

# Rabindranath Tagore and World Literature

 Pushpa Raj Acharya

<https://doi.org/10.3126/litstud.v28i01.39577>

## Abstract

Courses on world literature in English translations indicate to a new popular trend in the discipline of comparative literature in North American universities. Some scholars like David Damrosch promote the practice as a new way of doing comparative literature, but others like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak think that an encyclopedic survey of world literatures in English translations confirms the logic of globalization. Whether the world literature courses and anthologies in English translation inspire enthusiasm or invite reservation, the question "What is world literature?" has come to the fore as one of the central concerns of the discipline. In 1907, eighty years after German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in Germany coined the term Weltliteratur, Rabindranath Tagore in India expressed his views on "comparative literature" translating it as vishwa sahitya, "world literature." My paper is a reading of Tagore's lecture on world literature. Tagore envisions world literature as a creative transgression that activates a persistent human struggle for a bonding between aesthetics and alterity.

Members of National Council of Education in Calcutta invited poet Rabindranath Tagore to give a lecture on comparative literature on February 9, 1907. The Council, established in 1905 as a part of the on-going Indian nationalist movement, aimed at providing an alternative modern education to Indians to oppose the British education, which mainly produced clerks or lawyers—Thomas Babington Macaulay's "interpreters"—for colonial administration. "As a director of Bengali studies at the Council, Rabindranath was asked to deliver a series of extension lectures on Comparative Literature, a discipline yet to take root in the West and almost unheard of at the time in India" (Das and Chaudhuri 376). The lecture entitled as "VishwaSahitya" was first published in the 1907 January-February issue of *Bangadarshan* journal and was later collected with Tagore's four other essays in *Sahitya*, published in October of the same year.

Tagore chooses to translate "comparative literature" as *vishwasahitya* (or *bishshoshahitto*) instead of *tulanatmaksahityain* in his lecture: "Comparative Literature is the English title you have given to the subject I have been asked to discuss. In Bengali, I shall call it World Literature [*vishwasahitya*]" ("World Literature" 148). Tagore gives no explanation why he translates the English term "comparative literature" into Bengali as *vishwasahitya*, which combines two words from Sanskrit *vishwa*—"world"—and *sahitya*—"literature." Tagore's curious move in calling "comparative literature" *vishwasahitya* demands an inquiry into his understanding of comparative literature and world literature.

This paper is an exploration of his notion of *vishwasahitya*. Like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Tagore envisions world literature, I argue, as a continual process of unfinished creation with an ideal of synthesis. Tagore interprets world literature as a humanist project generated at a moment when aesthetics transgresses rationality and when humans create a bond with alterity. The aesthetic bonding, in which the self opens to the other, and vice-versa, engenders the possibility of crossing the borders of space, time, nation, and culture. In this act of transgression, world literature circulates like the "wasteful spending"—Tagore's metaphor for both beauty and expression—yet, the singularity, or the potential universalize-ability, of each work survives without being dissolved in the vast corpus. Tagore insists that humanism and time measure the value of world literature and implies that multiplicities of languages make the collectivity of world literature possible. In his translation of "comparative literature" into *vishwasahitya*, the categories of "world literature" and "comparative literature" exist as a destabilized bind.

Translators and editors of Tagore's essays Sisir Kumar Das and Sukanta Chaudhuri provide an explanation that Tagore could have been "influenced by Goethe's term *Weltliteratur*" (376). In more recent publications, Bhavya Tiwari and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have tried to explain Tagore's leap in translation. Tiwari, who draws a conclusion similar to the one Buddhadev Bose produced in 1959, argues that India provides a model for doing comparative and world literature because of its linguistic diversity and proposes that Tagore perhaps indicates to "Comparative World Literature." She interprets the translation as Tagore's rejection of European style comparative literature. However, Tagore's essay does not explicitly mention the development in the field or "European style" comparative literature.

A rather insightful reading of the essay comes from Spivak in her dialogue with David Damrosch in 2011. Spivak recognizes a few transgressive moments in Tagore that emerge from his "unexplained but declared translation of the English phrase 'comparative literature,' which he cites, in English, in his essay, is '*bishshoshahitto*, world literature,' he says, without any explanation at all" ("Comparative Literature/World Literature" 471). The other transgressive moment is "the repeated metaphor of *bajeykhoroch*, or 'wasteful spending,'" as well as "the intimations of singularity"<sup>1</sup> ("Comparative Literature/World Literature" 471). This paper follows three transgressive moments that Spivak has pointed out. In the sections that follow, I will analyze his notion of aesthetic bonding as an opening to the alterity, explain the metaphor of the "wasteful spending," discuss the concept of singularity and the metaphor of the earth, while also reading Spivak's *Death of a Discipline*.

In Tagore's Bengali speech, "comparative literature" remains untranslated, first because it sounds clumsy once rendered into Bengali,<sup>2</sup> or even into Hindi and Nepali, but at the same time it implies that there

are things which can and cannot be translated. For example, as Tagore writes:

The word *sahitya* [literature] comes from *sahit* [together]. Hence, if we take into account its etymological sense, we find in the word *sahitya* the idea of a union. It is not simply a union of idea and idea, language and language, book and book: nothing except *sahitya* or literature can establish deeply intimate ties between one person and another, between past and present, between far and near. The people of a country deficient in literature have no vital bonds to join them: they remain isolated. ("Bengali" 179)

The translation of *sahitya* to "literature" is merely functional as it does not retain the sense of togetherness. There is a problem in its translation even between English and German: "Upon this uncertain ground hardly secured by our method of inquiry, the English word 'literature' is not yet useful. Nor are all its romance homonyms, securely placed in German *Literature*, for historical reasons that we cannot consider here (Spivak, "Stakes" 457). Edward W. Said retains the German *Weltliteratur* in his translation of Erich Auerbach.

Through this transgression, Tagore destabilizes the categories: comparative literature and world literature. Lately, Damrosch and others' idea that world literature and comparative literature have "somewhat uneasy coexistence," echoes the voice of the "anxiogenic" discipline of comparative literature that has been trying to define its object and methods—the self of the discipline.

However, Said's comments on Goethe and Auerbach help interpret Tagore's unstable double-bind of world literature and comparative literature, the vision and the practice. Said reads Goethe's *Weltliteratur* as an idealized "vision" that gives way to the discipline of comparative literature, that is, *Weltliteratur* as the underlying idea and comparative literature as a do-able field:

For many modern scholars—including myself—Goethe's grandly utopian vision is considered to be the foundation of what was to become the field of comparative literature, whose underlying and perhaps unrealizable rationale was this vast synthesis of the world's literary production transcending borders and languages, but not in any way effacing the individuality and historical concreteness of its constituent parts. (95)

The vision is messianic—that is, something "yet to" come—and has a desire to preserve the individuality, historicity, and distinction of the parts in the universalizing synthesis of literary production. However, Said continues, Auerbach in his 1951 essay "Philology and *Weltliteratur* " shows "autumnal" gloominess at the loss of the institutions and expertise in Europe after the Second World War and at the emergence of non-European languages and literatures, making Goethe's project untenable. While Auerbach's Euro-centrism holds true, he has a faith in *Weltliteratur* because it emphasizes "the

unity of human history" and it allows the possibility of "understanding inimical and perhaps even hostile Others despite the bellicosity of modern cultures and nationalisms, and the optimism with which one could enter into the inner life of a distant author or historical epoch even with a healthy awareness of one's limitation of perspective and insufficiency" (Said 96). In other words, world literature opens the possibility of opening to others—those in a distance in space, in time, and in the inner depths of life. Tagore engages with this concept of the self and the other in literary expression and the unity of human history.

### **Aesthetic Bonding and Alterity**

For Tagore, world literature stands for a bond of aesthetics that makes possible the exchange between the self and the other. In this exchange, the aesthetic bond opens the self to the other and other to the self. One keeps traveling between home and the world, in the traffic between me and the rest, inner and outer, or nation and world.

Humans, Tagore argues, have an innate tendency to form bonds: "Whatever faculties we have within us exist for the sole purpose of forming bonds [*yoga*] with others," and such bonds give meaning to one's existence and the things that exist. The bonds are three in kind: "the bonds of reason [*buddhi*], of necessity [*prayojan*], and of joy [*ananda*]" ("World Literature" 138). Unlike the other bonds in which the self remains fragmented, the bond of joy or aesthetics creates the feeling of being-at-home, where "we are relieved to let go of our whole selves without restraint" and feel "exclusively our own selves" ("World Literature" 139-40). With the feeling of being with the self, there comes a moment of realization of aesthetics.

Therefore, Tagore asks, "What is this bond of joy? It is nothing but knowing others as our own, and ourselves as other [*porkeapnarkoriyajana, apnakeporerkoriyajana*]" ("World Literature" 139). The ethics of alterity emerges from the radical othering of the self—seeing the other in the self and, in reverse, seeing the self in the other. It creates a union, which is distinct from uniformity, because the "bond of beauty or joy erases all distances" (Tagore, "World Literature" 139). One does not ask why one loves the self but instead experiences joy in loving it: "When we feel the same sense of being about someone else, there is no need to ask why I like that person" (Tagore, "World Literature" 139). Tagore brings into play two Sanskrit words to elaborate on the relationship between the self and its bonding with the other: *atman*, "soul" and its derivative *atmiya*, "dear": The other outside becomes *atmiya* to the self because it "makes my *atman* [soul] true even outside of me" ("World Literature" 139). This, Tagore explains, is a desire, in which the self realizes its own being more comprehensibly. The Yajnavalkya-Gargi debate in the *Upanishad*, which Tagore alludes to, focuses on the question of the alterity of *atman*.

So, the aesthetic bond helps one see the self in the other and the other in the self—an ability to "apprehend" oneself from outside "in other human being": "It is natural that through sight, hearing, and though,

through the play of imagination and the attachments of the heart, one should be able to recoup oneself roundly in humanity" (Tagore, "World Literature" 139- 40). The radical process of alterization involves the extension of the self to the other and transformation of the other into the self. It is also the relationship of the totality—humanity—with the singularity—individuals. Humans know themselves when they stand among others, although some obstacles like self-interest and vanity—the impediments to the forging of aesthetic bond—can hinder the process of knowing. One has to struggle against the impediments "with heightened self-awareness," and "the fuller the awareness, the deeper its joy" (Tagore, "World Literature" 140). If "knowledge is this union of reason with the universe, and [if] it is in this union that our rationality finds joy," the human soul finds the true joy in "particular humanness" in a communion with "all humanity" where "our own enhanced selves that we then discover" (Tagore, "World Literature" 141) . The process and the mode of aesthetic expression have the inward and the outward move—the self extended to the world and the world expanded to the self.

Here is Tagore's analogy, where he explains a Baul song—a song from an esoteric mystical tradition in Bengal:

It is as if the beloved object were an object within the lover's heart. Someone has drawn it out of doors, so the lover is longing to fetch it back inside again. There is opposite situation as well. When the heart fails to perceive its desires and passions, in the external world, it tries hard to fashion their image with its own hands out of various ingredients. In this way, the heart's longing to make the world its own and itself the world's is constantly at work. To express oneself in the outside world is part of this process. ("World Literature" 144)

Tagore uses "as if," which refers to the self's potential of realizing the others in literature. In this "as if" or the aesthetic imagination, the desire to bring the external and the other to the self materializes because the other is the self outside the door. The self-expression takes two courses: of work and of literature, which are parallel but complementary. But the work is an offshoot of the desire to express because work fulfills intentions, and the actions are just expressions of those intentions. In contrast, literature is pure expression where the self and the other meet in the constant ebb and flow.

### **The "Wasteful Expenses"**

Tagore explains literature in general and world literature in specific as "wasteful expenses." In fact, he defines beauty as the "wasteful expense." To rationality, it looks like the wasteful expense, and so it fails to comprehend what goes beyond and circulates around. However, for aesthetics, beauty emerges from the wasteful expenses, the abundance of resources, the excessiveness of expression, and the wasteful spending of common language and form. Tagore provides a series of examples of this "literary."

First, a mother's play with her child has this quality. "The mother cannot help caring for the infant in her arms. But that is not all: mother's love seeks expression surpassing the demands of care and without apparent cause" (Tagore, "World Literature"143). The mother fulfills the necessity of care and love, but, without obvious reasons, she plays with child, sings, decorates it— love expresses itself in extravagance of beauty: "It wells up from within in various kinds of play, endearments, and words. Decking the child in many colors and ornaments, such love cannot help spreading wealth through extravagance and sweetness through beauty, quite without need" (Tagore, "World Literature" 143). So, the mother's songs, lullabies, other adornment have a higher value, and they are "wasteful expenses" of beauty. The extravagance is quite without a need, but mother's expression as such is the quality of her love.

The second example is the barbarian army's expression of violence. Tagore explains that if Western warfare aims at minimum damage and gives high importance to strategies that lead to victory, the barbarian army "manifests its inner violence in external guise by putting on warpaint, sounding drums and war cries, and dancing a wild war dance. It is as though its belligerence is not complete without all this" ("World Literature"144). The expressions like the painting of body or face and beating of drums are the manifestations of the violence inside. It is more expressive than utilitarian because "[w]hen a barbarian army marches to battle, victory over the enemy is not its sole concern" (Tagore, "World Literature"144).In the extravagance of expression, the inner violence comes out into different forms. "Violence secures its practical goal through battle, and slakes its desire for self-expression through such superfluous claptrap" (Tagore, "World Literature" 144). But "the superfluous claptrap" is the "literary,"— the inner that is expressed outside.

Then, Tagore provides another example—this time from the war in the colonial context in which a less sophisticated group fought the British:

The band of dervishes who attacked the British army in Egypt did not lay down their lives just to win a battle. They died to the last man to express the fiery zeal of their hearts. Those who fight only to win will never act in such an uncalled-for manner. The human heart expresses itself even at the cost of suicide: can one imagine *a greater waste [bajeykhoroch]*? ("World Literature" 144, emphasis added)

Tagore refers to the Mahdists opposition to the British in the 1880s and 90s. In a discussion with Damrosch on world literature, Spivak claims: Tagore" calls it 'literary' because of this wasteful spending of their lives," and she compares it "to the Ghost Dance of the Sioux against the U.S. cavalry at Wounded Knee. He defines that worldliness beyond, beneath, above, and short of not only merely rational choice but also the verbal text" ("Comparative Literature/World Literature" 472). The question one faces is how to judge the suicidal action of the dervishes. Rationally, the

choice they have made is the "wasteful expense" of lives, but on the other level, they express what Tagore names as the "fiery zeal of heart" to resist the oppression of Sudan by the successive Ottoman, Egyptian, and British empires.

Like Immanuel Kant who places "the possibility of judgment in the aesthetic," Tagore calls for judging this moment as "literary" (Spivak "Comparative Literature/World Literature" 472). To save more lives and fight strategically would be the rational choice for the teleological judgment. But the dervishes choose to "spend" their lives for the expression of their "zeal."

The same judgment makes a devotee distinct from a clever worshipper. For the clever one, worship has a teleological purpose—the attainment of salvation. For the devotee, the devotion is incomplete without worship, and hence there is no mathematical calculation of profit and loss:

The clever thinks, "My worship will obtain my salvation." The devout says, "My devotion is imperfect without worship; whether it profits me or not, worship brings my heart's devotion out into the world where it finds its full and secure dwelling." In this way, devotion achieves its own fulfillment by expressing itself in worship. To the clever, worship is laying out money at interest; to the devout, it is *idle expense* [*bhoktimanerpoojaekbareibajekhoroch*]. For when the heart expresses itself, it cares nothing for loss. (Tagore, "World Literature" 144)

The clever worshipper makes a rational choice, the devout an aesthetic one. What appears to be the "wasteful expenses" is the expression of heart and, thus, "literary." Tagore sees such an expression in the decorations that people do for festivities. One does not care for loss in the bond of joy because to lose here is to win.

This provides an opportunity to rethink the disciplinary concerns of the humanities and especially those of literature departments. The social sciences and the hard sciences are different from the humanities in terms of their distinct goals and directions. Literary studies aims at the rearrangement of desires through reading. Spivak, who emphasizes the necessity of taking the methods of area studies on the one hand and the critical edge of cultural and racial studies to revitalize the way of doing the comparative literature on the other, makes the disciplinary distinctions in *Death of a Discipline*:

If we want to compete with the hard "science"(s) and the social sciences at their hardest as "human science," we have already lost, as one loses institutional competition. In the arena of the humanities as the uncoercive rearrangement of desire, he who wins loses. If this sounds vague, what we learn (to imagine what we know) rather than know in the humanities remains vague, unverifiable, iterable. You don't put it aside in order to be literary critical. (101)

Research and pedagogy in the humanities concentrate on the training of the imagination and the rearrangement of desires. The strategies such as reading

from the margin and activating the agency of the marginalized reflect the goal of humanities: "The ethico-political task of the humanities has always been rearrangement of desires. It must be repeated that the task of the rearrangement of desires engages the imagination of teacher and student—in a pedagogic situation" (Spivak, *Other Asias* 3). To disrupt what has been oppressive and dominant and to rearrange the inner in a new order, one must quest for the new methods of reading, teaching, and learning: "It is a persistent effort at training the imagination, a task at which we have failed through the progressive rationalization of education all over the world" (Spivak, *Other Asias* 2). She proposes that one must look for more dialogue, critique, and engagement with imagination and desire in the discourses of humanities. One of the major purposes behind such proposal is to critique the dominant through reading: "so must the new Comparative Literature persistently and repeatedly undermine and undo the definitive tendency of the dominant to appropriate the emergent" (Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* 100). Here again one needs to return to aesthetics—only the literary, the "wasteful spending"—has the potential for transgression.

Aesthetics lies in the exchange between what the world gives and what one returns, without caring for profit or loss. The ethics of aesthetics is to return to the other and to the world. For Tagore, this exchange defines beauty: "One's heart is a willing captive to whatever in the universe displays this quality, which is also its own: it does not then raise a single question. This *thriftless excess* in the world constitutes beauty [*jogotermodhyeeibehisabibajekhorcheyrsoundarya*]" ("World Literature" 144). The "wasteful spending" is the expression of beauty even in nature. "Reason, that is forever old, shakes its head and asks, 'Why such a waste of *needless effort* [*bajeykhorchey*] all over the world?' The heart, that is forever young, answers, 'Only to beguile me: I see no other reason'" (Tagore, "World Literature" 145). Aesthetics takes beauty rather than necessity as the criteria for judgment, while rational thinking takes the law of necessity as its foundation:

The heart knows that all through the world there is one heart that continually expresses itself. Otherwise why should there be so much beauty and music, so many gestures, shadows, and hints, and such adornments throughout creation? The heart is not blandished by the trafficker's thrift; that is why in water, earth, and sky, there is such superfluous effort to hide necessity at every step. (Tagore, "World Literature" 145)

Thriftiness belongs to reason, abundance to heart. Thus, there is the distinction between what one expresses through work and through literature.

In work, one saves and produces more, whereas in literature, one spends more (form, language, or imagination) to produce more. So are the two kinds of expressions: *kaaj*, "work," and *bhav*, "idea" or "feeling"—the latter involves *rasa* or "aesthetic enjoyment." As literature is an unmediated expression of idea and feeling different from work, it has the possibility of



transgression: "In work lies our faculty of self-preservation; in *rasa*, our faculty for self-expression. Self-preservation is necessary, but self-expression surpasses necessity" (Tagore, "World Literature" 146). One is the law of necessity; the other is the transgression of necessity for an exchange between the world and the self. While necessity tries to save, expression tries to give more and return more. "Necessity impedes expression and expression impedes necessity: we have already seen that in the instance of warfare. Self-interest [*swartha*] dislikes extravagance [*bajekhorchey*], whereas joy declares itself in prodigality" (Tagore, "World Literature" 146). Necessity and expression are together but run in the parallel courses. Human beings live in the world of necessity (work) yet create the world free of necessity (literature). In this transgression of the law of necessity, there arises beauty and heroism, the better and greater image of humanity, and a higher bond of aesthetics between humans.

In the age of globalization and economic austerity, Tagore's metaphor of *bajekhoroch*, "wasteful expenses," is a brazen reminder of the value of humanities and art. Spivak rightly recognizes the context of revisiting this metaphor:

In globalization, where all impulses of judgment, including 'ethical waivers' claimed by government officials are managerial, this is an impulse worth subverting and sabotaging for a worldliness in the literary rather than restraining the future anterior—something (else) will have happened—by diagnosing and systematizing items to see how they qualify for our rubric. ("Comparative Literature/ World Literature" 472)

The "wasteful expenses" is the confrontational metaphor in the age of economic austerity on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet, there is something more. To quote Spivak again:

The world is in bad shape with the loss of emphasis on the humanities. This message of Tagore—that what goes across is not immediately profitable or evaluable does not give us greater numbers, etc., that it is "value-added" in an incommensurable sense with no guarantees—this lesson is hard to learn, in the face of the will to institutional power, through knowledge management. ("Comparative Literature/World Literature" 472)

Indeed, in literature, humanity becomes the core, while, in work, it remains fragmented. In the world ravaged by exploitations, violence, war, hatred, and controlled by capital, Tagore shows hope in aesthetics. The "wasteful expenses"—aesthetics—give humanity some hope, if there is any.

### **Singularity and the Metaphor of the Earth**

In his concluding paragraph, Tagore makes several points about world literature. First, he denies defining what corpus makes world literature and suggests that one needs to carve the path with one's own goals. Second, he refers to the singularity of each work and writer in the total synthesis of

world literature and proposes that each work deserves to be seen as a singular in its relationship with the whole. Third, he uses the metaphor of the earth to refer to world literature and calls for freeing our perspectives from narrow provincialism of seeing literature as belonging to a national culture. Finally, he returns to the sense of the yet-to come moment for world literature—he says this is the vision, and time has come for it.

I quote Tagore's entire paragraph with some modification in translation:<sup>3</sup>

Do not so much as imagine that I would guide your way through world literature. We must all cut our paths through it as best we can. I simply wished to say that just as the [earth] is not my ploughland added to yours and to someone else's—to see the [earth] in this light is to take a rustic view—so also, literature is not my writing added to yours and to someone else's. We usually regard literature in this rustic light. It is time we pledged that our goal is to view universal humanity in [world] literature by freeing ourselves from rustic uncatholicity [narrow-mindedness]; that we shall recognize a totality in each particular author's work, and that in this totality we shall perceive the interrelations among all human efforts at expression [and now is the time]. ("World Literature" 150)

Tagore denies setting a route to world literature and provides no path as he says that it depends on individual goal. There can be no level playing field for determining world literature as this is an individual path one cuts through. Perhaps, the market can be one of the playgrounds determining what travels and what cannot, but Tagore focuses on human creativity

However, he provides a method, which is to recognize a totality in each particular author's work. It is, in other words, to "singularize" an author or a work. Spivak's definition is helpful: " 'singularity' doesn't necessarily imply single texts. It simply implies that what is singular in any text is universalizable. We must be in this search of this –ability" ("Comparative Literature/World Literature" 478). Recognizing this "totality in each particular author's work" is a way of singularizing it. For Tagore, the task of a comparativist is to read the world literature by singularizing each work or author or to see the universaliz-*ability* in a singular text.

Then, comes the metaphor of the earth. Tiwari offers a reading in the postcolonial context, especially in the context of the British decision to divide Bengal into two parts: the Muslim dominated East and the Hindu dominated West. Tiwari argues that Tagore evokes "the organic connectedness that exists beyond geographical—or religious or linguistic—boundaries when it comes to literatures and other art forms. Furthermore, by saying that 'literature is not the mere total of works composed by different hands,' Tagore is underscoring the mobility and dynamic nature of 'Vishwa Sahitya'" (44). There is indeed a sense of organic connectedness, but there is more.

I propose to read the earth metaphor in two ways: first, with Spivak's notion of planetarity, and second, as the relationship between national literatures and world literature. Spivak recommends that planetary thinking allows us to recognize that humans, like any other species, live on the earth "on loan" and to see the self in the other or the other in the self—this politics of alterity.

The planetary thinking is different from globalization, which refers to "the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere" because the globe, now the simulation in computer where nobody lives, makes us think that humans are in command and control (Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* 72). On the contrary, the "planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan" (Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* 72). In other words, thinking of the earth as the planet and allowing the agency of the other characterize the knowledge that literary studies can teach because

[t]o be human is to be intended toward the other. We provide for ourselves transcendental figurations of what we think is the origin of this animating gift: mother, nation, god, nature. These are names of alterity, some more radical than others. Planet-thought opens up to embrace an inexhaustible taxonomy of such names, including but not identical the whole range of human universals: aboriginal animism as well as the spectral white mythology of post-rational science. (Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* 73)

Tagore's earth metaphor is a reminder that the earth is not a farmland plotted, divided, controlled, and possessed by one or other person, group, and nation. Rather, it is an entirety with all possibilities—the possibilities of seeing the self in the other and the other in the self—the notion of planetarity.

Tagore evokes the metaphor of the earth to maintain his argument that there is a constant exchange of the self and the other in world literature. After all, thinking of the earth, rather than the globe in globalization, allows one to aim at seeing the other as the other species, yet a co-inhabitant sharing the momentary life-span on the planet.

At the same time, to return to another interpretation of the earth and farmland metaphor, Tagore refers to the division of the earth into pieces in the name of nations—several of his poems and lectures on nationalism stand together with this stance here. Literature like the earth has seen its plotting in national boundaries. To think of only national literatures is what Tagore calls "narrow-minded rusticity." The earth metaphor refers to the possibility of world literature that one needs to realize and strive for.

The earth allows the multiple voices in exchange; the globe tries to create a uniform voice for commerce as the capital travels through the global networks. If the metaphor of the earth stands for the alterity and connectedness, then the metaphor of the sun stands for continual radiance and creation of the possible worlds. World literature is the other possible world. The metaphor of the sun<sup>4</sup> that Tagore uses represents the collective humanity that continually emanates the collective "literary." It is a process of collective

outward diffusion of the self to establish an exchange with the other and to create a collective bond of aesthetics. The radiant diffusion that reason might see needless is world literature that only the aesthetic imagination can perceive.

### Notes

- 1 Spivak further explains, "Tagore was at every step self-distanced from the ShinpeiGoto style, embattled Pan-Asianism of the early years of the last century. His attitude was cosmopolitan and critical toward mere nationalism—and I think David is right in saying that world literature can go against mere nationalism—and it combined with his love of what he perceived to be the possibility of a humane India. He thus had a serious engagement with India's nationalist message to the world. Yet, in the mistranslated name of world literature, he theorizes the imaginative creative bond that travels across national boundaries as *bajeykhoroch*, wasteful spending, a powerful metaphor for what in the imagination goes above, beyond, beneath, and short of mere rational choice toward alterity. The uncertain intimacy open to ethical alterity is 'wasteful'" ("Comparative Literature/World Literature" 472).
- 2 "because 'Comparative Literature' translated as a phrase is ridiculous in Bengali" (Spivak "The Stakes of a World Literature" 464).
- 3 Swapan Chakravorty's translation of Tagore I have used throughout my paper has its merits, but in this particular paragraph Chakravorty misreads some crucial phrases. While summing up his essay in the concluding paragraph, Tagore uses the term *vishwasahitya* "world literature" which Chakravorty translates into "universal literature" as the word *vishwa* can also mean the "universe." However, Tagore's word *prithivi*, simply means "the earth," but Chakravorty translates it into "world." I have modified these phrases and provided some alternatives in the quoted text. Here is a different translation by Buddhadev Bose for comparison: "What I am trying to say amounts to this. Just as this earth is not the sum of patches of land belonging to different people, and to know the earth as such is sheer rusticity, so literature is not the mere total of works composed by different hands. Most of us, however, think of literature in what I have called the manner of the rustic. From this narrow provincialism we must free ourselves; we must strive to see the work of each author as a whole, that whole as a part of man's universal creativity, and that universal spirit in its manifestation through world literature. Now is the time to do so" (4).
- 4 Tagore compares world literature with as the radiance of the sun emanating from the collective humanity: "The mass of matter at the sun's core is forming itself in many ways, both solid and liquid. We cannot see the process, but the surrounding of light ceaselessly expresses the sun to the world. It is thus the sun gifts itself to the world and links itself to all

else. If we could make humanity the object of such an integral view, we would see it like the sun. We would see that the mass of matter was gradually forming itself into layers, and around it, perpetually, a luminous ring of expression spreading itself joyously in every direction. Look at literature this ring of light, made of language, encircling humanity. Here there are storms of light, the wellsprings of radiance, and collision of radiant vapors" ("World Literature" 149).

### Works Cited

- Bose, Buddhadeva. "Comparative Literature in India." *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 8 (1959): 1-10. Print.
- Damrosch, David, Natalie Melas, and Mbongiseni Buthelezi, ed. *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2009. Print.
- Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003. Print.
- Das, Sisir Kumar, and Sukanta Chaudhuri, ed. *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Writings on Literature and Language*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.
- D'haen, Theo, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir. "Weltliteratur, literature universelle, vishwasahitya...." Preface. *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. Ed. D'haen et al. London and New York: Routledge, 2012. xvii-xxi. Print.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von and J.P. Eckermann. "Conversations on World Literature (1827)." Damrosch et al., *The Princeton Sourcebook* 17-25.
- Macaulay, Thomas Babington. *Minute on Indian Education*. Web. 1 Apr. 2013.
- Said, Edward W. "Introduction to Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*." *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. New York: Columbia UP, 2004. 84-118. Print.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "The Stakes of a World Literature." *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 2012. 455-66. Print.
- . *Death of a Discipline*. Calcutta and New Delhi: Seagull, 2004. Print.
- . Foreword. *Other Asias*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008. 1-13. Print.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, and David Damrosch. "Comparative Literature/ World Literature: A Discussion with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and David Damrosch." *Comparative Literature Studies* 48.4 (2011): 455-85. Print.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. "Bengali National Literature." Trans. Swapan Chakravorty. Das and Chaudhuri, *Rabindranath Tagore*. 179-93.
- . "Presidential Address at the Bengali Literary Convention of North India, 3 March 1923." Trans. Swapan Chakravorty. Das and Chaudhuri, *Rabindranath Tagore* 310-19.
- . "World Literature." Trans. Swapan Chakravorty. Das and Chaudhuri, *Rabindranath Tagore*. 138-50.
- Tiwari, Bhavya. "Rabindranath Tagore's Comparative World Literature." *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. Ed. Theo D'haen, David

Damrosch, and DjelalKadir. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.  
41-48. Print.

Wellek, René. "The Crisis of Comparative Literature. 1959. Damrosch et  
al.,*The Princeton Sourcebook*, 161-72.