

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction
e20fic17.blogs.rutgers.edu

Prof. Andrew Goldstone (andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu)

Mondays: Scott 119; Wednesdays: Scott 106

Office hours: Murray 019, Mondays 1:00–2:30 or by appointment

November 29, 2017. Tagore (2).

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.

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 [*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 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.

“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)

one more 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