

HOME AND WANDERLUST: PATRIOTIC WAYFARERS ON THE PATH OF “UNIVERSAL LIFE” IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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Abstract: Scholars have observed that the clash between patriotism and cosmopolitanism constitutes a central theme of Rabindranath Tagore’s novel The Home and the World. What remains to be fully addressed, however, is Tagore’s profound depiction of affective and spiritual sources of sympathy larger than loyalty to one’s country. Tagore’s multi-personal delineation of consciousness illuminates the complicated relations between notions of the constitution of self and allegiances to vital sites of belonging—home, nation, the world, and the infinite. Through a close examination of spatial tropes in the novel, the article illustrates how Tagore draws on Buddhist traditions in presenting his vision of svadeśsamāj, a form of social collectivity that amalgamates inner life with traditional Indian ways of communal existence. Paying special attention to the protagonists’ introspections, this essay argues that the novel suggests how moral judgments can be nurtured by aesthetic sentiments that are tied to such communal existence.¹

During Rabindranath Tagore’s visit to China in 1924, the Crescent Moon Society (新月社, a literary group that had been established the year before and took its name from Tagore’s book of poems, *The Crescent Moon*), organized a party in Peking to celebrate his sixty-third birthday on May 8. Tagore’s Chinese hosts arranged an amateur performance of his one-act English-language play *Chitra* at the party. Among the large audience of the capital’s intellectuals and celebrities was Lin Yutang, then a new faculty member in the English department at Peking University and a cultural critic. Lin remarked in an essay published in the *Morning Newspaper Supplement* (晨報副鐫) on June 16 that he found the play “sentimental, mawkish,” the same way he felt about a few poems he had read by

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Tagore.² Lin acknowledged his ignorance of Tagore's writings in general, but remained skeptical about Tagore's speeches in China, which upheld the importance of spiritual purification and revival as means to counteract the doctrines of materialism. Lin faulted Tagore for being politically disengaged and distracting. To his mind, Tagore's embrace of spiritual life betrayed a conquered people's resort to psychological consolation and would do little to help India's struggle to break out of the clutches of colonialism.

Lin's criticism of Tagore was clearly constrained, as he himself conceded, by his limited knowledge of Tagore's work. On the other hand, it was also indicative of the political climate in China in the 1920s, in which pursuits of national salvation predominated in the wake of the May Fourth advocacy of economic and political modernization through science and democracy. The resistance to material progress and political machinery that Tagore pronounced at his numerous talks, in other words, sounded out of tune with widespread endeavors to create a new political order in China. The critical responses to Tagore's message certainly reflected the particular cultural and political conditions in China,³ yet Lin's comments on the emotional and spiritual characteristics of Tagore's work and ideas also point to complicated aspects of Tagore's thought that often get lost in cultural translation. Martha C. Nussbaum, for example, presents a different image of Tagore in her influential essay "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." Invoking Tagore's novel *The Home and the World*, in which militant loyalties to nation are unfavorably contrasted with allegiances to what is morally good for the community of humanity, Nussbaum portrays Tagore as a champion of "universal reason" in line with the Stoic and Kantian cosmopolitan ideals of moral rationality. (Nussbaum 1996, 17) In Nussbaum's own words, "I believe that Tagore sees deeply that at bottom nationalism and ethnocentric particularism are not alien to one another, but akin—that to give support to nationalist sentiments subverts, ultimately, even the values that hold a nation together, because it substitutes a colorful idol for the substantive universal values

² Lin uses the English expressions twice to describe his impressions in this Chinese essay, titled "論泰戈爾的政治思想" ("On Tagore's Political Thought").

³ For a detailed account of Tagore's visit to China and oppositions to Tagore's message among Chinese political and intellectual circles, see Stephen N. Hay's *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp.146-185.

of justice and right.” (Ibid., 5)

Like Nussbaum, Amartya Sen gives prominence to Tagore’s espousal of reason in his reflections on Tagore’s political and philosophical thought. Comparing Tagore and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Sen argues that Tagore was committed to “pressing for more room for reasoning, and for a less traditionalist view, a greater interest in the rest of the world, and more respect for science and for objectivity generally.” (Sen 2005, 92) Drawing attention to Tagore’s 1938 essay “Gandhi the Man,” Sen notes Tagore’s disagreement with Gandhi’s nationalistic defense of past traditions and deployment of an “irrational force of credulity in [Indian] people.” (Ibid., 99) In Sen’s analysis, reason stands as the highest ideal for Tagore. Sen remarks: “The question he persistently asks is whether we have reason enough to want what is being proposed, taking everything into account. Important as history is, reasoning has to go beyond the past. It is in the sovereignty of reasoning—fearless reasoning in freedom—that we find Rabindranath Tagore’s lasting voice.” (Ibid., 119-120)

Other critics, however, have cast doubts on accounts of Tagore’s cosmopolitan ideal that polarize abstract reason and cultural traditions. Saranindranath Tagore (henceforth ST), for instance, argues that Tagore’s conception of cosmopolitanism emphasizes rather than eschews the richness of local traditions. Quoting Tagore, ST draws out Tagore’s idea of how inherited traditions shape the mind’s ability to reason and absorb different traditions through cultural encounters: “I have come to feel that the mind, which has been matured in the atmosphere of a profound knowledge of its own country and of the perfect thoughts that have been produced in that land, is ready to accept and assimilate the cultures that come from other countries.” (Tagore 2008, 1076) ST concludes that Tagore’s cosmopolitanism is rooted in real-life experiences instead of what Nussbaum calls “universal reason.” As he puts it, “Cosmopolitan identity, for Tagore, is not simply an empty token of an abstracted universal, produced by theoretical reason ... ; rather, cosmopolitan identity has to be existentially realized in each life project.” (Ibid., 1082)

A great deal of critical effort has been devoted to negotiating between Tagore’s local attachments and universal sympathies, along the lines of what Kwame Anthony Appiah has conceived as a rooted cosmopolitanism, one that must “reconcile a kind of universalism with the legitimacy of at least some forms

of partiality.”⁴ What has received insufficient attention, however, is the spiritual dimension of Tagore’s cosmopolitan vision, which cannot be fully captured in terms of current debates about patriotism and cosmopolitanism. Tagore’s vision, in fact, involves a substantive notion of the infinite that differs from preoccupation with a world that is politically organized and coextensive with the global domain of socioeconomic existence. Tagore’s novel *The Home and the World* (*Ghare Baire*, written in Bengali, translated into English and published in 1919), from which Nussbaum draws support for her argument about cosmopolitanism, presents a dynamic picture of the complicated relation between the constitution of self and allegiance to vital sites of belonging—home, nation, the world, and the infinite. Indeed, the moral ideals upheld by Tagore’s privileged character, Nikhil, are grounded in aspirations toward cosmic infinity.

I. Nationalism and “Intimate Truths of the Universe”

The two male protagonists of *The Home and the World*, which is set in Bengal in the aftermath of the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and against the backdrop of the nationalist *Swadeshi* movement, have often been read as hero and villain. In this scenario, Nikhil, a liberal cosmopolitan figure guided by his moral ideals and humanist sympathies, stands as the antithesis of Sandip, an unscrupulous and self-serving instigator of nationalist passions and violence. The novel no doubt highlights the contrasts between their moral beliefs and social behaviors, often in Nikhil’s favor. From the very outset, for example, the different attitudes of Nikhil and Sandip toward their country bespeak their conflicting moral persuasions. Explaining why he does not accept the nationalist spirit—*Bande Mataram* (“Hail Mother”)—of the *Swadeshi* upsurge, Nikhil says, “I am willing ... to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it.”⁵ Sandip snubs such

⁴ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 223. Poulomi Saha reads Tagore in a similar frame, describing Tagore’s model of patriotic attachment as “a locally-rooted globalism. See her essay “Singing Bengal into A Nation: Tagore The Colonial Cosmopolitan?” *Journal of Modern Literature* 36.2 (2013): pp. 1-24; for this citation see pp. 2-3.

⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 29. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

ideals, associating them with passivity and weakness. Instead, he preaches a doctrine of patriotism based on force and unscrupulousness: “‘That is really mine which I can snatch away.’ My country does not become mine simply because it is the country of my birth. It becomes mine on the day when I am able to win it by force.” (45)

Though Sandip’s emphasis on “win[ning]” his country expresses a will to fight against colonialism, echoing the citizen’s rallying cry of “put force against force” in “Cyclops,” his doctrine of the preemptive use of violence and his attempt to snatch Nikhil’s money and wife are called into question throughout the text. In addition, the rich texture of the novel discourages a simplified picture of good and evil, or right and wrong. Indeed, in response to the questions of his readers shortly after the novel was published, Tagore explained that his writing “was realistic, representing human traits that were psychologically accurate rather than idealized stereotypes.” (Chakravarty 2013, 93-94) The narrative structure lends further support to Tagore’s emphasis on his exploration of human nature. The novel is narrated from the interlaced first-person perspectives of Bimala (Nikhil’s wife), Nikhil, and Sandip, whose various accounts complement, challenge, and sometimes contradict each other. The intensified delineation of consciousness therein also gives voice to motivations, inner conflicts, introspections, and aspirations of each individual character which demand understanding before critical judgment.

John Marx has pointed out that in spite of the divergence of their political and moral positions, Nikhil and Sandip both belong to the English-educated Bengali elite. In Marx’s view, “The English School gives these two a political scientific vernacular in which to debate.” (Marx 2010, 110) What Marx’s interpretation leaves out, however, is how the debate between the two reflects different adaptations and applications of their shared education and scientific expertise. Whereas Nikhil tries to help the local community to develop its own industries through modern technology and finance and to acquire knowledge of political economy (26-7), Sandip promotes ideas of tyrannical power and ruthless material acquisition, which he attributes to “[a]ll the world-conquerors, from Alexander down to the American millionaires, [who] mould themselves into a sword or a mint.” (79-80) Moreover, Tagore extends the debate between Nikhil and Sandip to the local community to show the sway of Sandip’s advocacy. In an argument between Nikhil and the local undergraduate and graduate students about *Swadeshi* and the necessity of coercion in the governance of an estate, and by

extension, a country, the students rebuff Nikhil's condemnation of violence of any kind by ventriloquizing Sandip's doctrine. As a history student remarks, "Sandip Babu rightly teaches that in order to get, you must snatch. This is taking all of us some time to learn, because it runs counter to what we were taught at school." (129-130)

More important, the arguments between Nikhil and Sandip are couched in cultural terms, which shed light on the characteristics of Nikhil's spiritual ideal. While Sandip situates his doctrine of power and success within world history, trying to prove its truth by adducing Alexander and American millionaires, Nikhil refutes it by presenting an alternative view of universal truth. In a discussion about true freedom with his mentor Chandranath Babu, to whom Nikhil constantly turns for guidance and congenial company, Nikhil opines: "It was Buddha who conquered the world, not Alexander—this is untrue when stated in dry prose—oh when shall we be able to sing it? When shall all these most intimate truths of the universe overflow the pages of printed books and leap out in a sacred stream like the Ganges from the Gangotrie?" Nikhil's reference to Buddha follows his emphasis on the importance of freeing the mind of possessive desires. For him, those who "seek to reform something outside themselves" fail to see that "reform is wanted only in one's own desires." The "most intimate truths of the universe," in Nikhil's description, at once reside in the inner world of the self and require an orientation toward the universe that can hardly be taught by didactic "books" and "scriptures." (134-35)

Setting Buddha against Alexander, Nikhil does not posit a form of cultural nationalism, even though he draws spiritual sustenance from Indian traditions. By focusing attention on self-improvement, Nikhil recasts the conflict between domestic and foreign foregrounded by the *Swadeshi* movement and Sandip's patriotism as one between the material and the spiritual that concerns the deeper question of human nature across national boundaries. Nikhil's invocation of Buddha expresses Tagore's own interest in Buddhist thought as a salient part of the Indian philosophical tradition. Niharranjan Ray has illuminated how Tagore went to the *Upanishads* and Buddha and Buddhism for his intellectual and emotional inspiration. According to Ray, it was "the humanist tradition of the Buddha and the Buddhist way of life that appealed to him most." (Ray 1992, 223-32) Indeed, at the heart of Nikhil's disagreement with Sandip lies a conception of self-creation that differs from Sandip's deterministic viewpoint.

In many of their arguments and reflections concerning the question of the self,

both Nikhil and Sandip talk about giving life a certain shape; at first sight, their formulations seem similar. In Nikhil's words, "Providence leaves our life molded in the rough – its object being that we ourselves should put the finishing touches, shaping it into its final form to our taste." (197) Sandip, too, speaks of molding life into a shape: "We men, with our ideas, strive to give [life] a particular shape by melting it into a particular mould—into the definiteness of success." (79) Their conceptions of the shape of life, however, are substantively different. For Nikhil, it is both a possibility and a duty to realize "the great, the unselfish, the beautiful in man." (61) The "finishing touches," in his view, constitute humanity's moral and aesthetic aspirations and obligations. Dismissing Nikhil's moral delicacy as idealistic, Sandip asserts that "human nature was created long before phrases were, and will survive them too." (57) Sandip locates human agency in manipulating the material rather than cultivating the self. He avers: "My creation had begun before I was born. I had no choice in regard to my surroundings and so must make the best of such material as comes to my hand." (78) This seemingly defensive notion of material pursuit based on a deterministic outlook, however, immediately translates into an assertive account of conquest, an insistence on shaping life into "the definiteness of success."

Nikhil takes Sandip to task for his mechanistic understanding of man, which, to his critical eye, is prone to "making [man] petty." (61) Nikhil's criticism is twofold. To his mind, Sandip's idea is not only misguided but also deleterious as a leading principle for nationalism. Against Sandip's principle of material success and embrace of passionate desires, Nikhil pits "the soul," which, he affirms, "knows itself in the infinite and transcends its success." When Sandip complains that the idea of the soul is vague, Nikhil counters, "If to gain distinctness you try to know life as a machine, then such mere distinctness cannot stand for truth. The soul is not as distinct as success, and so you only lose your soul if you seek it in your success." (80) The opposition Nikhil highlights between a machine and the soul is crucial here. Nikhil discerns in Sandip's outlook on life both a form of "covetous self-love" and a fetishizing of machinery widespread in the modern world. (43) He ascribes Sandip's conception to the influences of a purely scientific understanding of man in European education, remarking, "in Europe people look at everything from the viewpoint of science. But man is neither mere physiology, nor biology, nor psychology, nor even sociology. ... Man is infinitely more than the natural science of himself. ... You want to find the truth of man from your science teachers, and not from your own inner being." (61) Against

scientific claims to the truth of man, Nikhil's stress on the truth emanating from one's inner being echoes his Buddhist conception of the "intimate truths of the universe," which, in turn, reflects Tagore's views on the nation and social life.

II. *Svadeśsamāj* vs. Nation

Nikhil's critique, however, is not targeted at science *per se* or European civilization *in toto*,⁶ nor is it a nationalistic attempt to establish the superiority of Indian culture. What it condemns are the mechanical tendencies that seem to Nikhil to diminish humanity as a whole. Here Nikhil gives expression to Tagore's abiding concern for "the weakening of humanity from which the present age is suffering." (Tagor 1917, 18) In his lectures on "Nationalism in the West," which he delivered throughout the United States during his visit in the winter of 1916-17, Tagore compares the organization of the nation-state to a lifeless machine whose operation tends to strip people of their individuality and humanity. He observes:

When this organization of politics and commerce, whose other name is the Nation, becomes all powerful at the cost of the harmony of the higher social life, then it is an evil day for humanity ... When [society] allows itself to be turned into a perfect organization of power, then there are few crimes which it is unable to perpetrate. Because *success is the object and justification of a machine*, while *goodness only is the end and purpose of man*. When this engine of organization begins to attain a vast size, and those who are mechanics are made into parts of the machine, then *the personal man is eliminated to a phantom*, everything becomes a revolution of policy carried out by the human parts of the machine, requiring no twinge of pity or moral responsibility. (Ibid., 23. My italics for emphasis)

In Tagore's contrast between success and goodness one can hear echoes of the debate between Sandip and Nikhil. While Tagore's emphasis on moral goodness

⁶ See Monish R. Chatterjee's "Poetic Intuition and Cosmic Reality: Tagore as Preceptor of Scientific Rationalism," in Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit Eds., *Rabindranath Tagore: University and Tradition* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), pp. 83-94, for an account of Tagore's emphasis on the role of scientific training in India's education.

as the end and purpose of man evokes the Kantian categorical imperative, his denunciation of machinery resonates with both the British tradition of social criticism and the Frankfurt School, to whose work questions of instrumentality remain central.⁷ Matthew Arnold, for example, argues in *Culture and Anarchy* (1867-1869) that “faith in machinery” is a “besetting danger” for “the whole civilisation” of a modern world growing increasingly “mechanical and external.” Like Tagore, Arnold maintains that machinery has no “value in and for itself,” and he mounts a critique of the prevailing tendency in England to regard machinery as “precious ends.” (Arnold 1993, 63-64) In a similar vein, Arnold’s conception of culture as “consist[ing] in becoming something rather than in having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of circumstances” seems to overlap with Nikhil’s idea of self-creation. (Ibid., 62)

Tagore goes even further and incorporates the category of “the Nation”—as the organizing principle of political and economic life—into his vision of machinery. Seeing the nation as a Western state organization transplanted to the soil of India, Tagore grounds Indian history in its social and spiritual life. He maintains, “In the West the national machinery of commerce and politics turns out neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their high market value; but they are bound in iron hoops, labeled and separated off with scientific care and precision.” Indian history, by contrast, “has not been of the rise and fall of kingdoms, of fights for political supremacy.... Our history is that of our social life and attainment of spiritual ideals.” (Tagore 1917, 16-17) In Tagore’s analysis, social life is not “union of a people ... organized for a mechanical purpose.” By contrast, Tagore continues:

It is an end in itself. It is a *spontaneous* self-expression of man as a social being. It is a *natural regulation* of human relationships, so that men can develop ideals of life in cooperation with one another. It has also a political side, but this is only for a special purpose. It is for self-preservation. It is merely the side of power, not of human ideals. (Ibid., 19-20. My italics)

⁷ See Raymond Williams’ *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), for a genealogy of such a tradition in nineteenth-century Britain. Raymond Williams is henceforth abbreviated as RW to differentiate two authors of the same last name in *References*.

Contrasting social life with political organization, Tagore lays emphasis on the “spontaneous” and “natural” characteristics of the former, in contradistinction to the mechanistic and unnatural ones of the latter. Tagore’s view further aligns him with “a continuing tradition of criticism of the new industrial civilization” in Britain since the late eighteenth century, in which, as Raymond Williams (henceforth RW) has pointed out, the word “unnatural” is the constant emphasis. (Williams 1983, 15) Social life, for Tagore, cannot and should not be contained by the organization of political power. As E. P. Thompson notes in his introduction to Tagore’s *Nationalism*, “More than any other thinker of his time, Tagore has a clear conception of civil society, as something distinct from and of more personal texture than political or economic structures.”⁸

What distinguishes Tagore’s conception of social life, however, is its inextricability from the “attainment of spiritual ideals.” Partha Chatterjee (henceforth PC) has illuminated Tagore’s non-statist idea of *samāj* (society) as an alternative to the political organization of the nation. As PC points out, the form of *samāj* Tagore believes India must “revive and reconstruct” is *svadeśsamāj*, which embodies “the collective power of self-making or *ātmāsakti*.”⁹ PC draws attention to Tagore’s explanation of the relations between *deś* (country), *svadeś* (my own country), and *ātmāsakti* (self-making) in an essay written around 1920:

⁸ E. P. Thompson, “Introduction,” Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Papermac, 1991), pp. 1-17. This citation is on p. 14. See also Ashis Nandy’s analysis of how Tagore sees the basis for the tradition of India “at the social level, not the political.” *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 1994), p. 6.

⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 104. Partha Chatterjee (henceforth PC to differentiate between two authors of the same last name in *References*) also outlines the change in Tagore’s attitude towards the idea of the nation. In PC’s account, at the time of the *Swadeshi* movement in Bengal in 1905–6, Tagore did not deny the necessity of statecraft “for the construction of the *svadeśī samāj*,” even though he believed mere machinery would not suffice. PC mentions that Tagore even “prepared a constitution of the *svadeśī samāj*.” However, according to PC, Tagore grew increasingly doubtful about the machinery of political organization and came to see it as doomed to failure (105-6).

The certain knowledge that I have a *dés* comes out of a quest. Those who think that the country is theirs simply because they have been born in it are creatures besotted by the external things of the world. But, since the true character of the human being lies in his or her inner nature imbued with the force of self-making (*ātmāsakti*), only that country can be one's *svadés* that is created by one's own knowledge, intelligence, love and effort. (Chatterjee 20011, 104)

For Tagore, *svadés* signifies neither a territorial concept nor simply an inheritance one has acquired by birth; instead, it grows out of the force of self-making (*ātmāsakti*). In other words, *svadés* is a moral and spiritual ideal based on an ongoing process of self-creation. In addition, Tagore's vision of *svadéssamāj*, differing from the machinery of political organization, denotes a collectivity that amalgamates inner life with traditional Indian form of communal existence. While the unity of inner being and communal life underpins Tagore's social imagining, his protagonist Nikhil's experience in *The Home and the World* suggests that "one's own knowledge, intelligence, love and effort" need to be fostered in a space that is larger than, and may even be in conflict with, the sphere of social bonds. As earlier described, Nikhil insists, in his argument with Sandip, that the soul "knows itself in the infinite." (80) On the other hand, the infinite space, toward which Nikhil aspires, also brings him anguish and alienation from his beloved ones.

III. A Solemn Orientation Toward Infinity and Aesthetic Enjoyment

The Home and the World is characterized by many spatial tropes, beginning with the title. Critics are inclined to read home and world dichotomously—in terms of domestic and social, private and public, Colonial India and the British Empire. Rebecca L. Walkowitz, for instance, argues, "The self-styled cosmopolitanism of *The Home and the World* ultimately depends on the uneasy encounter between one invented place and another, between public and private, between a conventional England and an invented 'Motherland.'" (Walkowitz 2000, 227) These interpretive paradigms are certainly true to the setting of Tagore's novel, especially if one follows the plotline of the female protagonist Bimala who, encouraged by her husband Nikhil and abetted by her would-be lover Sandip, leaves the traditional female seclusion of *pardah* and gets caught up in a world of nationalist passions and violence. Moreover, "the world" also contains a cosmic

dimension in the novel exceeding the global sociopolitical systems that the word often evokes in the modern mind. In this sense, the original English translation of the title—*At Home and Outside*—used when the book was published serially in the *Modern Review* in India in 1918-19, might be said to have captured the openness and rhythm of the text more aptly.

A related trope central to the novel is the journey to Calcutta upon which Nikhil and Bimala are to embark. From the very beginning, Nikhil's project of cultivating Bimala contains a significant spatial component. While inviting an English governess, Miss Gilby, to instruct her and trying to teach her himself, Nikhil also encourages Bimala to leave *pardah* and see the outside world. He proposes that they move to Calcutta to give their life "more room to branch out." (25) Nikhil's master, Chandranath Babu, later elaborates the importance of enlarging one's scope of life after Bimala becomes embroiled in the chaos of the local nationalistic agitations. Rebuking the parochial patriotism that puts "the country" in the place of "conscience," he advises Nikhil: "Take Bimala away to Calcutta. She is getting too narrow a view of the outside world from here, she cannot see men and things in their true proportions. Let her see the world—men and their work—give her a broad vision." (165) As an important center of culture and education in India at that time, where Nikhil obtained his BA and MA degrees, Calcutta indubitably represents a larger world than Nikhil's estate and the village they live in. Therein Chandranath Babu draws a connection between broadening one's horizons and the achievement of worldliness.

Moreover, Nikhil's insistence on Bimala's exposure to the larger world constitutes his endeavor "to save the country from the thousand-and-one snares—of religion, custom and selfishness," which he sees people like Sandip "busy spreading." (136) Nikhil has already detected a blind devotion in Bimala at the beginning of their marriage, when she has persisted in performing the ritual of touching his feet to show her worship of him. Such a blind devotion, Nikhil believes, is both shaped by conventions and susceptible to vicious manipulation. The tendency to worship certainly has a gendered aspect to it. The novel opens with Bimala's recollections of her mother's Hindu womanhood, an inheritance that conditions her feelings and choices. Bimala recounts reflectively: "It was my woman's heart, which must worship in order to love." (18) At the same time, however, Nikhil sees idolatry as a problem plaguing the whole country and making people vulnerable to incitement and delusion. Indeed, Sandip explicitly tells of his ploy to exploit such a collective mentality for his nationalist cause:

“True patriotism will never be roused in our countrymen unless they can visualize the motherland. We must make a goddess of her. ... We must get one of the current images accepted as representing the country—the worship of the people must flow towards it along the deep-cut grooves of custom.” (120) Sandip renders Bimala an icon of “the *Shakti* [divine power] of the Motherland” by playing on her passion for him, (31) and in turn, he deploys the deified image of the country to inflame patriotic feelings of the people. In this light, Nikhil’s commitment to freeing Bimala from spatial and conventional constraints embodies not merely a personal concern for his beloved; it emblemizes his conviction of the importance of critical detachment for the country as well.

The journey to Calcutta, however, also symbolizes Nikhil’s spiritual longing for the faraway, which tends to clash with his domestic and communal ties. Nikhil’s yearning points toward “the outside,” which, in Nikhil’s vocabulary, extends to the infinite where the inner self seeks its abode. He throws into bold relief his perception of differences between home and outside in a contemplative moment: “There are many in this world whose minds dwell in brick-built houses—they can afford to ignore the thing called the outside. But my mind lives under the trees in the open, directly receives upon itself the messages borne by the free winds, and responds from the bottom of its heart to all the musical cadences of light and dark.” (132) Nikhil’s description of the mind living under the trees conjures up the image of the Buddha meditating under a tree and achieving his enlightenment. In his lyrical rhapsody, the mind merges into the cosmic, and designedly poetic, world of the trees, the free winds, and the musical cadences of light and dark.

While the ethereality of such a realm contrasts with the earthiness of the “brick-built houses,” Nikhil’s cosmic aspiration means more than a metaphor for a spiritual journey beyond the confines of custom. Commenting on the changing conceptions and modes of travel writing, James Buzard notes that Kant’s idea of enlightenment as humankind’s “‘liberation from self-incurred tutelage’ lent itself to metaphorical travel narratives about the enlightened soul’s search for its new, true homeland in that clear ether of rational discourse that was thought to lie just beyond the boundaries of all mere ‘cultures.’” (Buzard 2003, 85) Nikhil’s conception of the soul intersects with the Kantian notion of enlightenment; and yet the cosmic, in Tagore’s rendering, is grounded in the natural world, as Nikhil’s enjoyment of the trees and winds indicates. Nikhil’s invoking of the Buddha also suggests an affinity with an Indian intellectual and cultural tradition.

Moreover, Nikhil's aspiration toward the infinite involves at once an abnegation of possessive desires and an affirmation of spiritual union. For Nikhil, "the union or separation of man and woman" is subordinate to the confluence of humanity in its ongoing striving for betterment. He constantly reminds himself of "the great world [that] stretches far beyond," in which "one can truly measure one's joys and sorrows when standing in its midst." (88) On the day when he and Bimala are about to set out for Calcutta, Nikhil rewrites his relationship with Bimala into a purely spiritual one in an elegiac monologue: "As master of the house I am in an artificial position—in reality I am a wayfarer on the path of life. ... My union with you, my love, was only of the wayside; it was well enough so long as we followed the same road; it will only hamper us if we try to preserve it further. We are now leaving its bonds behind. We are started on our journey beyond, and it will be enough if we can throw each other a glance, or feel the touch of each other's hands in passing." (187) Clearly, the contrast between house and life reiterates Nikhil's conceptions of home and outside; further, the passage to Calcutta, in Nikhil's language, takes on a spiritual undertone and translates into the journey of life in which Nikhil reimagines his relationship with Bimala in comradely, rather than conjugal, terms.

Radha Chakravarty and other Tagore scholars have linked Nikhil's desire for a companionate marriage to the influence of "the Victorian model of a new form of domesticity based on marriage as a partnership between two like-minded people" on the educated Bengali gentry in the early twentieth century.¹⁰ On the other hand, critics attentive to the limitations of Nikhil's liberal humanism point to his complicity with the social hierarchies that keep women and peasants subservient to their (land)lords. Bruce Robbins, for example, claims that in spite of his effort to liberate Bimala from women's traditional position in the home, Nikhil does not really enable Bimala to engage in social activities other than those confined to home. Robbins notes, "Just as Nikhil's political aspirations for the welfare of his tenants are couched in paternalistic terms, so his and his creator's aspirations for change at home remain patriarchal, even if neither can be

¹⁰ Chakravarty, p. 97. See also Supriya Chaudhuri, "A Sentimental Education: Love and Marriage in The Home and the World," in P. K. Datta Ed., *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2002), pp. 45-65; see p. 45.

happy with the results.”¹¹ It is true that Nikhil does not see the importance of a profession for Bimala, or women in general, even though he is committed to her intellectual cultivation. What is glossed over in both accounts, however, is Nikhil’s questioning of the establishment of marriage itself: “In the midst of the immense, age-long concourse of humanity, what is Bimala to you? Your wife? What is a wife?” (64) In keeping with his idea that his union with Bimala is “only of the wayside,” Nikhil subsumes connubial relationship under the larger unity of “humanity.” As Tanika Sarkar observes in her analysis of the interlocking forms of love in the novel, Nikhil’s ideal of love “acquires larger, non-conventional horizons, based on intellectual and political affinities, emotional honesty and capacity for mutual nurture” rather than “prescriptive norms about conjugal monogamy.” (Sarkar 2005, 27-34)

On the other hand, as shown in Nikhil’s case, such an envisioned spiritual union of humanity in cosmic life entails both a quality of self-command and a non-attachment to connections essential to social life. Recalling Nikhil’s contrast of Buddha and Alexander, we might see resemblances between Nikhil’s emphasis on the “journey beyond” and the Buddhist doctrine, “go forth from home to homelessness.” The voyage toward the infinite that Nikhil anticipates mirrors the Buddha’s own journey from the princely life of luxury and power to one of a wandering mendicant. Gravitating to “universal life,” (187) Nikhil, too, is disposed to break up family ties. Yet coupled with Nikhil’s pursuit of spiritual freedom in the vast domain of life are feelings of anguish and inadequacy. When Nikhil tells Bimala he refuses to be her fetters and sets her free based on the belief that “[grasping] desires are bonds,” (133-4) Bimala silently questions such a thought: “can freedom—empty freedom—be given and taken so easily as all that? It is like setting a fish free in the sky—for how can I move or live outside the atmosphere of loving care which has always sustained me?” (137) For Bimala, what Nikhil offers is but negative freedom, a severing of emotional bonds between them. The atmosphere of loving care means more than material comforts to Bimala. It is also the familiar and warm sphere in which her life has been

¹¹ Bruce Robbins, *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), pp. 161-162. See also Sumanta Banerjee, “The Peasant in *Ghare Baire*,” in Saswati Sengupta, Shampa Roy, and Sharmila Purakayastha Eds., *Towards Freedom: Critical Essays on Rabindranath Tagore’s Ghare Baire/The Home and the World* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2007), pp. 137-162.

rooted.

If Bimala voices her apprehension about how Nikhil's ideal of spiritual freedom could engender displacement, Nikhil himself regrets that he "could not impart" to humanity what he calls "the vital spark" for "self-creation." (197) Although he determines that "[a]lone, then, shall I tread my thorny path to the end of this life's journey," he is torn between a longing to be "free under the starlight, to plunge into the infinite depths of the night's darkness after the day's work was done," and a sense of loneliness "in the midst of the multitudinousness of life" (197, 132). Now we seem to come back to the debate concerning particular allegiances and universal sympathies. Addressing the uneasy path of cosmopolitanism, Nussbaum remarks, "Becoming a citizen of the world is often a lonely business. It is as Diogenes said, a kind of exile—from the comfort of local truths, from the warm, nestling feeling of patriotism, from the absorbing drama of pride in oneself and one's own. In the writing of Marcus Aurelius (as in those of his American followers Emerson and Thoreau), a reader can sometimes sense a boundless loneliness, as if the removal of the props of habit and local boundaries had left life bereft of any warmth or security." (Nussbaum 1996, 15)

While Tagore portrays Nikhil's loneliness in a sympathetic manner, he also heightens a sense of inadequacy in Nikhil's vision. It is important to note how the novel at once endorses Nikhil's moral value and questions his somberness. Indeed, part of the complexity of the tone of the text lies in its simultaneous exposure of the danger of Sandip's passion and of the inefficacy of Nikhil's renunciation. Compared to Sandip, who was called a "Hindu Nietzschean" who worships passions by the reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* after the novel was published in 1919, (Chakravarty 2013, 94) Nikhil seems like a Buddhist monk committed to "self-denial." As he himself laments, "How severely I have curbed my desires, repressed myself at every step, only the Searcher of the Heart knows." (197) Through many arguments between Sandip and Nikhil and via their own introspections, the novel takes pains to accentuate Nikhil's moral rectitude. Sandip accuses Nikhil of espousing moral precepts at the cost of emotion, asking, "Can't you recognize that there is such a thing as feeling?" In response, Nikhil eloquently defends his moral feelings and condemns Sandip's vices: "It is my feelings that are outraged, whenever you try to pass off injustice as a duty, and unrighteousness as a moral ideal. The fact, that I am incapable of stealing, is not due to my possessing logical faculties, but to my having some feeling of respect for myself and love for ideals." (37) Yet, without downplaying the dangerous

power of Sandip's siren song of hatred and violence, the text also contrasts Sandip's ability to sing his sin with Nikhil's incapacity for enjoyment, which Nikhil recognizes as his "incorrigible solemnity." (64)

This description of his character reflects back on his ideal of "self-creation," which tends toward engendering what Bernard Williams (henceforth BW) has called "the characterless self." In his critique of the Kantian ideal that locates freedom in critical reason, BW observes:

This ideal involves an idea of ultimate freedom, according to which I am not entirely free so long as there is any ethically significant aspect of myself that belongs to me simply as a result of the process by which I was contingently formed. If my values are mine simply in virtue of social and psychological processes to which I have been exposed, then (the argument goes) it is as though I had been brainwashed: I cannot be a fully free, rational, and responsible agent. Of course, no one can control their upbringing as they receive it, except perhaps marginally and in its later stages. What the ideal demands, rather, is that my whole outlook should in principle be exposed to a critique, as a result of which every value that I hold can become a consideration for me, critically accepted, and should not remain merely something that happens to be part of me. ... It presupposes a Platonic idea of the moral self as characterless.... If the aspiration makes sense, then the criticizing self can be separated from everything that a person contingently is—in itself, the criticizing self is simply the perspective of reason or morality.¹²

Admittedly, Nikhil's ideal has a spiritual dimension that departs from the Kantian conception of moral reason. On the other hand, envisioning a union of humanity in a quest for moral ideals, Nikhil, too, superposes the moral and critical self, a colorless "solemnity," on the socially embedded personalities.

ST has mentioned that for Tagore, "the ideal of humanity is facilitated by the aesthetic category of enjoyment." (Tagore 2008, 1078) Indeed, in *Gitanjali*, Tagore's song offerings, he locates spiritual freedom not in renunciation, but in a

¹² Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 158-159. Bernard Williams is henceforth abbreviated as BW to differentiate from Raymond Williams (RW).

joyful perception of beauty and sensuous delight. In Poem No. 73 Tagore says:

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom
in a thousand bonds of delight.

Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various
colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim.

My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame and place
them before the altar of thy temple.

No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and
hearing and touch will bear thy delight.

Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires
ripen into fruits of love. (Tagore 1913, 68)

Tagore's poem can productively be brought to bear on *The Home and the World*. Reminiscing, at the beginning of the novel, about her mother's devotion to her father as a manifestation of the tradition of womanhood, Bimala observes, "devotion is beauty itself, in its inner aspect. When my mother arranged the different fruits, carefully peeled by her own loving hands, on the white stone plate, and gently waved her fan to drive away the flies while my father sat down to his meals, her service would lose itself in a beauty which passed beyond outward forms. Even in my infancy I could feel its power. It transcended all debates, or doubts, or calculations: it was pure music." (18) It is easy to see, with Nikhil, how Bimala's commendation of wifely devotion here reflects the influences of an enslaving tradition. It also transpires that the irrational form of loyalty that transcends moral and instrumental reasoning alike is liable to be remarshaled for nationalistic causes and cruelties. As Sandip declares, his words "are not meant to be scribbled on paper" that can be analyzed, but "to be scored into the heart of the country." (123) Still, there is something more in Bimala's detailed description of the beauty of the loving hands and careful and gentle acts that cannot be dismissed as sheer delusion. The beauty and tenderness of the "fruits of love"—to borrow Tagore's befitting phrase in the poem—Bimala perceives and enjoys contrast with both Nikhil's solemnity and Sandip's intense passion. They are what Sandip destroys and Nikhil fails to engage.

IV. Desires for Agency and Anchorage

Many critics have pointed out that the character of Bimala represents a contested site wherein the struggle between Nikhil's moral ideals and Sandip's destructive passions is played out. In this line of thinking, Bimala's initial surrendering to Sandip's hypnotic power and subsequent appreciation of Nikhil's morality reflect both the seductiveness of passion and the triumph of moral reason. Such a binary structure, however, is too neat to capture the complexity of a range of affective states between and beyond passion and reason. Bimala's inner thoughts and feelings warrant closer examination if we are to understand the novel's representation of the tensions between individual aspirations, social existence, and cosmic life. Bimala's praise of womanly devotion in the beginning, notably, is attended by a desire for agency. Reflecting on Nikhil's love for her, Bimala describes how it "seemed to overflow [her] limits by its flood of wealth and service." She also proclaims: "But my necessity was more for giving than for receiving." (19) Bimala's declaration, surprisingly enough, resonates with that of Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of the Lady* when she refuses Lord Warburton's proposal: "It is not what I ask; it is what I can give." (James 2011, 112)

Tagore lays bare the fact that Bimala's passion for Sandip and his nationalism is bound up with a sense of empowerment. Bimala is not gullible; rather, she exhibits a keen sensibility when she describes her earlier impressions of Sandip, "too much of base alloy had gone into (the) making" of his handsome face and "the light in his eyes somehow did not shine true." (30) However, when extolled by Sandip as the goddess, "the Queen Bee" of the nationalist movement, Bimala is inebriated by her new-found feeling of importance. She expresses her euphoria thus: "I who was plain before had suddenly become beautiful. I who before had been of no account now felt in myself all the splendor of Bengal itself. ...My relations with all the world underwent a change. Sandip Babu made it clear how all the country was in need of me. ...Divine strength had come to me, it was something which I had never felt before, which was beyond myself." (50) One could see similarities between Bimala and Sandip in terms of their self-love masquerading as patriotic passion, though the narrative seeks to rationalize Bimala's desire for admiration in a larger community due to the traditional, religious, and social constraints imposed on her as a woman. Further, Bimala shows a keen awareness of her stupefaction by Sandip. As she concedes, "There must be two different persons inside me. One of these in me can understand that

Sandip is trying to delude me; the other is content to be deluded.” (149) Bimala’s knowledge of and willing submission to Sandip’s delusion complicates a simple dualism of moral reason and blind passion.

Crucially, Bimala finally breaks away from Sandip’s spell not only because she sees through his moral depravity but also because she sees through it via an emotional bond with Amulya, a young devotee of Sandip and an enthusiast for the nationalist movement. Bimala emphatically describes the innocence and beauty of Amulya; his “guileless face, his gentle eyes, his innocent youth,” and his “beautiful [face], radiant with devotion” (147, 182) evoke tender feelings in her, which harks back to her aesthetic experience when observing her mother serving her father fruits. Indeed, Bimala recounts how her maternal instincts come alive in the company of Amulya; “delightfully, lovably immature was he – of that age when the good may still be believed in as good, of that age when one really lives and grows. The mother in me awoke.” (139) The novel, however, connects them as loving “Sister Rani” and devoted “little brother,” instead of mother and child. (159) One could argue that the relationship of siblings is less hierarchical than one of mother and son, even though Bimala treats Amulya with motherly love. This arrangement on the level of the plot also extricates Bimala from being idolized as the nationalist spirit of *Bande Mataram* (“Hail Mother”), thus endowing the bond between Bimala and Amulya with familial affection in contrast to patriotic passion.

In the meantime, the newly developed tie between Bimala and Amulya parallels the renewed connection between Nikhil and his widowed sister-in-law Baba Rani. In spite of his devotion to moral and spiritual ideals, Nikhil at one moment confesses that his “empty, drifting heart long[s] to anchor on to something.” (133) This desire for anchorage balances out Nikhil’s aspirations toward infinity and illuminates the significance of warm emotional connections that Nikhil’s spiritual ideal forecloses. Nikhil is astonished by Baba Rani’s determination to go with him on the day of his departure for Calcutta. He does not realize so acutely, until that moment, how she treasures her sisterly bond with him. Nikhil articulates the real reason for her decision that Baba Rani quietly conceals: “she had made up her mind to drift away towards the unknown, cutting asunder all her lifelong bonds of daily habit, and of the house itself, which she had never left for a day since she first entered it at the age of nine. ... She had only this one relationship left in all the world, and the poor, unfortunate, widowed and childless woman had cherished it with all the tenderness hoarded in her heart.” (189) The

appreciation of Baba Rani's tender feelings softens the solemn Nikhil, who now "should love to go back to the days when [they] first met in this old house of [theirs]." (190) Such nostalgia for the past seems to strain against Nikhil's spiritual journey beyond, yet it works to relink the cold infinite space and warm social life.

V. The End of the Beginning

Critics tend to agree that *The Home and the World* is a tragic story. The novel ends in a *Swadeshi* riot in which Nikhil is seriously wounded in the head and Amulya takes a bullet through the heart. The tropes of "head" and "heart" at this tragic moment have eluded critical attention yet are crucial to central themes of the novel. The final killing scene clearly embodies Tagore's censure of the *Swadeshi* movement and the consequences of nationalistic fervor. Furthermore, Tagore's reference to the wound of Nikhil's head and Amulya's heart seems to convey a more specific message that both moral reason and genuine feelings fall victim to belligerent patriotism.

If the final scene highlights the failure of both head and heart, the novel reaches its significant culmination in the penultimate scene, however, where both the mind and the heart show their redeeming power. First, Nikhil criticizes his own imposition of his moral ideals on Bimala and his inability to connect with her: "I did not realize all this while that it must have been this unconscious tyranny of mine which made us gradually drift apart. Bimala's life, not finding its true level by reason of my pressure from above, has had to find an outlet by undermining its banks at the bottom. She has had to steal the six thousand rupees because she could not be open with me, because she felt that, in certain things, I despotically differed from her." (198) Even Sandip, troubled by "the ghost of compunction" (200), returns the stolen money and Bimala's jewel-casket, though he characteristically denies that this represents an act of repentance under the influence of Nikhil's moral principles. Sandip explains instead that the restitution is a tribute to Bimala, renamed by him "Queen of the bleeding hearts, Queen of desolation." Bimala has blamed men who are either "bent on making a road for some achievement" or "mad with the intoxication of creating,"—implicitly referring to Sandip's doctrine of success and Nikhil's ideal of "self-creation" respectively—for having no feeling for her plight itself and only caring for "their own object." (146) On the other hand, both men show sympathy, though in

different ways and with different degrees of consciousness, for her feelings in the end.

The moment of hope in the novel is often located by critics in Bimala's moral awakening. Nussbaum argues that as a story of education, its success lies in Bimala's awareness in the end that "Nikhil's morality was vastly superior to Sandip's empty symbol-mongering, that what looked like passion in Sandip was egocentric self-exaltation, and that what looked like lack of passion in Nikhil contained a truly loving perception of her as a person." (Nussbaum 1996, 15-16) However, as I have noted above, Bimala is not unaware of Sandip's delusion; her choice of Sandip over Nikhil before she steals money from Nikhil involves a desire for agency and for a more affectionate mode of connection. More important, Bimala is acutely aware of her sin when she steals money from Nikhil; her recognition of Nikhil's morality does not await the end, when she receives Nikhil's generous forgiveness.

Indeed, it is less Bimala's moral awakening than the expansion of her consciousness toward something more infinite that embodies the novel's ethos of universal humanity. After Bimala steals the money, she is tormented by the pangs of guilt. She thinks, "I had robbed my house, I had robbed my country. For this sin my house had ceased to be mine, my country also was estranged from me." (144) It is crucial to note that here Bimala grounds her sense of belonging in moral desert, which contrasts sharply with her former pride in being idolized as a goddess of her country. She believes her moral transgression deprives her of her claim to both her house and her country. Bimala's thought brings back Tagore's idea of *svadeś* (my own country), which, as I have shown earlier, grows out of the force of self-making. Still, Bimala's consciousness continues to expand from house and country into the infinite space. Gazing at the starry winter sky, she imagines that if she steals all the stars for her country, "the sky would be blinded, the night widowed forever, and my theft would rob the whole world," and she compares her stealing to this "robbing of the whole world – not only of money, but of trust, of righteousness." (145) Bimala's meditation on the starry sky echoes Nikhil's desire to be "free under the starlight," pointing to aspirations toward a larger universe. We might also identify affinities between the imagery conjured by Bimala and Kant's metaphor "the stars in the heavens, the moral law in our hearts." The personification of the sky and the night in Bimala's depiction paints not just, if at all, a material world of existence, but a moral and spiritual union of humanity. The novel, in this sense, ends with a beginning. After Sandip returns

her jewel-casket, Bimala dismisses gold and jewels, announcing: “To set out and go forth was the important thing.” (201) Bimala finally keeps alive Nikhil’s spirit, even as her emotional connection with Amulya, coupled with Nikhil’s renewed bond to Baba Rani, enriches Nikhil’s moral ideal.

VI. Tagore and Global Modernism

Summing up Tagore’s aesthetics in relation to modernism in *1913: The Cradle of Modernism*, Jean-Michel Rabaté notes that “Tagore belonged to the reformist Hindu sect founded by Rammohun Roy, Brahma Samaj. It rejected ordinary Hinduism and embraced a ‘deity’ that was purposely left vague and formless. It was a religion which was an esthetic at the same time, and their fusion prevented Tagore from being a modernist, at least in the sense that modernism implies a questioning of these values and he steadily refused the accolade of modernist masters that he felt too condescending. ... Indeed, he embodied the Romantic ideal of the poet as priest and prophet with a vengeance.” (Rabaté 2007, 126) Rabaté argues that Tagore’s fusion of religion and the aesthetic runs up against the supposed epistemology of modernism, even though he also suggests that Tagore’s religious beliefs betray a poetic character.

Given Tagore’s renowned reputation as a spiritual poet, it is surprising how criticisms of *The Home and the World* largely leave out the spiritual dimensions of the book. Among earlier responses to the novel, E. M. Forster claims that Tagore’s “World proved to be a sphere ... for a boarding-house flirtation that masks itself in patriotic talk.” Criticizing the novel’s style, Forster remarks that Tagore “meant the wife to be seduced by the World, which is, with all its sins, a tremendous lover; she is actually seduced by a West Kensingtonian Babu.” Georg Lukács, in a more irascible manner, considers the novel as “a petit bourgeois yarn of the shoddiest kind” and Tagore as “a wholly insignificant figure ... whose creative powers do not even stretch to a decent pamphlet.” (Desai 1985, 7) Postcolonial studies has produced abundant rich and nuanced readings of the book, but Nikhil’s spiritual ideal and renewal of the Buddhist intellectual tradition have not received much critical attention.

The stepping away from the spiritual in the novel is not hard to understand, considering how studies of colonial and postcolonial authors have largely not moved beyond the paradigm of oppression and resistance (and critique as resistance). However, as I have shown in this essay, Tagore conveys important

cosmic imaginings that work to foster larger sympathies with humankind. In *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, Pericles Lewis invites a rethinking of the spiritual energies in Western modernist novels, and he coins the phrase “secular sacred”—meaning “a way of seeing aspects of human experience itself as set apart, venerable, inviolable”—to describe modernism’s spiritual character. In Lewis’s account, modernist writers employ a language composed of words like “sacred, reverence, sanctity, magic, and soul” to speak about “ultimate truths, human truths for which supernatural explanations might no longer seem adequate.” (Lewis 2010, 30) My exploration of the cosmic in Tagore’s *The Home and the World* shares Lewis’s attentiveness to the spiritual dimension of modernism. The cosmic, I contend, proves to be an exceptionally useful way to think about the scope and politics of global modernism.

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