaboration with Tarun Gupta, an alumnus of the University, and Amiya Chakravarty, distinguished Bengali poet, now a visiting professor at Smith College, and published by the New American Library, is now in circulation.

According to Mrs. Lago, Tagore is the most important Bengali poet of the 19th and 20th centuries. His subject matter includes narratives based on myth but the emphasis is on contemporary Bengali life. His works range from poems, novels, plays and short stories to songs.

MARY LAGO MIGHT WELL HAVE BEEN a musician; as it is, her interest in music has provided stimulation for her literary career. Her first connection with a published work in translation was assistance given in 1941 on completion of a classic in the field of music theory—the counterpoint treatise, *Gradus ad Parnassum*.

Introduced to Bengali literature by the songs of Rabindranath Tagore (she has an enviable collection of recordings), Mrs. Lago turned to a study of Tagore's works and is now working on her doctoral dissertation at the University of Missouri on Tagore's short stories. She learned both Tagore songs and the Bengali language from an Indian student, Tarun Gupta, who earned both Master of Arts and Master of Science degrees at the University of Missouri and is now associated with an advertising agency in Bombay. Mrs. Lago and Mr. Gupta have translated the first new collection of Tagore short stories published in the United States for many years.

Published by the New American Library, *The Housewarming* appeared late last year, as a paperbound Signet Classic. The stories, most of which had never been translated into English before, were chosen to display the astonishing range of Tagore's experimentation with the short story. Like Western literary experimenters

near the turn of the century, Tagore was already anticipating the modern short story.

Translation has its own unique difficulties. First, Mary Lago faced the formidable task of learning the Bengali language. Then there are always those phrases which defy the translator to find an equivalent expression in another language without losing the artistry of the original. Mrs. Lago remarks that "there are times when you just give up and push the whole thing into your desk drawer in despair . . . and then suddenly, later, the exact phrase you were looking for pops into your mind."

The Housewarming, which is but one item on Mrs. Lago's growing list of publications, has been favorably reviewed in several recent literary journals, among them a special issue of *Mahfil: A Quarterly of South Asian Literature* published at the University of Chicago, with assistance of a grant by Asia Society, New York. The same issue, subtitled "Tagore in the West," also includes a review by Mary Lago of a Tagore novel, *Binodini*, and an essay, also by Mrs. Lago, titled "The Parting of the Ways: A Comparative Study of Tagore and Yeats."

The June, 1966, issue of *Literature East and West* (the Journal of the Conference on Oriental-Western Literary Relations of the Modern Language Association of America) includes reviews of both *Housewarming* and of another of Mrs. Lago's and Mr. Gupta's translations—"Nine Poems of Jibananda Das," as well as Mrs. Lago's article, "Tagore's Temporal Encounters." The "Nine Poems" appeared last year in the *Beloit Poetry Journal*. An article about Das' work, co-authored by the translators, appeared in *The Journal of Asian Studies*.

This impressive catalog of publications really accounts for only a small part of Mary Lago's activity. In addition to working on her doctorate, she teaches a course in English literature at the University and assists with the Asian Studies program. She is married to Gladwyn V. Lago, a professor of electrical engineering at the University, and is the mother of two children. In her "spare time" she sings in the University's Collegium Musicum and has recently contributed an article about the Collegium's activities to the *American Choral Review*. Her plans for the future include a trip to India, where she will complete research for her dissertation.