

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction  
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Office hours: Murray 019, Thursdays 11:30–1:30 or by appointment

November 25, 2019. Tagore (I).

## review: Hurston and the hurricane

- ▶ historical precision, but not a chronicle
- ▶ “natural” disaster reveals social division
- ▶ elegiac sense of a transnational community
- ▶ segregation not immutable but coercively enforced
- ▶ injustice registered in wry or muted tones

## review: reading *Their Eyes*

- ▶ bad reading: Janie on trial
- ▶ recuperative reading: Walker
  - ▶ commemoration
  - ▶ monumentalization (“masterpiece”)
  - ▶ affiliation
  - ▶ enabling contexts: the 1970s
- ▶ transformative reading: Pheoby
  - ▶ affirmation without satisfaction
  - ▶ margins of the margins: Janie at home on the edge

## parallel histories

1891 Tagore, “poṣṭmāṣṭār”

1893 James, “The Middle Years”

1895 Tagore, “kṣudhita pāṣān”

1916 Joyce, *Portrait*

1916 Tagore, *Hungry Stones and Other Stories*

1918 Tagore, *Mashi and Other Stories*

1921 Woolf, *Monday or Tuesday*

1923 Toomer, *Cane*

1923 Sayers, *Whose Body?*

1929 Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

1929 Hammett, *Maltese Falcon*

1930 Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

1937 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

## comparative discussion

- ▶ What does “The Postmaster” have in common with Toomer and Hurston? Make specific comparisons.

## modernity (I)

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

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

## modernity (2)

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 (3)

Such little incidents would drive out greater events from her mind. (161)

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," 150)

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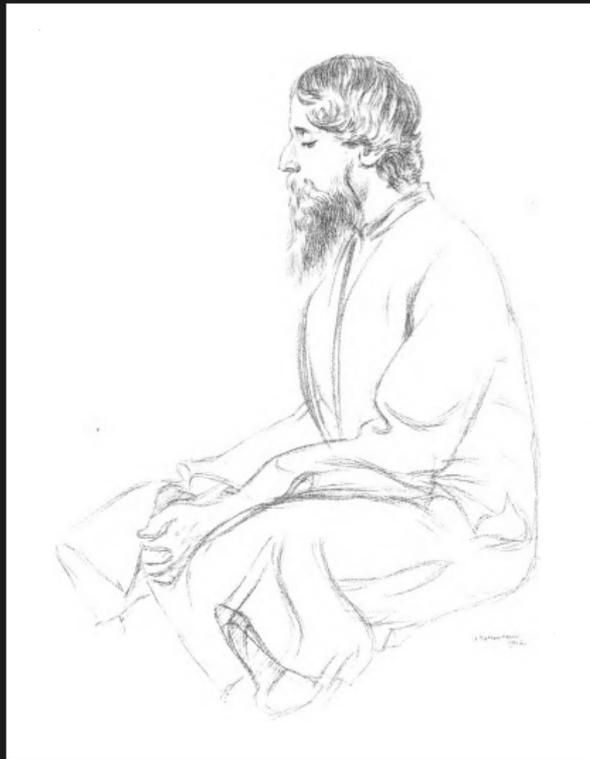
It was not at all necessary for my own reputation that I should find my place in the history of your literature. It was an accident for which you were also responsible and possibly most of all was Yeats. But yet sometimes I feel almost ashamed that I whose undoubted claim has been recognized by my countrymen 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.

(more detail: see the [DNB](#))

## globalizing literary English: empire

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 on Indian Education,” 1835.

## within and beyond English: Bengal Renaissance

1828 Brahmo Samaj founded by Ram Mohan Roy and Tagore's grandfather

1861 Michael Madhusudan Dutt, *Meghnādavadha kāvya* (epic)

1864 Bankimchandra Chatterjee, *Rajmohan's Wife* (English novel)

1880 Tagore, *Evening Songs* (Bengali debut volume)

1905 Rokeya Sekhawat Hussein, "Sultana's Dream" (English utopian 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](http://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](https://www.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 [*visva-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.

## interconnectedness?

The master said: “You need not be anxious about my going away, Ratan; I shall tell my successor to look after you.” These words were kindly meant, no doubt: but inscrutable are the ways of a woman’s heart!... She burst out weeping. (167; qtd. by CJ).

## the universal, particular versions

- ▶ Consider the four translations of the ending of “The Postmaster” on the handout. Locate a detail in the Mitter, Radice, or Chaudhuri version that is distinctive.

Ratan ceased to be a little girl. She at once stepped into the post of mother. (164–65)

- ▶ Does this story take Ratan's side?

next

- ▶ class meets tomorrow, Tuesday
- ▶ “The Hungry Stones”
  - ▶ Read and print out Basu version (Sakai)
  - ▶ Recommended: read Ghosh version (Sakai)