

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction
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Office hours: Monday 2 p.m., or by appointment

April 22, 2021. Tagore (2).

review: reading Janie, reading Hurston

- ▶ what effect does Janie's story have?
 - ▶ Mouth Almighty: jealousy and judgment
 - ▶ Pheoby: productive self-dissatisfaction
 - ▶ Alice Walker: an aunt worthy of memorialization and emulation
- ▶ the stakes: who speaks for whom? (once again)

review: “The Postmaster”

- ▶ narrator’s voice is more like the postmaster’s than anyone else’s
 - ▶ but narrator’s pity and irony align us with Ratan
- ▶ orderly roles (master, servant, mother...) thrown into disorder
 - ▶ by...?

modernity (1)

There was an indigo factory near by, and the proprietor, an Englishman, had managed to get a post office established. (“Postmaster,” 159)

He at once wrote off to Calcutta an application for a transfer. (165)

That the movement of the leaves and the clouds of the sky were enough to fill life with joy—such were the sentiments to which he sought to give expression. But God knows that the poor fellow would have felt it as the gift of a new life, if some genie of the Arabian Nights had in one night swept away the trees, leaves and all, and replaced them with a macadamised road, hiding the clouds from view with rows of tall houses. (160)

modernity (2)

Such little incidents would drive out greater events from her mind.
(161; qtd. by IB with the tag “the atoms as they fall upon the mind”)

modernity (2)

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Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small. (Woolf, “Modern Fiction,” 190)

what literature is Tagore part of?

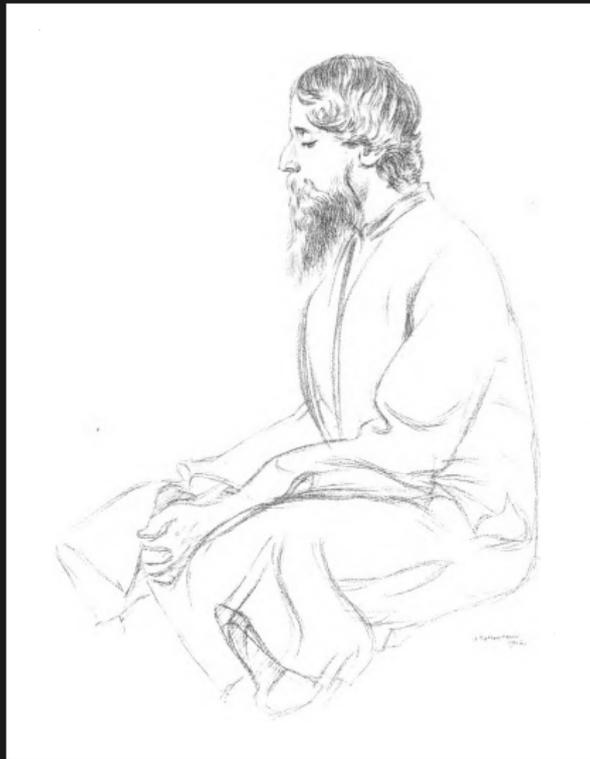
It was not at all necessary for my own reputation that I should find my place in the history of your literature. It was an accident for which you were also responsible and possibly most of all was Yeats. But yet sometimes I feel almost ashamed that I whose undoubted claim has been recognized by my countrymen to a sovereignty in our world of letters should not have waited till it was discovered by the outside world in its true majesty and environment, that I should ever go out of my way to court the attention of others having their own language for their enjoyment and use.

Letter to William Rothenstein, November 26, 1932, in *The Essential Tagore*, ed. Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakrabarthy (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011), 119.

Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not. Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.

I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter; I forget that there abides the old in the new, and that there also thou abidest.

Gitanjali 63, trans. Tagore (London: Macmillan, 1913), 58; scan available via [HathiTrust](#). Also appeared as “Poems” I in *Poetry* I, no. 3 (December 1912): 84; scan available via [Modernist Journals Project](#).



William Rothenstein, illus. *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* (London: Macmillan, 1913), frontispiece. [HathiTrust](#).

Tagore: bare outlines

1861 b. Calcutta

1878 1st visits England (briefly at UCL)

1880 *Evening Songs* (Bengali debut volume)

1883 m. Mrinalini Devi

1901 founds Santiniketan school

1902 wife dies

1912 *Gitanjali* (English), introduction by W.B. Yeats

1913 [Nobel Prize for Literature](#)

1915 knighted

1916 novel *The Home and the World* (Bengali, English)

1916 travels: Japan, USA

1919 returns knighthood after Amritsar massacre

1921 founds Visva-Bharati university

1941 d.

(for more detail, see the [DNB](#))

globalizing literary English: empire

I have never found one among them [Orientalists] who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.... We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West.

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country.

Thomas Babington Macaulay, minute of the Committee of Public Instruction, Calcutta, February 2, 1835, in G. O. Trevelyan, *The Competition Wallah* (London, Macmillan, 1866; [HathiTrust](#)), 322, 329.

within and beyond English: Bengal Renaissance

- 1828 Brahma Samaj founded (Ram Mohan Roy, Tagore's grandfather)
- 1861 Michael Madhusudan Dutt, *Meghnādavadha kāvya* (Bengali epic)
- 1864 Bankimchandra Chatterjee, *Rajmohan's Wife* (English novel)
- 1880 Tagore, *Evening Songs* (Bengali debut volume)
- 1905 Rokeya Sekhawat Hussein, "Sultana's Dream" (English story)
- 1929 Bibhutibhushan Banerjee, *Pather Panchali* (Bengali novel)

If a Western literature should turn to this extraordinary literature in Bengali [the Bengal Renaissance] and expect to find some sort of simple response to colonialism, he or she will be disappointed; the response is complex, subtle, varied and profound; the colonial world is represented, in these fictions, as history, contemporaneity, memory and change, by, for instance, the post office and the railways, by the names of roads, by professions, and old and new ways of life, rather than the figure of the British oppressor. This peripherality of the Western figure might be unsettling to the Western reader.

Amit Chaudhuri, "Modernity and the Vernacular," in *The Vintage Book of Modern Indian Literature* (New York: Vintage, 2004), xix–xx.

“world literature”

It is my express wish that in awarding the prizes no consideration whatever shall be given to the nationality of the candidates, but that the most worthy shall receive the prize, whether he be a Scandinavian or not.

Alfred Nobel's will, 1895. nobelprize.org.

Concerning our understanding of this poetry [*Gitanjali*, etc.], by no means exotic but truly universally human in character, the future will probably add to what we know now. We do know, however, that the poet's motivation extends to the effort of reconciling two spheres of civilization widely separated, which above all is the characteristic mark of our present epoch and constitutes its most important task and problem.

Harald Hjärne, Award Ceremony Speech, December 10, 1913. nobel-prize.org.

Tagore's "universal literature"

To see literature through the mirror of nation, time and people is to diminish it, not see it fully. If we understand that in literature the universal man (*vishva-manav*) expresses himself, then we can perceive what is truly worthy of observing in literature.

World literature [*viśva-sāhitya*] is not merely the sum of your writings, plus my writing, plus his writings. We generally see literature in this limited, provincial manner. To free oneself of that regional narrowness and resolve to see the universal being in world literature, to apprehend such totality in every writer's work, and to see its interconnectedness with every man's attempt at self-expression—that is the objective we need to pledge ourselves to.

Tagore, "Visva Sahitya" (1907), trans. Rijula Das and Makarand R. Paranjape, in *Rabindranath Tagore in the 21st Century*, ed. Debashish Banerji (New Delhi: Springer India, 2015), 286, 288.

“The Hungry Stones”

“The Hungry Stones”

- ▶ Are ghosts real? Consider how the story spells out the consequences for giving one answer or another.

systems of opposition

present	past
tax-collecting	palace recreation
Rs. 450/month	Mughal luxury
world of men	world of women
sola hat	paijamas
India	Persia, Arabia
comedy	desire
reality	illusion
illusion	reality

Call it reality or dream, the momentary glimpse of that far-off world, 250 years old, vanished in a flash. The mystic forms that brushed past me with their quick unbodied steps, and loud, voiceless laughter. (9)

That I...should be drawing a monthly salary...appeared to me such an astonishingly ludicrous illusion that I burst into a horse-laugh. (11)

My short English coat and tight breeches did not suit me in the least. (15–16)

Who am I? (19)

another opposition

present	past
tax-collecting	palace recreation
Rs. 450/month	Mughal luxury
world of men	world of women
sola hat	paijamas
India	Persia, Arabia
comedy	desire
reality	illusion
illusion	reality
frame narrator	inner narrator?

next

- ▶ Anand, *Untouchable* (all of it)
- ▶ commonplace: group B.
 - ▶ How does Anand represent the worker *as* a worker?